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New Grimsby aquaculture center to adopt a global view

12 December 2016

By Nicki Holmyard

'Specialist aquaculture library' will unify academic prowess, technical knowledge and supply chain expertise




The Northeast coast seafood processing town of Grimsby will be home to the National Aquaculture Center in the coming years. Billed as a “specialist aquaculture library,” the center will unify academic prowess, technical knowledge and supply chain expertise.

Moving into new territory, the **Global Biotechnology Transfer Foundation** (GBTF) is setting up a **National Aquaculture Center** (NAC) in the U.K. Its aim is to contribute strongly to future food security and nutrition through a wide range of activities.


Conceived by Clifford Spencer, chief executive of GBTF and originally assisted by specialist management consultancy Seafox, the center will be established over the next few years at the Humber Seafood Institute in the Northeast coast seafood processing town of Grimsby.


“We are still at the very early stages of setting this up, but I am keen to get a discussion going with interested parties,” said Spencer, who has a high-level background in agriculture in developing nations.

For the past year, he has been travelling the world, looking at aquaculture systems, to see where the U.K. sits in the global picture. The contrasts were stark.



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“Our aquaculture and in fact our whole food system is very different from that found in other parts of the world,” he said. “In particular, I was struck by the way in which aquaculture is part of the everyday social fabric in Asia, whereas in the U.K. it is in a silo with politics and science. However, my research has given me some great ideas about how to make aquaculture more acceptable and inclusive in the U.K.”

Scots lead the way

In Scotland, aquaculture is more firmly established and strongly supported by the government. The recent creation of the **Scottish Aquaculture Innovation Center** (<http://scottishaquaculture.com/>) at the University of Stirling, is bringing together industry and academia to provide unparalleled assistance with research and problem-solving for urgent issues such as sea lice, with a view to a more sustainable and profitable future for Scottish aquaculture.

In addition, the October 2016 launch of an ambitious **Vision 2030** (http://www.foodanddrink.scot/media/78119/lr-sfd-aquaculture-doc_spread.pdf) growth strategy should see the Scottish sector double in size to £3.6 billion by 2030.

“Our aspiration for the NAC is initially to develop aquaculture in England, then spread our activities into Wales and Ireland, and eventually tie in with Scotland,” said Spencer. “It will unify academic prowess, technical knowledge and supply chain expertise.”

Nearby Hull University has agreed to be the official academic partner and meetings have been taking place with its Institute of Estuarine and Coastal Studies and Hull International Fisheries Institute.

“We are very excited by this development and are having meetings with several other local and national institutes and organizations, including the famous Eden Project in Cornwall,” said Spencer.

Promoting healthy eating with seafood

Crucially, the new center will focus on the entire value chain of fish and shellfish farming, from breeding and physical production techniques, through transport and marketing, to waste management. It will also look at ways to promote greater seafood consumption.



Spencer explained that the U.K. population currently eats only half of the chief medical officer's recommended dietary intake of seafood for heart and brain health.

The aquaculture center will be located at the Humber Seafood Institute in Grimsby.

"Fish farming offers the prospect of supplying a larger range of fish and shellfish for public consumption," he said.

The first task for the centre is to set up the Michael New library, named after Michael New OBE (Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire), a specialist in aquaculture in developing countries, who is a keen supporter of the project.

"Michael has donated books for the new library, and Plymouth University has donated the entire library from one of its satellite facilities that is no longer in use," said Spencer. "The idea is for it to become a specialist aquaculture library for everyone from professionals and students, to local schoolchildren to use."

Wide scope

Spencer is brimming with a "melting pot" of ideas for the new centre, including a demonstration fish farm that would produce and harvest fish for commercial sale. He says that it will look beyond the traditional species grown in the U.K., such as salmon, trout, mussels and oysters, to include research into issues with tropical species, and the potential to collaborate with developing countries to help improve their own aquaculture industries.

"As a working development farm, the learning opportunities and other activities will be vast, both domestically and internationally. Perhaps the greatest scientific question today is that of how to practice aquaculture research and innovation in ways that lead to development impact," he said.

There is also the possibility of engaging with emerging areas of aquaculture such as bio-marine technology and medical research, encouraging companies to use the NAC as an aquaculture incubator, to set up an aquaculture think tank, or create an innovation platform.

One of Spencer's initial discussions has been with a biorefining expert, who is keen to explore the potential to add value to the by-products of local fish processing; around 80 percent of England's seafood is processed in the locality.

He also sees the centre as a learning facility, linked to education partners, which would focus on aquaculture, human and animal nutrition, engineering, basic business, marketing and entrepreneurial skills related to sustainable food production.

"Another idea is to engage with the insurance and financial sectors, encouraging them to research and develop better strategies for risk mitigation and improved dialogue about how fish farming can lower its risk profile. This would be particularly welcomed by industry," said Spencer.

His organisation is now looking at a range of funding streams, from philanthropic foundations, to government and regional council grants, to get the NAC off the ground. A website will be online shortly, which Spencer anticipates will kick-start a flurry of enquiries and partnerships.

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Nicki Holmyard has written about the seafood industry for longer than she cares to remember! A committed pescetarian, she is also a partner in the UK's first fully offshore rope-grown mussel farm.

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