

SHOWCASE

Professor at University of New Brunswick becomes President of International Seaweed Association

Dr. Thierry Chopin, Professor of Marine Biology at the University of New Brunswick in Saint John, became President of the International Seaweed Association (ISA) during the 19th International Seaweed Symposium, held in Kobe, Japan, earlier this Spring.



Thierry Chopin

The ISA is an international organization dedicated to the encouragement of research, development and commercialization of seaweeds and seaweed products. The mission of the ISA is to promote applied phycology (the study of algae) on a global basis, and to stimulate interactions among researchers and industrialists involved in basic and applied biology, ecophysiology, biochemistry, molecular biology, biotechnology, resource management, and cultivation and processing of seaweeds.

Chopin is involved with the cultivation of kelp to develop integrated multi-trophic aquaculture (IMTA) systems in which salmon, mussels and kelps are co-cultivated to bring a balanced ecosystem approach to aquaculture.

Becoming President of the International Seaweed Association for the next three years is both a great honour and responsibility, says Chopin. It is a recognition from both my academic peers and the industrial seaweed sector. The Symposium in Kobe, attended by 535 participants from 46 countries, showed how lively and truly international in scope the seaweed research and industry community has become. The trade show associated with the Symposium opened the eyes of many Westerners. Seaweed applications are so numerous. Japanese eat seaweeds every day at breakfast, lunch and supper, not in large quantities each time, but multiplied by 128 million people you quickly get many tonnes, says Chopin... Japanese people have a healthy diet; maybe one day the Western World will wake up!

Seaweeds have long history and many uses

The first conference on the utilization of seaweeds was held at Dalhousie University, in Halifax, in September 1948. Soon thereafter the ISA began holding symposia every three years and all over the world. As the commercial potential of seaweeds transformed into realities in extremely varied applications (from your orange juice in the morning to your toothpaste in the evening) it became obvious that harvesting of wild seaweeds would soon not be enough to secure the increasing need for raw materials and large scale aquaculture of seaweeds emerged in the 1970s.

Presently, 92% of the world's seaweed supplies come from cultivation and the seaweed aquaculture production (11.3 million tonnes worth US\$5.7 billion) represents 45.9% of the total mariculture production. Molluscs represent 43.0% and finfish only 8.9%. Until the 1990s, the seaweed industry was dominated by the production of additives – such as agars, carrageenans and alginates used extensively in the food, brewing, textile, paint, photography, ceramic, paper coating, welding, drilling, bacterial and pharmaceutical, etc. industries. Now seaweeds for direct human consumption (nori for wrapping sushi and the sea-vegetables kombu and wakame) are the main sources of revenue, says Chopin.

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