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Responsibility

Study: COVID-19 disrupted fish farming, but not as much as climate change

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By Responsible Seafood Advocate

Economic losses from climate change outweighed those from COVID-19, according to global study of fish farms

The seafood industry has been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, causing disruptions in supply chains and shifting buyer demand. But according to a new global study of fish farms, the impact of the pandemic hasn't been "nearly as damaging as the ecological havoc caused by humans."

The global study, published in *Environmental Science & Policy*, assessed the impact of COVID-19 on fish farms in more than 50 countries. The findings offer a stark look into the devastating impact global warming is already having on oceans, lakes and rivers across the planet.

More than 80 percent of 585 fish farms surveyed worldwide reported that the economic losses from human-caused issues such as climate change, pollution and flooding far outweigh losses from supply-chain disruptions or a loss in buyers caused by the pandemic.

"These businesses have to build resilience to these events in their planning because it's only going to



Brian Helmuth, co-author of the study and a professor of marine and environmental science at Northeastern University. Photo by Alyssa Stone, courtesy of Northeastern University.

get worse over time,” said Dr. Brian Helmuth, co-author of the study and a professor of marine and environmental science at Northeastern University.



(<http://info.globalseafood.org/goal-2022-save-the-date>).

The 585 fish farms that responded to the survey detailed losses in stock, sales and jobs as a result of COVID-19. But almost 490 of those respondents said pollutants, diseased fish and other human-caused climate problems caused more losses than the economic downturn triggered by COVID-19 or supply-chain disruptions. Helmuth said this should serve as a “wake-up call” for fish farmers.

“We’re going to have more pandemics,” said Helmuth. “We’re going to have increasing impacts of climate change. New England is ground zero for a lot of these changes, and so we really have to get our act together now.”



Special report: Retail demand reduces COVID-19 pain for seafood industry

A poll of retailers commissioned by the Global Aquaculture Alliance (GAA) finds a brighter future for the seafood industry in the wake of COVID-19.



Global Seafood Alliance

According to Helmuth, another major finding is that it highlights a farming method that could be a blueprint for resilience, as seafood farmers struggle with the impacts of climate change in the upcoming years.

“What’s interesting is that more ecologically-sustainable approaches were more resilient, in part because one of the stoppages in the supply chain was getting food to feed the things you’re trying to grow,” said Helmuth.

Additionally, findings suggest that the integrated multi-trophic aquaculture showed “potential buffering characteristics” on some surveyed components of economic distress (e.g. job loss). For instance, tilapia farmers would grow seaweed, algae, and mollusks in the same place as the fish.

“This means you’ve got a couple of different organisms all eating each other,” said Helmuth. “But it builds a self-sustaining approach, and it means the farm is a lot more stable against COVID-19 or any other global event that could disrupt the supply chain.”

[Read the full article here \(https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S146290112100294X\).](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S146290112100294X)

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