





# The people behind the fish

*FFI* finds out who is shaping the aquaculture industry of tomorrow and what makes them show up to work each day

Rijuta Dey  
Andy McNicoll  
Rachel Mutter

**I**f there's anything you learn from working in the aquaculture industry, it's that it is a sea of personalities. And in an industry where research and science still plays as important a role as marketing and sales; and where environment, politics and social whims can make or break a company, the people leading it are key.

This level of diversity also brings a raft of different characters with incredibly different backgrounds as *FFI* discovered...

## BRAZIL'S SHRIMP CHAMPION

Itamar de Paiva Rocha, President, Brazilian Shrimp Farmers' Association



### ITAMAR DE PAIVA ROCHA

- He runs his own company MCR Aquaculture Ltd. He has built more than 100 shrimp farms in the northeast region of Brazil this position

- He has published 63 scientific articles

- He was a federal congressman from 2007 to 2011 and is currently the president of the Brazilian Shrimp Farmers Association, member of the World Aquaculture Society and member of the National Council of Fishery and Aquaculture from Brazil

- He has a degree in Fishing Engineering from the Federal Rural University of Pernambuco in Brazil. He graduated in 1974 and worked as a researcher at the same university, in the field of fish and shrimp aquaculture

It takes only one conversation to understand that Itamar de Paiva Rocha is much moved by the untapped potential of the Brazilian aquaculture industry. To say that he is passionate about aquaculture in his home nation is an understatement, testified by his agonized lamentations against the government bureaucracy he says inhibits the South American giant from becoming a seafood superpower.

"Brazil's got huge potential. But we have great problems too. The problem of government licensing is the biggest one," de Paiva Rocha tells *FFI*.

He is referring to Brazil's 5.5 million hectares of 'federal jurisdiction waters,' where the government is the legal owner, but can assign private use of areas to specific users, for a specific term. The ministry tells *FFI* that it plans to assign up to 1 percent of those federal jurisdiction waters for aquaculture production.

But according to Rocha, this

is where Brazil is being held back. "In Brazil, if you don't get a license you don't get money from any bank," he said.

"Most of the freshwater fish have no license; many small shrimp farms have no license. In 2010, we imported more than \$1 billion worth of seafood, and the government paid fishermen about \$700 million to stay at home!"

Rocha points out that big companies won't invest unless there are licenses attached to the business.

"We have to fight more and more, and find a way to develop," de Paiva Rocha tells *FFI*.

"Of all the aquaculture countries in the world, no one has the

“Of all the aquaculture countries in the world, no one has the potential of Brazil”

potential of Brazil; no one has the climate conditions and location of Brazil, as we are close to the U.S. and European market. But we have very difficult people to work with.”

Brazil aims to produce more than 1 million metric tons of farmed seafood by 2015, and to hit the 10 million mark by 2020.

Roughly 300,000 metric tons of aquaculture produce is farmed in Brazil annually - which is just 10 percent of what Vietnam produces, "though we have 10 times the freshwater reserves of Vietnam," Rocha points out.

For the past decade, the BRIC countries have analysts and economists twisted in excitement every time any discussion on global commerce needs a mouthy sound bite. But the facts of Brazil's natural abundance are truly impressive- Brazil has 13 percent of the world's fresh water reserves, 10 million hectares of freshwater reserves, a long coastline, and a climate

“But we have very difficult people to work with”

suitable for year-round farming. "Why are we not developing our potential, why?" Brazil's biggest aquaculture enthusiast asks. "In some states in Brazil, no one has license to farm at all."

But it is not all doom and gloom for Rocha. He has great hopes from the aquaculture show - the world's biggest - to be held this month in Natal. "We are working very hard for the show - it will be a very good opportunity for Brazil," he said. "We are being encouraged by the fish minister and the governor, which is a new development."

"We are looking forward to aquaculture partnerships out of the show and I think it will be a success, as the future is very bright for Brazil and aquaculture."

And maybe, with the passion and drive of people like de Paiva Rocha, Brazilian aquaculture, will indeed have a bright future.

## SPEAKING WITH ONE VOICE

Arnault Chaperon, President, European Federation of Aquaculture Producers



Back in the 1980s, 20-year-old Frenchman Arnault Chaperon was offered the chance to enter fish farming - at the time a small industry. Thirty years on and Chaperon is President of the European Federation of Aquaculture Producers (FEAP), a body representing the continent's fish farmers who produce a

“Over the last thirty years we have been labeled with this image of us producing ‘artificial fish’ which isn’t fair”

combined 1.8 million metric tons of fish every year. Looking back, Chaperon is glad he grasped the opportunity to enter aquaculture.

"I have a passion to be on the sea. I love sailing and windsurfing. So when I was 20, the chance to work in the fish farming sector was a fantastic opportunity," he says. "At that period the development of the sector was very little. It has been great to be part of its growth since then. We've arrived at a stage now that we want aquaculture to be a strong pillar of the development of Europe's fisheries and agriculture sector."

Chaperon feels that FEAP, which represents 28 fish farmers' associations in 23 European states, is key to increasing aquaculture's dialogue with the European Commission. He says that the strength of the umbrella body allows the sector to "speak with one voice" to aquaculture's stakeholders and consumers, and suggests that there are signs that Europe's powerbrokers are becoming more receptive to the aquaculture sector as a whole.

"We are seeing a new commitment to the aquaculture business from the European Commission and some national governments. That is a good step because, until now, we haven't always had that message," he says. "Until last year we were just answering the European Commission's questions," he says. "But now we

want to propose some new questions and areas of discussion."

This is part of FEAP's new ambition to drive more proactive communications from Europe's fish farmers. Chaperon says that engaging with stakeholders is crucial if aquaculture is to correct some of what FEAP feels are misleading messages about fish farming.

"Over the last thirty years we have been labeled with this image of us producing 'artificial fish' which isn't fair," he says. "The consumer doesn't have this mindset about other farmed products like poultry or pork. So we have to explain better what we do and have real transparency for the consumers."

Another area Chaperon is keen to address is the claims made about the fish in/fish out (FIFO) ratio of Europe's aquaculture providers. Critics say that fish farming is unsustainable as it requires 4 kilos of white to fish to produce one of farmed fish. Chaperon says that FEAP is working on producing authoritative research in the area in order to provide a solid basis for discussions on the issue.

"We are producing a research paper and will work on it with researchers, consumers, NGOs and other stakeholders. We will distribute the information to everybody, to make sure that everyone can work from the same numbers," he says.

Going forward, Chaperon says the biggest challenge facing FEAP is in addressing what he feels is an "uneven playing field" between European producers and non-EU countries that don't have the same level of regulations, such as Vietnam.

"We want to correct this aspect because it is not fair that we are competing with markets that don't have the same rules and also have no tax to export into Europe," he says. "For example, in Europe we have stricter rules over fishmeal, we pay higher wages, but it is not the same in Vietnam."

No matter what challenges await Europe's fish farmers, Chaperon says he will keep his philosophy of doing business in mind: "the most important thing, always, is remembering that the market is king."

## A FORCE OF NATURE

Bill Martin, president, Blue Ridge Aquaculture



## BILL MARTIN

- Began his work life as a journalist, working for the Martinsville Bulletin, a daily newspaper that his father published.

- Published a small newspaper in West Memphis, Ark., and later traded commodities and sold commercial real estate.

- Started Blue Ridge Fisheries in 1986, raising catfish in tanks filled with recirculated water, after reading an article about indoor fish farming

- The catfish farm went out of business in 1991, and two years later began farming tilapia in Blue Ridge Aquaculture

Bill Martin believes in moving forward and learning from past mistakes. He believes in going against the grain and taking the plunge into alien waters. He believes in "happy" fish, sustainable food sourcing and in company loyalty. At least that is what *FFI* gleaned from a thoroughly engaging chat with the president of the world's largest indoor producer of tilapia.

"I got into aquaculture when I was living in Tennessee and watched the catfish industry develop in ponds, and I felt there had to be a better way to do things," Martin tells *FFI*. "There were just too many things against pond aquaculture - predators, susceptibility to weather changes etcetera."

The genesis of Martin's aquaculture business came upon reading "with great interest" an article that talked about recir-

“Quite frankly feed is the embarrassment of our industry, the biggest deterrent to the future of the aquaculture industry”

culating aquaculture written by Dr George Libey, who was then at Purdue University. He flew to Purdue with engineers from Virginia Tech University, interviewed Libey and looked through the recirculating system. The project was on when local government loaned several million dollars to Virginia tech to begin an aquaculture program. However, this was short-lived.

"We failed, not because of the catfish but because of a systems fault," he said. "We rested for a year or so and began with tilapia. In the interim we had grown tropical fish, largemouth bass, hybrid striped bass, catfish and tilapia."

"We moved forward and have been uninterrupted since."

Martin is unflinching in his criticism of feed companies, most of whom he says push quantity at the cost of quality. "Quite frankly feed is the embarrassment of our industry, the biggest deterrent to the future of the aquaculture industry," he tells *FFI*.

"Everybody is tired of buying the junk that goes into feed. Ultimately, I think the feed industry will clean itself up, but

## THE REFRESHING FACE OF AQUACULTURE RESEARCH

Thierry Chopin, Scientific Director, Canadian Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture Network



Thierry Chopin is an unusual breed. Despite his deep-rooted background in science and research he has an acute awareness that without application, science is worthless.

As Professor of Marine Biology at New Brunswick University, Chopin has been instrumental in bringing the concept of integrated multi trophic aquaculture (IMTA) to the commercial sector's attention and is currently working with north America's biggest salmon farmer to pro-

“For me it is more than biology, it's also economics”

duce IMTA salmon for Canada's biggest food distributor.

When you ask Chopin about the journey to get the concept of IMTA to commercial acceptance, he laughs and refers to the five years between 1995 and 2000 he spent “preaching in the desert”.

“Initial reactions were that we were complicating it,” Chopin tells *FFI*. At this point

the salmon industry had been going for 20-25 years and no-one could understand why the model needed improving.

“We had to convince them it was worth it and for this, we had to put a financial value on the model”.

Regulations have also hampered IMTA's progress. The existing legal framework in Canada said that a 125 meter distance must be put between any farmed species. It was built on experience in the agricultural industry and took Chopin and his team four years to have changed – a frustratingly long process for Chopin, but apparently a remarkably speedy turnaround in terms of the regulatory sector, Chopin tells *FFI*.

Chopin says the interdisciplinary aspect of what he does is what he loves. “For me it is more than biology, it's also economics,” he says.

The social aspect of his work is also important to him. “For me [IMTA] is about improving practices in aquaculture. For me, it's about doing it right – I enjoy doing science relevant to society.”

Originally from the Beaujolais wine-making region of France, Chopin describes himself as having moved “from one liquid to another”. Following his passion for the sea, Chopin moved to Brest to study phycology – the study of seaweed – later moving to a federal laboratory in Halifax, Canada as part of his national service. There he met his future wife, did a post-doctorate in Florida and moved back to France for two years before a post came up at the University of New Brunswick in 1989. The rest, as they say, is history.

It's been a long journey, but according to Chopin “if I can improve aquaculture practices long term, then it's all worth it.”

### IMTA – THE SHORT VERSION

“I call it the turquoise revolution,” Chopin tells *FFI*. “On land we've had the green revolution, then came the blue revolution with aquaculture, but now we have to make the blue revolution greener!”

On a basic level Integrated Multi Trophic Aquaculture recreates the natural environment by farming species on different trophic levels together. In the Bay of Fundy, Chopin is helping Cooke Aquaculture to farm Atlantic salmon alongside seaweeds and mussels, all for commercial sale.

The beauty of the system is that it can potentially mitigate the environmental impacts of commercial fish farming by cultivating fed species with extractive ones. This utilizes the inorganic and organic wastes from aquaculture while simultaneously growing other products. “Some of the externalities of fed monoculture are internalized, increasing the overall sustainability and longterm profitability of aquaculture farms,” says Chopin.

There are also biological advantages. Through their trials, Chopin and his team have found that mussels can filter the infectious salmon anaemia (ISA) virus and the early stage of sea lice, thereby destroying them.

Cooke is also doing some feed trials with the seaweed it is growing.

they have a long way to go.”

Martin rattles off his company facts with pride - “The mortality rate of our tilapia is less than 2 percent,” Martin says. “We operate out of an 80,000 square feet building, producing 4.2 million pounds (1,905 metric tons) of live weight tilapia – which is unbelievable. It's extremely high density and our fish are very happy.”

Talking about the future, Martin believes that indoor recirculating aquaculture will lead the way. “The U.S. investment community hasn't realized this as yet but the Europeans are on fire about recirculating aquaculture - they want it everywhere,” he says. “I have been contacted by virtually every country in Europe as they see the future. The United States does not see this as yet, which is unfortunate.”

The American grower also stresses that fish farmers cannot rely on fishmeal for fish diets in the same degree as they do now. “We use no fishmeal in any of our tilapia diets as we don't believe that if you use any fishmeal you are sustainable,” he tells *FFI*.

“We believe that in the future, grain-based diets and other animal protein-based diets will come in. Fishmeal has to be replaced- we cannot continue to take from the ocean at the rate that we are taking now. Another reason to champion recirculating aquaculture- we are the best fishermen on planet earth.”

*FFI* is all ears

## SMOOTH OPERATOR Dmitry Dangauer, CEO, Russian Sea Group

Media-savvy and articulate, Russian Sea Group's CEO



Dmitry Dangauer tells it like it is.

Born in the Russian far-east in the city of Komsomolsk-on-Amur, he moved to Moscow to study, and graduated from Moscow State University with a degree in International Relations.

He entered the seafood industry “by chance” from university straight after the Russian financial crisis of 1998 and began as a sales manager of the Russian Fish Company. From there he quickly moved to commercial director, followed by executive director of the company's distribution company, then general director, then in 2009,

CEO of Russian Sea. “It was a long journey”, he recounts to *FFI*. Although some would argue that from graduate sales manager to CEO of Russia's largest seafood company in 9 years is a pretty rapid rise.

And he is not shy of taking big decisions, as he proved, when Russian Sea – a company with a long history in the fishing industry - recently broke into aquaculture.

The decision came on the back of sky-high salmon prices which hurt Russian Sea's distribution business.

“We were really harmed by the worldwide situation in salmon, as we are by far the biggest company in Russia dealing in salmon,” Dangauer tells *FFI*. “Almost 40 percent of the group's business is salmon and we suffered because of the high prices and limited supply.”

“Fish is too expensive”

Now Russian Sea plans to invest up to RUB 3 billion (\$100 million/€75 million) in developing salmon farming in the Murmansk region of north-west Russia, where the potential farming volume is over 30,000 metric tons, representing around 35 percent of total Russian import volumes. As the Russian market is number three behind France and Poland for Norwegian salmon firms, it would mean significant changes in the current trading model if the Russian firms reach their full potential. It is a new and

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# The XX factor

Aquaculture is still a male dominated industry, especially in the upper echelons, but women are making increasing headway. Greek seabass and seabream farmer Lara Barazi-Yeroulanos and Belize shrimp farmer Linda Thornton are two such women.

## MANHATTAN TRADER TO GREEK FISH FARMER

Lana Barazi-Yeroulanos, CEO, Kefalonia Fisheries, Greece



## LARA BARAZI-YEROULANOS

■ From 1993 to 1996, she was vice president at Credit Lyonnais.

■ She studied International Trade & Finance at Harvard University.

■ She is a member of the FAO General Fisheries Committee for the Mediterranean and works on several sector in this capacity: member of expert group for Selection of Indicators for the Sustainable Development of Aquaculture in the Mediterranean; and International Marketing expert for the Marketing of Aquaculture Products.

■ She is also a member of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and is a member of the expert group and contributor to the Guide for Sustainable Development of Mediterranean Aquaculture.

One of the leading lights of Greek aquaculture, Lana Barazi-Yeroulanos swapped the Manhattan trading floor for Mediterranean bass and bream farming.

Barazi-Yeroulanos, CEO of Kefalonia fisheries, made the journey from Manhattan's trading floors to Mediterranean aquaculture in 1998 after marrying into the Yeroulanos family – founders of Kefalonia, Greece's oldest seabass and seabream producer after being set up in 1982. "I came into this world by accident I guess," she laughs.

It may have been a chance opportunity, but Barazi-Yeroulanos's background meant she was well equipped to take the reins. An economist by trade, she studied agricultural economics at Columbia University and international trade and finance at Harvard before moving into the derivatives trading market in New York, rising to vice-president at Credit Lyonnais. Her finance background armed her with some key skills for her CEO role at Kefalonia's 100 percent family-owned busi-

ness which employs 100 staff.

"I love the trading aspect in aquaculture. I love to sell and have contact with clients. That is my favorite part of what I do," she says. "Finance gave me the ability to think on my feet and solve problems. That's essentially what you do when you run an aquaculture business. You're a problem solver."

In her 13 years at the helm of Kefalonia, Barazi-Yeroulanos has had plenty of opportunity to put her problem-solving skills to use. She successfully steered her company through the Mediterranean aquaculture market's meltdown of 2007, when overproduction, combined with the global economic recession, plunged the industry into crisis, leaving a raft of debt-ridden producers on the brink of collapse.

"We were, I think, very lucky," she says. "One of the advantages, or disadvantages, of being the oldest company is that

**“ I love the trading aspect in aquaculture. I love to sell and have contact with clients ”**

we make the same mistakes as everyone else, but we make them a little bit earlier. The advantage of that, for us at least, was that after being highly leveraged in the 1990s, by the time the 2007 crisis arrived, we were actually on a pretty solid footing."

Since being appointed CEO, Barazi-Yeroulanos has instilled the value of "quality over quantity" in Kefalonia's corporate culture. Recognizing the growing niche market in organic products, she introduced certified organic production to the company in 2007. It was a move in line with Kefalonia's longstanding commitment to quality animal husbandry, and organic products now account for one-fifth of the producer's 1,500 metric ton output. Barazi-Yeroulanos also stresses the benefit of long-term thinking over short-term gain and the value of building longstanding relationships with customers.

"A good partnership with customers means we weather storms together," she says. "The most valuable thing we get from our relationships with customers is feedback. They have access to our consumers, the people who eat our product. That feedback is really quite an asset because you can detect market trends, you can anticipate potential problems and then you can plan together."

Looking to the future, Barazi-Yeroulanos thinks coming years will see the raft of research into aquaculture come to fruition with benefits in productivity, profitability and innovation. Yet, she is wary, that the full potential of these developments won't be realized unless the financial health of the bass and bream industry is stabilized.

"Companies under a lot of financial stress don't have the clarity of mind to invest in research and innovation. They

are in continuous crisis mode and that doesn't lead to building anything," she says. "At the moment a lot of companies are wobbling but whoever is in touch with the innovation, the chance to improve marketing and grow markets, could be in a really good place to make money in the next few years."

## CENTRAL AMERICA'S QUEEN OF SHRIMP

Linda Thornton, Manager, Aqua Mar Belize Ltd., Belize



## LINDA THORNTON

■ She has a bachelor's degree in animal science/agriculture from the University of Illinois, United States.

■ Before moving to Belize, she worked at King James Shrimp - the first indoor, re-circulating, artificial seawater shrimp factory in the United States.

■ She began working at Aquamar, the largest shrimp farm in Belize, in 1996, and manages it to date.

■ She bought her own shrimp farm, Cardelli Farms, when she turned fifty. She is the only woman in Belize – and one of only a few in the world – to own a shrimp farm.

Linda Thornton has led a remarkable, chequered life. She moved to Belize from her home state of Illinois and was told by people at the time that she wouldn't last a week. That was almost 30 years ago.

Her stories are as exotic and compelling as the countries she's worked in, living in Mexico and Belize, raising pigs as well as shrimp, battling sudden hurricanes and miserly farm bosses. She started as a lab assistant and now manages Aquamar, the biggest shrimp farm in Belize. She is also the first woman to own her own shrimp farm in Belize – Cardelli Farms - a move she describes as a retirement plan.

"I started my shrimp farm five years ago" she tells *FFI*. "I decided that I wanted some income for my older age as I didn't have any retirement program set up at that time."

She is modest in describing

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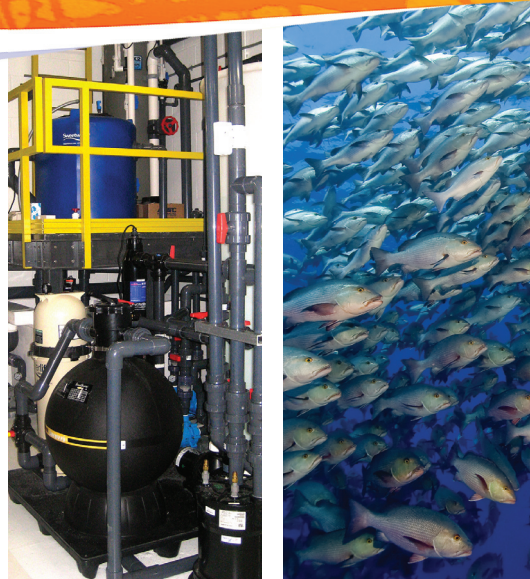
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her farm and its operations. "I had 400 acres of land here in Belize and always thought I could convert it into a shrimp farm. It's a very simple farm - only four ponds, 25 acres each, where I grow vannamei extensively - about five or six shrimp per square meter."

Cardelli Farms produces 100,000 pounds (around 45 metric tons) annually, though the very large sizes ensure a good price. "I realized that there is a very good market for very large shrimp," Thornton tells *FFI*. "I grow my shrimp for seven to eight months so they reach 40 grams, and as there is a limited availability of that size, I do very well and get a very good price."

Thornton describes her farm, where she and her farm helper live, to be "very simple". "A gentleman lives on the farm and takes care of it for me, I also live there but I also work during the day," she said.

In comparison, Aquamar grows about 4 million pounds (1,814 metric tons) a year.

Some of the shrimp is sold locally for the tourist business, but primarily it goes to Jamaica, where it is redistributed to other Caribbean countries.

Thornton says that Belizean shrimp enjoys a good market in Mexico too. "Mexicans really prefer our shrimp and buy year-round from us," she says.

When talking about Belize and its shrimp, Thornton's voice rings with sincerity and pride. "We have very strict environmental rules in Belize, and we adhere to them - we do not clear any mangroves, do not use antibiotics or any chemicals, and we believe that shrimp from Belize are of a much higher quality than other countries," she tells *FFI*.

There are only about six shrimp farms in production in Belize and they are all small companies owned by one or two people, says Thornton. None of them are owned large corporations, in sharp contrast to other shrimp-producing countries' conglomerates.

And the last couple of years have been hard for the sector. Many farms have closed down - the largest, Nova, stopped producing in 2007. Several smaller farms have also closed, including Belize Aquaculture Ltd in February of this year. "We have gone from 18 farms down to 5 now in production," says Thornton. This is due to a combination of problems including poor management, insufficient capital and disease.

As with any veteran, she describes her life in shrimp farming as "a long story".

"I have found it to be just wonderful," she says. "I've never had any restrictions on what I could do and never felt any prejudices against me for being a woman. I think that is because I have always participated and done everything - I

have jumped in and done the same work as the men have had to do. I think I was always respected for that."

"Maybe it was good being a woman as I got special attention," she adds as an afterthought.

She is right about the attention: Thornton is the subject of a recent documentary film made by students of Pace University titled 'Linda Thornton Seeking Sustainability, One Shrimp at a Time', which documents Aquamar and Thornton's efforts in sustainable aquaculture practices.

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exciting development in global aquaculture, acknowledged to be so even by Marine Harvest, the world's largest player in salmon farming, which welcomed this move by saying it could increase product competitiveness in the Russian market.

The Murmansk region is the only part of Russia suitable for farming Atlantic salmon, and the company has bagged the rights to almost all the best sites in the region, it is said, after winning a state-conducted tender for nine sites in the Barents Sea basin.

Dangauer believes that Russia's foray into aquaculture will stabilize the current situation. "Fish is too expensive," he said. "I really hope that with our help and the Chilean recovery the prices will stabilize."

More moderate and stable prices can push Russian seafood consumption up to 200,000 metric tons, from its current level of 120,000 metric tons, says Dangauer. "It is not a problem because Russians really love fish," he tells *FFI*.

Dangauer says that though the aquaculture division is small in comparison to the group's other operations, it is an important part of the company's strategic development. "The aquaculture division is almost like a start-up business for Russian Sea, almost nothing compared to the whole company, but we really feel that it will be a significant part of the group," he said.

"We were looking into aquaculture to have control of the entire value chain - from the fish when it starts, to the end customer. We have a distribution company, a production company and a company for value-added products of fish. But we had no source of the fish by ourselves."

Russian Sea plans to build the sites in Murmansk and farm salmon using modern technologies of cage breeding with automatic control systems. It is developing plants together with "leading" Norwegian equipments and technology suppliers, and is to become operational by next year. "We have a plan of a developing a huge complex for these sites," Dangauer tells *FFI*. "Due to time constraints and the natural need to put smolt only in summer, we were not in time to start this year. Next year we put our first smolt into the sea."

## FLYING THE ORGANIC FLAG FOR IRELAND

John Murphy, managing director, Murphy's Irish Seafood, Ireland



John Murphy gained a love of the sea during childhood summer holidays spent learning how to fish and handle a boat with his uncle, on Ireland's Whiddy Island. The island lies in the bay of Bantry, a town on the coast of County Cork in Ireland, which, since 1984, has been home to John's aquaculture company - Murphy's Irish Seafood.

The company, which now has an annual turnover of €5 million (\$7 million) and employs 35 staff, was started by Murphy after he saw great potential for aquaculture in Ireland while working as a professional diver in the late seventies.

"Back in 1974 I was diving and exporting sea urchins to France and I started hearing about this idea that you could farm in the sea. I thought - this has to be the way forward! In Ireland we're surrounded by sea, there's about 92 per cent water so I thought I had to take advantage of it," he recalls.

Murphy's Irish Seafood, then known as Fastnet Mussels, started mussel farming in Bantry Bay in 1984. Strong sales of the product boosted by high demand for Murphy's mussels in France, the UK, Germany and Italy, contributed to the company establishing a processing plant

## FROM THE CATWALKS OF MILAN TO THE WILDS OF IRELAND

John Murphy's path to aquaculture is not exactly text book. His parents owned a shoe shop and a greyhound farm. After pulling out of school at aged 15, Murphy took up a job on the farm training greyhounds which were raced both domestically and internationally.

A few years later, the manager at his parents' shoe shop left and he was called upon to step into the breach. He grew to like the fashion world and in 1977 opened a ladies' fashion boutique in his home town of Bantry, West Cork.

On the back of his success, four years later Murphy opened a second shop in Cork City followed by a third in Dublin two years later.

Murphy spent his time "travelling to the fashion exhibitions for the launch of the new season's collections in London, Paris, Milan, Düsseldorf and New York," he says.

"It was a very exciting and wonderful experience and I guess there must have been some sync of style in what was bought as the business has survived for over 30 years," he tells *FFI*.

And what ties retail fashion to aquaculture? "The high risk factor is probably the only common denominator!" says Murphy.

"But my experiences in the retail fashion trade has made me customer and quality focused which is what we endeavour to deliver at all times."

in 1996. Murphy's farms now produce about 600 metric ton of mussels, with the plant processing a further 1,500 tons of the shellfish.

The most exciting development Murphy has witnessed, however, is in the organic salmon market. In 2007 Murphy purchased a salmon farm from German company Laschinger Group as a means of "adding another string

to the bow" of his company's portfolio. The farm now produces 500 metric tons of organic salmon. The investment proved a sound one - Murphy's secured a major deal with U.S. high-end retailer Wakemans and now exports about 10 metric tons of salmon per week to the U.S. market, as well as selling to Hong Kong, Japan, France and Germany.

"At the Brussels seafood show the amount of people looking for our organic salmon was just ridiculous. We could sell three times our production levels," he says. "In this economic climate, selling is sometimes not the easiest game in the world as people don't have money to spend, but the organic salmon business is doing incredibly well. Demand is high and prices are strong."

With growing demand for organic products, Murphy is looking to expand his company's output in the sector. Murphy's Irish Seafood has attained a license to set up another salmon farming site with a 3,800 metric ton capacity and has recently started producing organic mussels after being accredited as an organic producer earlier this year. As his business expands, Murphy will be sure to stay true to his company's values of producing high quality products with committed and passionate staff.

"If you can produce and deliver a quality product then you build up a reputation that gets you noticed," he says. "I have a lot of emotion in what I'm doing; the people I work with are passionate about what we're delivering. We all want to make it succeed. There are huge challenges out there but when you are all committed to the product and where it's going then you take these challenges on."

As for the future of aquaculture, just as when he started up his company back in the early eighties, Murphy still feels that Ireland's potential for fish farming remains underutilized.

"Ireland has huge potential for aquaculture. There's so much wealth in the sea that we're not harnessing at the moment that needs to be researched and developed commercially. I think there's a very exciting future in that."

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