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GOAL Day 3: The greater good

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By James Wright

Annual leadership conference wraps with deep dive into innovation, aquafeeds, communication



Henry Demone, chairman of High Liner Foods, gave the keynote address on Day 3 of the GOAL conference in Vancouver, Canada.

The final day of the Global Aquaculture Alliance's (GAA) annual GOAL conference in Vancouver, Canada, began with buoying remarks from one of North America's most respected and influential seafood businessmen, High Liner Foods CEO Henry Demone.

High Liner, a company with a century's worth of roots extending deeply into Canada's groundfish industry, has become increasingly reliant on farmed seafood products as it evolved into a company with \$1 billion in turnover. Wild or farmed, Demone said, seafood is an industry to be proud of.

"Rarely have I seen a business opportunity so aligned with the greater good," he said.



(<https://link.chtbl.com/aquapod>).

Demone outlined the massive challenge the global seafood industry has in meeting the demands of what many expect will be a swelled global population, totaling 9.5 billion people by mid-century. "The growing middle class is one of the great developments in human history," he said. "Protein consumption increases with wealth. Per capita protein consumption will increase. How will we supply this massive increase? We need to communicate the health and environmental benefits of our product. We can only do this if our house is in order."

Demone called for consistent enforcement of best aquaculture practices regulations at the national level: “Not doing so contributes to the negative perception of farmed seafood. All farms, hatcheries and feed mills should be licensed. You can’t improve what you don’t measure.”

If anything in aquaculture has been measured, it’s aquafeeds. Continual improvement in fish feed formulations have been made, with a decreasing dependence on crucial marine ingredients such as fishmeal and fish oil. A series of feed sustainability presentations revealed dynamic innovations and new incentives for further development:

- Jessica Rosen, Senior Sustainability Advisor for the Forum for the Future, announced an innovation partnership called Protein Challenge 2040 (<https://www.forumforthefuture.org/project/protein-challenge-2040/overview>), which will “explore how we balance supply and demand of protein for a growing population in a way that’s affordable, healthy and good for people and the environment,” she said.
- Steven Hart, GAA’s VP of education and outreach, briefed the audience on the impact of global agricultural trends on aquaculture. Hart noted trends in the oilseed market, emphasizing that China remains the major driver “by far” for global oilseed demand, with Russia, Indonesia, India, Argentina and Brazil all representing growing markets. “Fish don’t have a requirement for meat, or plants, only essential nutrients,” said Hart, saying that the greatest opportunities for farmed fish growth will be in species that can consume alternative proteins like soy.
- Jesus Zendejas, director of aquaculture technology development at Cargill, and Karl Tore Maeland, director of sustainability and quality management for EWOS Group, briefly discussed the opportunities the world’s largest aquafeed manufacturers are exploring. (Cargill is in the process of acquiring EWOS.)
- Gorjan Nikolik, senior analyst at Rabobank, echoed Hart’s stance that future growth, or the emergence of new species, will be greatly influenced by their diets. “Only fish that require low fishmeal content can be developed to commercial scale, e.g. tilapia and pangasius,” he said, “or very high-value niche species” that require high fishmeal and fish oil inputs. The industry is making better use of byproducts like fish trimmings, he added. Trimmings now represent up to one-third of the global fishmeal supply, but Nikolik said it was “debatable” if more or less will be available in the future.
- Lastly, Alan Shaw, president and CEO of Calysta, introduced the audience to his company’s potentially groundbreaking technology that converts fuel (natural gas) into food. “Our [FeedKind] stock is natural gas, the cheapest usable form of carbon on earth, a transformed product, a single cell protein. We are on that list of future feed ingredients,” said Shaw, whose company will break ground on a production facility “somewhere” in North America soon. The products’ only inputs are methane, oxygen and nitrogen. “More food production is needed in the next 50 years than in all of human history,” he said. “It’s absolutely scary. There’s no more land. There are sensitivities around land and water use that are very real. Land-based protein uses too much land and way too much water, and is highly inefficient in protein conversion.”

“The need to innovate is absolutely critical,” said Ally Dingwall, aquaculture and fisheries manager for J. Sainsbury, during a marketplace roundtable on the conference’s final day.

“Without feed, you won’t have the products,” echoed Robert Fields, senior merchandise director-fresh meat, seafood and deli for Sam’s Club/Wal-Mart Stores.

The discussion then turned to certification standards, as it normally does. Retailers like Dingwall and Fields voiced their support for the Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative (GSSI (<http://www.ourgssi.org>)), which aims to benchmark sustainability standards for global seafood production. “If a standard doesn’t want to [be benchmarked], I would ask, ‘Why not?’”

“Any scheme that hasn’t got the balls to put themselves forward, you’ve got to ask why,” asked Laky Zervudachi, group sustainability director for Direct Seafoods/Bidvest. “But while we need to separate the wheat from the chaff, we realize that food safety is what really captures the consumer’s attention.”

A wise man once said, ‘Success has many fathers, failure is an orphan.’ After 42 years in this business, I’ve learned that you make a living by what you get; you make a life by what you give. Find your passion.

Indeed, communicating the complex message (<https://www.aquaculturealliance.org/advocate/goal-2015-day-2-the-story-we-choose-to-tell/>), about farmed seafood sustainability to an attention-deficit-disorder public, is going to take an entire industry’s collective effort. But as Fields noted, despite aquaculture’s competitive advantages when compared to terrestrial livestock production, the industry can’t distance itself too far from the rest of the food business.

“I am in the protein business,” Fields said. “Picking on poultry and beef, that bothers me a little bit. We promote salmon as a whole, versus farmed *or* wild. As a result, we sell more salmon today than we ever have, and it’s because of farmed salmon.”

Communication is the keystone to future growth and consumer acceptance, said Travis Larkin, president and owner of The Seafood Exchange in Raleigh, N.C., who continued his role of delivering the take-away messages to conclude the event. And what an event it was. Next year’s GOAL will be held in Guangzhou, China, one of the world’s biggest tilapia-producing regions.

Looking forward, the industry’s future is bright. But that would not be possible without the hard work of certain individuals who have made valuable contributions and others who have made total commitments. The day, undoubtedly, belonged to GAA Lifetime Achievement Award

(<https://www.aquaculturealliance.org/advocate/aquaculture-exchange-bill-herzig/>). recipient Bill Herzig, a longtime seafood executive for Darden Restaurants and now president of Sustainable Strategies & Initiatives.

“Before GAA, the industry had no mechanism to talk to itself about its problems. Before GAA, there were no standards at all to assure sustainability. Before GAA, there was no global gathering place to advance progress on a wide variety of fronts. When we had issues like EMS, there was no global mechanism to address them,” Herzig said. “A wise man once said, ‘Success has many fathers, failure is an orphan.’ After 42 years in this business, I’ve learned that you make a living by what you get; you make a life by what you give. Find your passion.”

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