

The purpose of mussel farming: Finding answers to the “W Questions”

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To be successful, mussel farming has to rely on the answers to the following questions: What is our purpose of farming? Where will the farm be located? What is the proper timing for launching the project? How and when do we harvest? Who are the end customers? Are we a commercial or non-profit mission? Is there any governmental financial support involved in the project?

The strategies of mussel farming are always depending on the answers to these questions. If, for example, the purpose is to grow mussels to eat in fancy restaurants, the project is very different from those farming mussel to feed fish with. And also the harvesting method differs depending on who the end customers are and what requirements they have. The locations of mussel farms are very heterogeneous, differing in terms of whether one is located at sea or in the archipelago. The kind of seabed at the location is of huge importance, especially for what mooring technique can be applied. And the mooring system has huge financial implications due to the fact that it is a large part of the overall investment. Methods of harvesting are also important, especially for the operational costs. Thus, harvesting is an important part of the efficiency formula but has to be balanced versus the purpose of farming. Again, we have to ask the question: Who are the end customers and what are their demands for the delivery? The choice of harvesting techniques is also subject to considerations concerning local conditions such as depth, constitution of the seabed etcetera. Adding to the complexity is that harvesting can be carried out at sea but often it is more convenient to harvest in a harbor with immediate access to containers as well as transportations.

For centuries, policy makers in Europe have spent huge amounts of money to support as well as regulate the agricultural sector. However, concerns about global climate should encourage them to rather, or at least, invest money in project such as mussel farming. That would give them an efficient tool to deal with the emission into seas and oceans of substances such as nitrogen and phosphorus. Today, the phosphorus is reduced dramatically at land but not at sea. And since mussel farming, is a great method not only for reducing problems caused by nutrient and phos-

phorus which cause the eutrophication of the sea, it should provide a good argument for governmental subsidies. One model would be to apply reverted taxes linked to the reduction of substances that are of major concern from a sustainable climate point of view. It would unfold very much as a similar problem to controlling fishing quotas. And the model for a reverted tax system could be applied to mussel farming according to very similar principles as those used in quota control, including for example checking of volumes during mussel framing harvesting seasons.

There are many arguments pointing at mussel farming not only to be here to stay but also being a business with tremendous growth potential. Financial and environmental arguments should of course encourage investors and others to launch mussel farming endeavors. But the current development of wind turbines located at sea provides a great opportunity for mussel farmers to find locations for their farms. In fact, there are also many other environments at sea – manmade as well as natural ones – that offer excellent conditions for successful mussel farming. And this is very encouraging when the world – finally and seriously – is taking on the pollution problems in our seas and oceans.

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The development of offshore wind parks provides great opportunities to find new sites for mussel cultivation.