

PR1458 – 25 October 2010

Aquaculture: A fast growing food producing sector

Accounting for more than half the fish supply for human consumption, aquaculture is the world's fastest growing food producing sector and this growth is likely to continue.

Aquaculture is the farming of aquatic organisms in inland and coastal areas, which involves intervention in the rearing process to enhance production and cultivate stock. Scotland is the second largest producer in the world and the largest in the EU; there are around 260 aquaculture businesses in Scotland which employ approximately 2,200 people. Aquaculture accounts for almost 40% of food export from Scotland each year*.

The aquaculture industry is part of the land-based and environmental sector, represented by Lantra Sector Skills Council. Willie Ferguson, Lantra's National Director said: Worldwide fish stocks are declining each year, yet there is increasing consumer demand for fish. Aquaculture production helps supplement and replenish the wild reserves in order to satisfy this demand.

Due to this increased production, employment demands in aquaculture are forecast to increase, with a need to attract new entrants while also retaining current staff.

Robert Wyvill has worked in the aquaculture industry since he was just 14 years old, initially on a part-time basis and then choosing to pursue a career in the industry. He is currently employed as a farming technician with Marine Harvest Ltd. Enjoying the diversity of his job, Robert said: Each day is different, some days I'm looking after the salmon and involved in feeding, grazing, harvesting or sampling the fish; other days I could be operating the barge, or undertaking forklift work.

With an increasing need for skills, the aquaculture industry is initiating a programme of best practice and has developed National Occupational Standards which can be used by employers to highlight best practice, identify the skills needed, develop training and recruitment plans and develop job descriptions. A Modern Apprenticeship at level 3 is currently available, with a qualification at level 2 under development; this programme allows an apprentice to develop their skills and career whilst being paid on the job.

Robert continued: Skills are becoming more and more important, with a real need for planning and good awareness of safety regulations, as well as good communication skills and confidence in what you do. The availability of training within the industry is good, and over the years I've attended a number of courses, which have ranged from chemical handling, gas awareness and onsite training for tool awareness right through to leadership.

I've also realised that it's important to learn the theory behind the practice and recently completed an SVQ Level 2 in Aquaculture, and I'm just about to start an SVQ Level 3. Alongside this I am also studying for a degree in Environmental Science through the Open University; I hope to put this learning to progressing my career opportunities.

Willie Fergusson concluded: With climate change comes a prediction of water scarcity and a reduction in global productive land. We need to use our marine resources more effectively to feed the world's population, and that means through aquaculture.

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CREDIT FOR PHOTO

Robert Wyvill at work

EDITORS NOTES

" *Lantra AACCS LMI report, March 2010

" Lantra is the Sector Skills Council for land-based and environmental industries, working to ensure these businesses access the training, qualifications, skills and knowledge they need.

" An independent UK organisation, Lantra works with employers and the UK's governments to address the skills and productivity needs of approximately 230 businesses (one in every ten UK businesses) in: agriculture; animal care; animal technology; aquaculture; environmental conservation; equine; farriery; fencing; fisheries management; floristry; game and wildlife management; land-based engineering; horticulture, landscape and sports turf; production horticulture; trees and timber and veterinary nursing.

" By working together with the sector, Lantra leads research on skills issues and business needs, sets national standards and develops qualifications to meet modern business needs and help businesses grow through skills.

" For more information see www.lantra.co.uk.