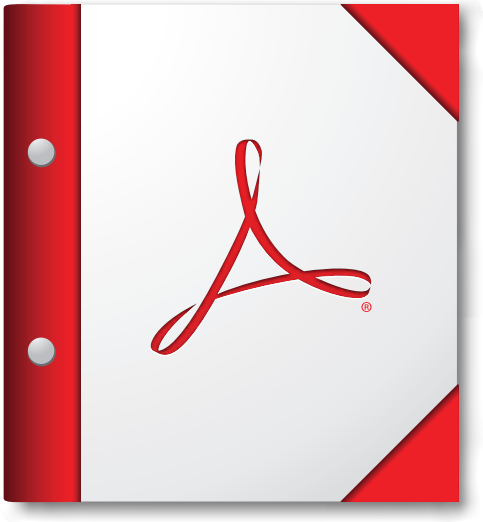

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The Global Aquaculture Alliance stands by Cooke Aquaculture's plans to farm sterile steelhead trout in Washington state. As a global leader in responsible aquaculture and a leading proponent of the world's largest and most comprehensive third-party aquaculture certification program, Best Aquaculture Practices (BAP), Cooke Aquaculture is well positioned to ensure that steelhead trout is raised in a responsible manner with minimal impact to the surrounding environment.

Additionally, aquaculture is expected to play a greater role in feeding the 10 billion people projected to inhabit the Earth by 2020, and farming finfish and shellfish in waters close to market is critical to food security, which is addressed in Goal #2 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) identified by the United Nations and adopted by all 193 member states, including the United States, in 2015. The SDGs act as blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all by 2030.

Cooke Aquaculture's commitment to stock ocean pens in Puget Sound with sterile steelhead trout goes above and beyond the requirements of the BAP Salmon Farm Standard. (Techniques to produce sterile salmon and trout that cannot interbreed with local wild salmon if fish escape is currently being researched and will be kept under review by the BAP program and its advisors, with a future requirement for certification a possibility.)

Escapes are thoroughly addressed in Section 6 of the BAP Salmon Farm Standard, stating "salmon farms shall take all practical steps to prevent escapes and minimize possible adverse effects on aquatic wildlife if escapes occur." Additionally, farms shall not be located in habitat areas officially designated as "critical" or "sensitive" (or equivalent regional terminology). The eight clauses related to escapes can be found on page 12 of the BAP Salmon Farm Standard: https://www.bapcertification.org/Downloadables/pdf/standards/PI%20-%20Standard%20-%20Salmon%20Farms%20-%20Issue%202.3%20-%2013-October-2016.pdf

By farming sterile steelhead trout in waters where the species is native to the region combined with a stringent action plan if fish escape, the impact on with local wild salmon in terms of competing for food and interbreeding is non-existent, as there is no potential for spawning in the wild. In addition, triploid fish are less able to outcompete wild fish populations for food and survive in the wild because they were raised in captivity and fed pellet feed.

As for the impact on the environment, the production cycle for steelhead trout is shorter, resulting in less feed and waste. Steelhead trout take about 12 to 18 months to grow to harvest size, at a target weight of 7 to 9 pounds, compared to Atlantic salmon, which take a full 18 months to grow to market size.

Cooke Aquaculture has a long history of responsible aquaculture. The company submitted its salmon farms to audits by independent, third-party certification bodies beginning in June 2011. By March 2015, Cooke Aquaculture had achieved four-star BAP status, one of only three salmon-farming companies in the world to do so at the time. Four-star BAP status is the highest achievement in the BAP program, representing that a combination of a company's processing plants, farms, hatcheries and feed mills are BAP certified.

BAP is the world's most comprehensive aquaculture certification program, with standards encompassing environmental responsibility, social accountability, animal health and welfare, and food safety. Processing plants, farms, hatcheries and feed mills must demonstrate 100 percent compliance to these standards in an annual audit to attain BAP certification, and Cooke has done so for the majority of its facilities.

Cooke Aquaculture has also made strides in greatly reducing the use of antibiotics, and GAA audited several of its salmon hatcheries and farms last year to verify that no antibiotics were used throughout the entire life cycle of those fish. This has not yet been achieved for all salmon produced by Cooke Aquaculture, but they are certainly a leader in responsible use of therapeutants.

It is unfortunate that the Cooke Aquaculture salmon farm in Washington suffered damage and fish escapes shortly after it was acquired and before the cages could undergo planned renovations. The renovated cages coupled with use of sterile steelhead trout are a responsible solution that effectively deals with the issue while preserving jobs and contributing a healthful food to the community.

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