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Is 'technology-verified storytelling' the new way to sell responsibly sourced shrimp?

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By Lauren Kramer

Aquaculture technology company xpertSea uses data to tell a comprehensive story about shrimp and its origins

To simplify the selling of sustainably sourced shrimp for retailers, Canadian technology company xpertSea's latest solution – xpertSea Responsible Shrimp – addresses traceability and fair trade in addition to conventional production data.

The new tool is a data-driven service for shrimp retailers in North America and Europe that want to add sustainability commitments to their private-label brands.

"We've spent the last several years working with shrimp farmers to build technology that improves the productivity and sustainability of their operations," said Katie Sokalsky, CEO of xpertSea. "But we also want to help support and enable a fair trade system. With this launch we are leveraging the data insights, growth and prediction our software gives the farmers, and translating that into making buying decisions easier for retailers."



Canadian company xpertSea's latest data-driven service is for retailers that want to add sustainability commitments to their private label brands. Courtesy photo.

The data from xpertSea offers a comprehensive story about shrimp and how it is grown. The company wants that information to be accessible to retailers whose customers want to know the provenance of their food and its sustainability impact.

A comprehensive solution for the wild seafood supply chain.

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“If you’re a Safeway [grocery store], it’s hard to get information about where your shrimp comes from at the production level, especially if you’re dealing with lots of food sources,” Sokalsky said. “We’re offering a seamless, turnkey offering. When retailers purchase through us, we give you all the technology-verified storytelling information to unlock a compelling brand that provides a quantified impact, for example, of the carbon footprint of that production.”

Sokalsky stressed that xpertSea is not trying to replace the roles of seafood importers or the established relationships between retailers and their shrimp wholesalers: "If retailers want to unlock this value and create their own consumer-facing brand, they reach out to us and we will work with whoever they source their seafood from, to enable a more data-rich supply in their supply chain."



The social network: A key to building an effective AIP model

To recruit fish farmers into an aquaculture improvement project (AIP), a Wageningen University researcher finds "tell your friends" has tremendous value.



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For shrimp importers who already have strong relationships with a farming group, xpertSea hopes to get its technology on those farms to reveal insights like seafood traceability and carbon footprint analysis. For importers who are not working with existing farms, xpertSea wants to help them tap into its large network of farmers, presently concentrated in Ecuador.

"This offering empowers the buyers to source responsibly but also has the potential to inspire farmers to farm more sustainably in order to access a better market," she said, adding that the cost for retailers will depend on the shrimp data they're looking for.

"If you want to promote specific practices, like how the shrimp is slaughtered, or if you want to undertake a reforestation of mangroves, we help to be your execution partner to manage that," Sokalsky said. "We sit down with each buyer individually to understand their needs and then deliver the end product. Compared to other sourcing options we're in the ballpark of competitive, but it's hard to give specific pricing because it depends on what a buyer is asking for."

The company launched the service at Seafood Expo North America in March, targeting retailers looking for a stable, committed shrimp supply partner and less vulnerability to market volatility, Sokalsky said. Its shrimp farming partners are willing to provide locked-in price contracts, enabling retailers to move away from spot buying, she added.

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