

Geoff Walton

To whom it may concern,

I am in full support of Cooke Aquaculture Pacific's plan to raise steelhead fin fish in its exiting facilities. I am part of a long, rich history of aquaculture in the state of Washington as a former resident and still engaged within the industry. Many of the statistics that are cited by opponents are outdated. Globally the Aquaculture industry has matured since many of the claims made by anti-aquaculture activists. Cooke Aquaculture is a global leader of responsible fin fish Aquaculture and has the resources to upgrade their facilities to comply with any current best practices and regulations.

Fin fish aquaculture provides a valuable food source within the United States that does not rely on wild caught fish, reducing pressures on native salmon runs. Over 60% of all wild salmon caught in the USA is exported, by raising fish inside Washington State we increase our food security. Couple this with Cooke Aquaculture Pacific's close location to established fish retail markets means that we can have fresh locally raised fish year-round. In times of uncertainty such as during this COVID-19 Pandemic this is more important than ever. Fin fish aquaculture relies on clean water to support healthy growth, often the first signs of pending poor water quality are detected by fin fish farmers. It is in their best interest to act as stewards of the environment. In Puget Sound, failing septic tanks are a major source of pollution resulting in seasonal algae blooms which negatively affect fin fish aquaculture production.

Encouraging Cooke Aquaculture Pacific to register with third party certification programs such as BAP, Global GAP, ASC or Friends of the Sea would further bolster accountability and accountability. Washington state has a long and supportive agricultural history supporting ranching of cows, sheep, pigs, chickens-it is time we show the same support to the marine agriculture industry: fin fish aquaculture by granting an extension of Cooke Aquaculture Pacific's permit to raise steelhead in fish pens in Puget Sound.

Thank you,
Geoff Walton