

Organic Shrimp Farming Experience in Thailand

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Abstract

Thailand, located in lush, tropical environment, is an ideal location for operating agriculture business. More than half of the Thai population is working in, or supporting, primary industries. Under the broad policy agenda that aims to establish Thailand as "The Kitchen of the World," the government has been encouraging farmers and relevant stakeholders to produce high quality and safe foods for domestic and export consumption. (National organic agriculture development Strategy, 2008).

Shrimp culture underwent development through several periods. In the initial period, about two decades ago, intensive shrimp culture developed rapidly. Mangrove areas were used to build large areas of rearing ponds and natural resources were used extravagantly. After some initial success, producers moved to more intensive production schemes, and as disease problems developed in the later 1990's, from stress to the local eco-system, drugs and chemicals were often utilized, and improper use was quite common. Despite tremendous increases in production, poor management practices resulted not only in major production losses due to diseases, which spread throughout the various farming areas, but in this period the "Made in Thailand" brand received serious blows, as several major consumer countries placed restrictions on Thai shrimp imports. (Ruangpan, 2005). In response to this crisis, the Thai government, in 1998, set up a robust plan to not only solve the local problems, but to reestablish the "Made in Thailand" brand worldwide as a symbol of quality and safety. The Code of Conduct (CoC), was launched, in 1998, to implement an environmentally responsible management system, and in 2001, the Good Aquaculture Practice (GAP) standard was introduced and practiced by shrimp farms (Dept. of Fish., 2007). Thailand was the first country among the shrimp producers to establish both the environmentally sustainable (CoC) and product quality/safety (GAP) guidelines.

The organic farming standard for shrimp was introduced in Thailand in 2005. This standard was formulated based on the principle of economic sufficiency philosophy of our ruling King Bumiphol Adulyadej, and harmonized with other international organic farming standards. Farmers' initial experiences with organic farming were found to be quite satisfying. After many years of industrial farming, struggling with disease, etc., farmers began to recognize that under the organic system, the environment becomes naturally fertilized, and they feel happier and content using the organic system.

Recently, farmers have formed into groups that are registered under the Department of Fisheries. The groups are learning how to control the quality of the farmed organic shrimp produced under the Thailand Organic Standard. In 2005, organic agriculture was adopted under the National Agenda and the development strategy was proposed (Ratanavaraha, 2007).

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