



Water Brothers Blog – Opinion Editorial

Mary Ellen Walling, Executive Director, BC Salmon Farmers

No one is more aware of the debate about ocean-based salmon aquaculture than salmon farmers themselves. Of salmon farmers around the world, those in British Columbia are perhaps the most aware of this discussion – and for good reason.

We are lucky enough to live in one of the most beautiful places in the world. British Columbians are deeply connected to the environment around them – our reverence of wild salmon, particularly the Sockeye – is an example of that. In the fierce defense of these amazing animals, our farmers are under some of the closest scrutiny in the world.

That's a good thing. It's made us excellent farmers, enabling us to provide a safe, healthy protein to a growing world population without putting further stress on wild salmon populations.

There isn't a discussion about aquaculture that BC's farmers haven't taken seriously – which is why it was so disappointing to see our work, our effort and our perspective dismissed in The Water Brothers episode "Farmed and Dangerous," which aired Oct. 15.

While there were a number of erroneous comments and assumptions included in the story, there were a few in particular that simply have to be addressed. We believe with this information the conclusions presented by the Mifflin brothers would be understood as not the 'easy answer' it was presented as.

Closed Containment Aquaculture

Salmon farmers are not opposed to land-based farming because of capital cost. Salmon farmers are not opposed to land-based farming at all. What you did see in the episode was the fact that we are using this technology more than anyone else in British Columbia and are leading the way in its development. What wasn't included though were the questions and concerns that remain for farmers.

Yes, it has to be viable as business – but even if or when that’s achieved – there are other concerns. For example, the higher density that larger fish would need to be kept in closed containment facilities raises ethical questions for those responsible for the animals’ health. Reviews to date have suggested high energy consumption would be needed to run these facilities, and to access that energy right now, we would have to move out of the small coastal communities where we are critical employers.

These questions are answerable, which is why the BCSFA’s members are involved in significant research on the topic (including building the closed containment facility featured in the story, providing feed and smolts and staff expertise to that project). Not including this full picture of the discussion does a disservice to those who genuinely want to be educated on salmon aquaculture and the options available.

Feed and Wild Fish

Fishmeal and fishoil is used in many feeds – from other land-based farm animal feed to the food we give our pet cats and dogs.

A finite amount is available to the many users of fishmeal and fishoil, aquaculture being just one – and this has focused attention on research by many users, with salmon farmers leading the way. It’s as simple as this: the amount of wild-caught whole fish protein used by farmers in BC is 0.8 kg for every 1 kg of salmon. Getting that number down is the result of extensive research and innovative ideas. For example, additional fishmeal is now sourced from trimmings of other fisheries – product that previously would have gone to waste.

Aquaculture is about adding to the oceans’ potential, providing safe, healthy protein to the world where wild fisheries can’t meet the demand. Salmon farmers in British Columbia are in a unique position to help meet this growing demand for nutritious and affordable fish protein.

We agree with the Mifflin brothers that the question around fishmeal and fishoil is one of the most critical to the sustainability of our oceans – which is why our farmers have worked so hard to address it. This point seems to be lost in this film.

Informed Discussion

Having a healthy debate about potential concerns to our natural environment is important for everyone. Perhaps most important though is ensuring that people have balanced, accurate information so they are making decisions they’re confident in.

There are other errors in the episode, which we’ve corrected in a letter posted here (http://www.salmonfarmers.org/sites/default/files/open_letter_to_tvo_the_water_brothers_oct_16.pdf). We’re thankful to TVO for inviting this blog to shed some further light in

some of the areas left dim by the recent episode, and hope that before simple conclusions are drawn by viewers they take the time to look more closely at the facts.