

## **The Secretariat of Agriculture promotes a sanitary strategy to strengthen the country's aquaculture sector**

All the players in this productive sector are involved, from workers, technicians, managers and owners who operate the 9,230 registered farms, whose production has a commercial value of 40 billion pesos.



The Secretariat of Agriculture and Rural Development, together with the country's Aquaculture Health Auxiliary Bodies, designed a strategy to strengthen sanitary and safety schemes, with the aim of raising the productivity and competitiveness of aquaculture and fisheries producers that will lead to access to better markets.

Officials from the National Service for Agro-Alimentary Public Health, Safety and Quality (Senasica) met with presidents and managers of the country's 28 Aquaculture Health State Committees to prepare a diagnosis about the main sanitary challenges of the sector and find short, medium and long term solutions.

During the meeting they agreed about the need to establish a National Training Program, with the convergence of producers, veterinarians, biologists, lab technicians and managers from the Committees to homologate techniques and minimize the risk of introduction and dispersal of pests and diseases.

The aquaculture producers, representing 9,230 farms registered with the Secretariat of Agriculture and Rural Development, explain that taking in consideration the risks of disease dispersal with responsibility is relevant to their activity, since most of the production units share bodies of water with the regional basins and catchment pools.

To that end, they proposed the creation of organized technical teams that will coordinate operational activities per species, catchment pool and state, with the participation of the regional committees.

Juan Gay Gutiérrez, General Director of Animal Health of Senasica, stated that aquaculture is a strategic component of veterinary medicine, and currently there is a marked increase of professionals that are becoming specialists in the area, product of the growth of the sector in recent years.

He pointed out that Aquaculture Committees are a good example of austerity and good use of public resources, and encouraged them to keep working along

the same lines to become self-sufficient and “startup businesses” especially for small producers.

Mauricio Flores Villasuso, Director of Aquaculture and Fisheries Health of the Senasica, underlined that the Secretariat of Agriculture and Rural Development pretends that all producers, but mainly small producers, raise their quality of life, and the best way to achieve that is by raising their health and safety standards, so their products can be traded in more and better markets.

He claimed that, although countries such as South Korea, China, Poland, South Africa, Ecuador and Vietnam are always looking to export tilapia, trout and shrimp to Mexico, to supply Mexican consumers the Senasica privileges national products that comply with health and safety practices that minimize the risk of disease and contamination.

On behalf of the auxiliary bodies, Miguel Ángel Castro Cosío, President of the Aquaculture Health Committee of Sonora, pointed out that one of the main issues for the Committees is to comply in due time and proper form with the different reports they submit to the Senasica.

He alleged that occasionally the technical personnel also has to do administrative work, thus, he asked the federal health authorities to unify and make flexible the forms that they have to submit by law.

To strengthen scientific work, he added, the auxiliary bodies will look into establishing more relations with universities to improve the areas of epidemiological surveillance and diagnosis.

Mexico ranks 17<sup>th</sup> in fisheries and aquaculture production in the world, with an average production of more than two million annual tons; it ranks third in octopus production, seventh in sardine and shrimp, and ninth in tilapia and lobster.

More than 56,000 persons work in this activity and operate 9,230 farms registered with the Secretariat of Agriculture and produce a commercial value of 40 billion pesos.

Aquaculture farms mostly produce tilapia, trout, shrimp, oysters, carp, catfish, etc. and the sector accounts for 19% of the production of fish and seafood in Mexico.