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GOAL 2015 Day 2: The story we choose to tell

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By James Wright

Inspired by sustainability advocate Barton Seaver, the aquaculture industry looks forward with renewed confidence



Chef and sustainability advocate Barton Seaver said “sustainability cannot be defined by the absence of negative impacts,” during his keynote address to begin Day 2 of the annual GOAL conference.

If [Day 1 of GOAL 2015](https://www.aquaculturealliance.org/advocate/goal-2015-day-1-we-stand-on-guard/) (https://www.aquaculturealliance.org/advocate/goal-2015-day-1-we-stand-on-guard/) was all about defense, the following day of the aquaculture industry’s leading global conference was about offense – exuding confidence that farming fish is the way to feed future generations, and determining how to tell the world its story.

And who better to inspire the audience about the environmental benefits of producing essential protein through aquaculture than Barton Seaver, the keynote speaker on the second day of the conference, held in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

Seaver, a “recovering chef,” author and sustainable seafood advocate who now makes his home in Maine, had a very simple message: “The way we eat describes how this world is used,” he said. “But sustainability cannot be defined by the absence of negative impact.”

Comparing farmed fish to other farmed animal proteins, Seaver concluded that a “do no harm” approach embraced by producers for years may not win the hearts and minds of the public at large. But in creating the positive message that aquaculture so desperately needs to improve consumer perceptions of its operations and products, all that is truly needed are the facts. In the United States, not only are Americans’ diets slowly killing them, but current food-production methods are harming the environment in “myriad ways.”



“I’m not anti-beef, but I am pro-diversity. We desperately need to incorporate more seafood into our diet. It’s more dangerous to not eat seafood than to eat any [kind of] seafood,” said Seaver, who is also the leader of the Sustainable Seafood and Health Initiative at the Center for Health and the Global Environment at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

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“Consider the threats truly existential to our oceans — acidification. Thirty-five percent of all greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) are from meat production. What is the context of the decisions we are making? If it’s the environment, salmon looks good. If it’s health, salmon looks really good,” he said. “Greenhouse gases, water use, land alterations ... aquaculture is looking pretty good. You feed people, you deserve a lot of credit for that.”



Ned Bell, executive chef at the Four Seasons Vancouver and YEW Restaurant + Bar, noted the aquaculture industry’s progress over the past decade.

The positive messages that aquaculture needs to disseminate worldwide continued throughout the day. Ned Bell, executive chef at the Four Seasons Vancouver and YEW Restaurant + Bar, spoke about all the important choices that professional chefs must make. The Okanagan Valley native rode his bicycle across Canada last summer to engage his peer group, and to ask them what sustainable seafood meant to them. “Well managed fisheries and responsible aquaculture, living together,” is how Bell sees it.

“I look ahead to a day when aquaculture is thought of the same way that the last wild protein is thought of,” he said, before expressing gratitude to farmed seafood producers in the audience. “I want to thank you as a chef for what you’re doing. Not all of you do it exactly how I want you to do it, but you do it better than you did it 10 years ago.”

Throughout GOAL, industry leaders issued and accepted the challenge of clarifying the messages about farmed fish, which continues to get negative media coverage. A consumer survey from the Global Aquaculture Alliance and The Fishin’ Company revealed a deeper, statistical look at favorable and unfavorable opinions about aquaculture (see related story here).

“Aquaculture is very complicated,” said Joanne Sasvari, a Vancouver-based independent food writer who participated in a consumer education roundtable. “In a world where people only read headlines or tweets, people think they know but they know very little and don’t read past the first paragraph.”

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Retailers struggle with messaging seafood sustainability to consumers, admitted Kendrick Repko, Social Compliance Manager at Ahold USA, during a marketplace roundtable discussion. “We’re really bad at it.” Offering safe, healthy delicious and environmentally friendly seafood is something that consumers simply expect, added Troy Enz, Director of Purchasing for Darden Restaurants.

Social responsibility was another major focus on Day 2. After the retailers referred to supply chain audits and social compliance policies as “non-debatable” aspects of today’s business climate, Patima Tangprachayakul, Manager for the Labour Rights Promotion Network in Thailand showed everyone exactly what was at stake, and it was far more than supply chain integrity. Her organization helped free 2,000 Thai, Cambodian and Laos fishermen who were part of organized forced labor efforts that were documented by The Guardian, The Associated Press and other media outlets over the past couple of years. “Everyone is part of the solution,” she said. “We would like to request you kindly look to your supply chain to improve working and living conditions for workers.”

Phil Gibson, CEO of Resiliensea Group, said human-rights compliance risks can be managed but “not eliminated completely.” Businesses need to shine a light on critical control points in the supply chain, he said, referring to tools like the [Labor Safe Screen](http://www.laborsafescreen.com/) (<http://www.laborsafescreen.com/>).

Aquaculture producers have an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of the members of their communities, said Magdalena Lamprecht-Wallhoff, who oversees global sales and social investment for the world’s largest vertically integrated tilapia producer, Regal Springs Tilapia. Her company, which was founded by her father Rudi Lamprecht, makes huge commitments for its employees’ medical care and educates its workers on all sorts of positive projects like domestic violence workshops.

“We bridge the gap between conservation and business,” said Lamprecht-Wallhoff. “We believe in fair and timely wages. Poverty is a dollar amount – poverty is being unable to change your place in life. Can you change your situation?”

Author



JAMES WRIGHT

Editorial Manager
Global Aquaculture Alliance
Portsmouth, NH, USA

james.wright@gaalliance.org (<mailto:james.wright@gaalliance.org>)

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