

Can good communication change consumer perception about aquaculture?



*Consumer focus group run by EAS Past-President Rosa Flos (far right).
Faces have been erased for identity protection purposes.*

R. Flos & L. Reig

According to all available data aquaculture is still one of the fastest growing sectors of food production and contributes significantly to the protein supply and the well being of millions of people. The sector has demonstrated to be able to perform and implement an impressive scientific and technological development and today offers a wide diversity of safe, healthy and high quality products. Nevertheless, the consumer perception is not always positive about aquaculture.

In this context The Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya has led two projects of the Reference Network in R+D+I in Aquaculture of Catalunya and in collaboration with researchers from the Centre for Agro-food Economy and Development, the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB), and the Institute of Marine Science. One of the projects dealt with the perception about aquaculture along the full value chain (VALORA) and the other addressed how to communicate information to consumers to dispel the myths that still exist related to aquaculture processes and products (VALE+).

In Aquaculture Europe 2016 results of VALORA were presented (Flos et al. 2016; Escobar et al. 2016), showing how perception changes along the value chain (high and low frequency consumers, fishmongers, wholesalers). Through a qualitative method the main positive and negative ideas about aquaculture were obtained and classified following the main subjects. Wholesalers, fishmongers and high frequency consumers considered that there is a need for more information and communication. The respondents assigned different levels of importance to topics such as environment, market, welfare, quality, society and health.

The same qualitative method was used to assess the perception of different consumer groups. After analysing the image

that the Spanish press offers about aquaculture (Reig et al. 2016), a group of students from an Audiovisual Communication Degree at UAB was also surveyed (Reig, et al., 2017). Results can be compared with those of the other groups of consumers.

Perception about market and economy was mainly positive for all groups, being less important for students what could likely be because they are not responsible of buying food at home. Even if there were some negative perceptions about the impact of aquaculture on the environment, the vision was mainly positive for low frequency consumers and especially for students, who showed a more ethical bias. Quality was mainly approached as negative, and this was especially important for consumers. Welfare, with a negative bias, was only important for low frequency consumers and students.

After assessing perception, the interest was then focused on choosing a single subject and conducting a quantitative study to determine how perception may change with a scientifically sound and easy to read message using different communication tools (VALE+) Preliminary results have been presented in Flos et al. (2017).

The analysis of all results, together with a survey to experts, led to a consensus to choose fish quality as the myth to dispel in this first step. A document about fish feeding was written by the researchers participating in the project, who are experts in different fields related to aquaculture. The document was scientifically based but easy to read and transferred both to a plain text in pdf and to an interactive docuweb. A quantitative study with 300 Spanish consumers was conducted. The survey included a series of questions about their profile (demography, socioeconomics, involvement, knowledge on aquaculture concept) as well as a questionnaire asking for their opinions on different aquaculture subjects, mainly, but not exclusively, related to product qual-

ity and fish feeding. After answering the questionnaire, they were asked to read the document either as pdf or as docuweb. Then they were confronted to the same questionnaire about aquaculture without being able to look at their previous answers. After reading the document they significantly increased their agreement with the positive statements and increased the disagreement with the negative ones, showing in all cases a more positive view of the aquaculture subjects. There were no significant differences between consumers having used one of the two communication tools. This confirms the importance of providing good information, content being more important than the tool itself, providing that the tool is scientifically sound, easy to read and built in an appealing way.

These promising results show that further efforts should be devoted to understand how consumers perceive aquaculture as well as the best way to communicate aquaculture procedures and products to improve its appreciation.

Escobar C., Flos R., Carrasson, M., Constenla, M., Gil, J.M., Padrós, F.,

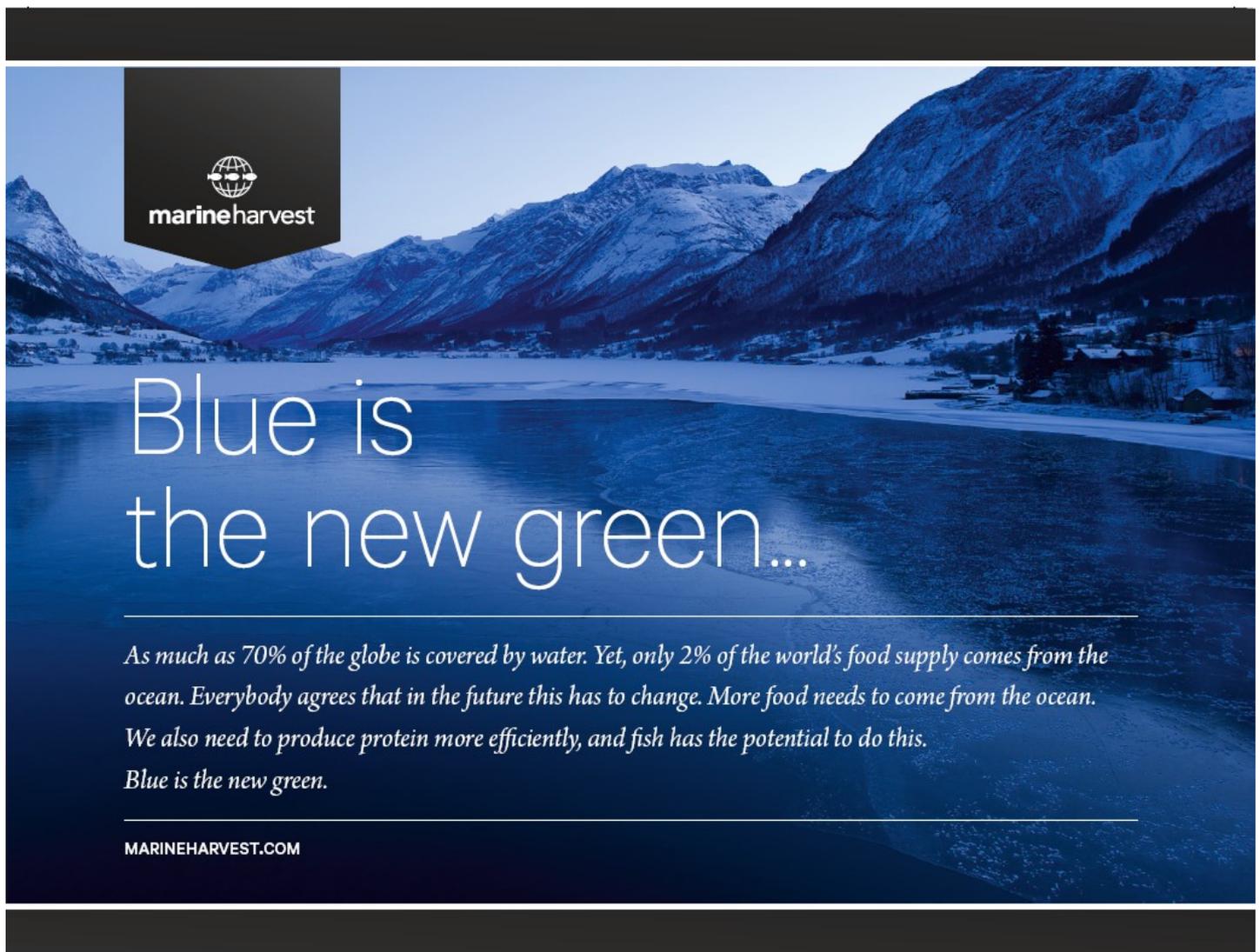
Piferrer, F., Reig L. (2016) Consumer's positive and negative perceptions towards aquaculture: a hybrid delphi approach. Aquaculture Europe 2016: Food for Thought. September 2016, Edinburgh, UK.

Flos, R., Escobar, C., Carrasson, M., Constenla, M., Gil, J M., Padrós, F., Piferrer, F., Reig, L. (2016) Supply-chain agents' perceptions towards aquaculture: a hybrid delphi approach. Aquaculture Europe 2016: Food for Thought. September 2016, Edinburgh, UK.

Flos, R., Escobar, C., Carrasson, M., Constenla, M., Gil, J M., Luzon, V., Padrós, F., Piferrer, F., Soler, A., Reig, L. (2017) Information impact on consumers' perceptions towards aquaculture: dismantling the myth about farmed fish feeding. Aquaculture Europe 2017: Cooperation for Growth. September 2017, Dubrovnik, Croatia.

Reig, L., Marquez, Flos, R. (2016) Aquaculture image as seen by the media in the Spanish written and digital press in the recent years. Aquaculture Europe 2016: Food for Thought. September 2016, Edinburgh, UK.

Reig, L., Marquez, J., Flos, R. (2017) The perception of future communicators about aquaculture. Aquaculture Europe 2017: Cooperation for Growth. September 2017, Dubrovnik, Croatia.





Blue is the new green...

As much as 70% of the globe is covered by water. Yet, only 2% of the world's food supply comes from the ocean. Everybody agrees that in the future this has to change. More food needs to come from the ocean. We also need to produce protein more efficiently, and fish has the potential to do this. Blue is the new green.

MARINEHARVEST.COM