

## Blue Foods

**Date:** Tuesday, 29 April 2025

**Theme:** Blue Foods

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The workshop featured four expert presentations exploring innovative approaches to sustainable aquaculture and consumer engagement across the Baltic region. The session focused on understanding consumer preferences for aquaculture products and how these influence market trends. Key topics included the role of sustainability, convenience, and cost in shaping purchasing decisions, as well as strategies for increasing acceptance of new species and innovative aquaculture products. The discussion also emphasized the importance of transparency in the food supply chain—particularly in communicating production methods and building consumer trust in seafood sourcing.

**Tomasz Kulikowski** shared key findings from the Aqualoop project's EU-wide survey on seafood purchasing habits. While convenience and price dominate consumer decisions, around 35% of respondents indicated a willingness to pay more for sustainable options. Central and Eastern Europe showed greater acceptance of aquaculture products than Western Europe, although overall preference for aquaculture remains limited. Misinformation and concerns about antibiotics and artificial feed persist, highlighting a need for better education and communication.

**Remigiusz Panicz** presented developments in multitrophic freshwater aquaculture, focusing on integrated farming systems that combine fish, crayfish, and aquatic plants. These systems reduce nutrient emissions and open opportunities for cross-sectoral reuse, including growing mushrooms and worms from waste streams. He emphasized eco-intensification and diversification as alternatives to geographic expansion.

**Monika Normant-Saremba** showcased the potential for farming whiteleg shrimp in Poland. Initial experiments and infrastructure development—such as EU-supported hatcheries and feeds—are laying the groundwork for a sustainable, land-based shrimp aquaculture sector. Consumer awareness remains a challenge, though demand and interest are growing, as evidenced by the success of Poland's first shrimp farm.

**Anna Sowa and Marek Harenda** introduced the Mr. Goodfish initiative, designed to promote sustainable seafood consumption through education and stakeholder engagement. Polish consumers still rely heavily on a few overfished species, with low awareness of sustainability labels and limited access to clear information. Their efforts include educational games, collaborations with chefs and influencers, school programs, and a multilingual website and mobile app.

Together, the presentations underscored the importance of connecting sustainable aquaculture practices with consumer education, policy alignment, and market innovation to drive meaningful change in the seafood sector.

The workshop discussion highlighted a strong interest in promoting circularity in aquaculture, particularly around the reuse and valorisation of by-products. One of the key topics was the use of saline discharge from RAS (Recirculating Aquaculture Systems) and its potential application in industrial symbiosis—for example, reusing treated water for cultivating crops like strawberries. Participants acknowledged that while the regulatory framework technically permits some reuse of water, clearer guidance is still needed. There was a call for better integration of such opportunities into legislation, with more explicit recognition of by-products as valuable resources beyond just fertiliser.

Representatives noted the practical solutions already being explored, such as drying sludge, and the importance of addressing technical challenges like sand removal. Although regulatory hurdles exist, they are being navigated, but more support is needed to scale up solutions.

In terms of stakeholder engagement, insights from Norway and Poland showed differing levels of awareness and adoption. In Poland, aquaculture is still relatively new to many farmers, and generating interest among the next generation remains a challenge. There was a clear need for academic involvement and educational initiatives to build capacity.

On the environmental side, it was noted that aquaculture contributes only a small share to eutrophication. Nevertheless, methods such as bioremediation with plants and sediment capture were discussed as effective tools to mitigate any impacts and even enhance local ecosystem quality.

Consumer-focused questions through Slido explored preferences for freshwater products in Central Europe, with most participants indicating continued consumer interest. Another key point was the importance of communicating the environmental and biodiversity impacts of aquaculture. Participants noted the lack of a widely accepted system to evaluate sustainability, with life cycle assessment (LCA) mentioned as a potential approach.

Misconceptions around sustainable seafood were also addressed. Concerns about parasites and antibiotics were frequently cited as barriers to consumer acceptance.

When asked about perceptions of seafood produced in RAS, some noted a gap between research projects and industry needs. While RAS technologies offer technical solutions, commercial viability is still a concern. There was a broader call to align research funding and legislative frameworks with industry realities, and to ensure that support for aquaculture development is comparable to what is offered to traditional agriculture and fisheries.

Overall, the session underscored the need for clearer regulation, improved communication with consumers, and stronger cross-sector collaboration to unlock the full potential of sustainable aquaculture.