

FOOD & WATER WATCH

July 17th, 2012

Aquaculture is dirty, unsustainable and inefficient. So why is the UN pushing it?

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By [Meredith Moore \(http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/about/who-we-are/\)](http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/about/who-we-are/)

[\(http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/reports/factory-fed-fish/\)](http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/reports/factory-fed-fish/) The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) [released a report \(http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/150839/icode/\)](http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/150839/icode/) last week predicting world aquaculture production to increase 33 percent by 2021, with 89 percent of aquaculture products coming from Asia (61 percent for China alone).


At Food & Water Watch, we have [long opposed \(http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/fish/fish-farming/\)](http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/fish/fish-farming/) the expansion of the agricultural factory food model into our oceans. Aquaculture is a dirty, unsustainable model of food production that yields an inferior product for consumers while simultaneously leaving behind an indelible footprint on the surrounding ecosystem. Yet the FAO and [our fisheries managers \(http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/aquaculture/\)](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/aquaculture/) continue to promote aquaculture as if it were a sustainable and effective way to feed the world.

The expansion of aquaculture means [more waste \(http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/reports/fishy-farms/\)](http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/reports/fishy-farms/), more chemicals, and more antibiotics being dumped directly into our waters to raise fish. It means more [imported seafood \(http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/reports/import-alert/\)](http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/reports/import-alert/) with residues of unapproved drugs entering the country through our weak food safety system. It means more small bait fish, a key component of a healthy marine ecosystem, will be scooped from the oceans and ground into feed in order to feed these farm-raised fish. It also means the expansion of our already dominant [GE soy industry \(http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/reports/factory-fed-fish/\)](http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/reports/factory-fed-fish/), which genetically modified 93 to 94 percent of its soybeans in 2009 according to Monsanto patents, to create unnatural diets for fish farms.

If the FAO is right, by 2018, half of the fish eaten in the world will be from aquaculture facilities. I know I'll still be looking for wild, local, and sustainably caught seafood in my grocery store. With all of the risk factors and harmful practices related to factory fish farms, why take the risk?




6 Comments on *Aquaculture is dirty, unsustainable and inefficient. So why is the UN pushing it?*

1.  *James* says:
[July 18, 2012 at 9:09 AM](#)

Frankly this is inflammatory nonsense. Compared to more commonly practiced fish industry methods such as trawling, aquaculture has a significantly smaller footprint ecologically, providing much needed respite for oceanic ecology.


Also its efficiency allows broader and more significant operation across larger areas minimizing concentrated points of impact both in economic terms and health.

2.  *Meredith Moore* says:
[July 19, 2012 at 1:06 PM](#)


While there are certainly some negative effects from traditional fishing methods, aquaculture poses an enormous threat to both ocean and human health. As we have documented in many of our reports, rather than giving relief to the oceans, aquaculture is dependent upon small wild fish to use as feed, threatening the balance off the food chain. Aquaculture dumps tons of waste, excess feed, chemicals and antibiotics directly into the water - these have been shown to damage organisms living on the sea floor, and create reservoirs of antibiotic resistant bacteria. To top it off, many of these chemicals are dangerous for humans and known carcinogens, yet the aquaculture model cannot exist without them. Open ocean aquaculture just takes the factory model for agriculture and livestock that has hurt farmers and created a worse product for consumers, and moves it into the seas.

- o  *Max Mayeaux* says:
[July 20, 2012 at 9:55 AM](#)

I want you to back up your assertions with facts. Show is some REAL numbers. Show us science-based information with respect to your claims.

3.  *Hank* says:
[July 20, 2012 at 11:55 AM](#)

Meredith: you are not qualified to comment on practices within the aquaculture industry. As a 30+ year veteran of the aquaculture industry, I am. Your article is typical of the hyperbolic, exaggerated sensationalism which FWW exploits in an effort to alarm the public and sway them towards FWW's extremist agenda. The reason the UN is promoting aquaculture is that they are in full command of the facts, and they recognize that aquaculture is the most viable solution to meeting the increasing demand for seafood without placing additional pressure on wild fisheries, many of which are already at maximum sustainable carrying capacity. If FWW employed fact checkers as do many responsible media organizations, pieces like your's would never make it to press.

4.  *Meredith Moore* says:
[July 20, 2012 at 1:22 PM](#)

Fortunately there is plenty of documentation on the negative impacts of aquaculture in the scientific literature. We've summarized some of it in an accessible manner in many reports.

For general off shore aquaculture and the failures of four American attempts at off shore aquaculture, please see: <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/reports/fishy-farms/>

For our new report about how the partnership of the soy and aquaculture industries will exacerbate these problems, please see: <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/reports/factory-fed-fish/>

For investigations into our weak food inspection system and the dangerous chemicals used in aquaculture that I mentioned before, please see <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/reports/import-alert/> and <http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/reports/laboratory-error/>

And for an excellent alternative to off shore aquaculture, please see:

<http://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/reports/land-based-recirculating-aquaculture-systems/>

5. *Meredith Moore* says:



[July 20, 2012 at 2:13 PM](#)

Thanks for your comment. Our research (see my previous comment) is fully sourced and fact checked. Even proponents of aquaculture are well aware of its problems. The FAO discusses how aquaculture “is vulnerable to adverse impacts of natural, socioeconomic, environmental and technological conditions.” It goes on to discuss disease outbreaks in aquaculture operations, water pollution, and vulnerability to natural disasters. They further acknowledge the problems with feeding so many farmed fish. Jobs in aquaculture are increasing while jobs in traditional fishing are decreasing, leading to no net gain of employment. Further, child labor is a concern.

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