The Myth of "Sustainable" Aquaculture

For decades, fish farming has been sold as a "Blue Revolution"—a sustainable fix for collapsing wild fisheries. The Aquaculture Accountability Project, in partnership with Farm Forward, investigated the five most enduring myths behind this claim. In reality, industrial fish farming is factory farming, moved into the ocean.

THE FIVE MYTHS WE EXPOSE

MYTH 01

Fish Farming Relieves Pressure on Wild Fisheries

It depends on wild fish for feed—draining the very oceans it claims to save.

MYTH 02

Fish Farming Meets a Growing Global Demand

The industry manufactured demand through lobbying and marketing—stacking on top of wild-caught fishing, not replacing it.

MYTH 03

Farmed Fish Is a Healthy Ocean Protein

Crowded pens breed disease, antibiotic overuse, and drug-resistant bacteria.

MYTH 04

Farmed Fish Is a Climate-Smart Food

One kilogram of farmed fish emits more than 13 kg CO_2-eq. Shrimp farming has driven 38% of global mangrove loss.

MYTH 05

Certifications and Labels Ensure Sustainability

Industry-funded labels like ASC and BAP allow routine antibiotic use, weak auditing, and have repeatedly certified farms that fail their own standards.

WHO WE ARE

The Aquaculture Accountability Project exposes greenwashing in industrial fish farming and works to shift purchasing decisions at universities, foodservice institutions, and NGOs toward genuine ocean protection.

Sea lice, injuries, and disease are rampant in fish farming operations worldwide. (Top photo credit: Abolish Salmon Farming)

Five myths. *Decades of greenwashing.* One urgent conclusion.

Industrial aquaculture has not solved the problem of declining wild fisheries—it has extended factory farming into public waters while deploying sophisticated marketing and certification systems to obscure the consequences. Our report documents each claim with peer-reviewed science, regulatory data, and industry records.

FEED & WILD FISHERIES

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of the global marine catch is reduced to fishmeal and fish oil annually. Salmon consume up to five times more wild fish than they yield. The burden falls hardest on already-depleted fisheries in West Africa and South America.

Majluf et al., Science Advances 10:42 (2024) · Roberts et al., Science Advances 10:42 (2024)

HEALTH & ANTIBIOTIC RISK

70%

of retail shrimp samples in a Louisiana study contained illegal drug residues. Fish farms are projected to have the highest antibiotic use intensity of any farmed animal sector by 2030, accelerating antimicrobial resistance.

Khan & Lively, Aquaculture Reports 18 (2020) · Schar et al., Scientific Reports 10 (2020)

CLIMATE & CERTIFICATION

13.6 kg

CO_2-eq emitted per kg of farmed fish—more than 13× the footprint of legumes. Shrimp farming has driven 38% of global mangrove loss. Nearly 80% of audited ASC farms failed their own standard—yet kept certification.

Poore & Nemecek, Science 360:6392 (2018) · Roebuck & Wristen, SeaChoice (2018)

The Path Forward for an Ocean-Friendly Food System

The evidence shows we cannot produce fish at today's scale—whether farmed or wild—without accelerating ecological decline. The most effective solution is also the simplest: reduce sea animal consumption. Restaurants, workplaces, and schools are already showing that shifting toward more plant-based options is practical, affordable, and widely supported.

Read the full report at AquacultureAccountability.org/myth or scan the QR code.

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Selected citations: Majluf et al., Sci. Adv. 10:42 (2024) · Roberts et al., Sci. Adv. 10:42 (2024) · Khan & Lively, Aquacult. Rep. 18 (2020) · Schar et al., Sci. Rep. 10 (2020) · Poore & Nemecek, Science 360 (2018) · Roebuck & Wristen, SeaChoice (2018) · Chatting et al., Front. Mar. Sci. 9 (2022) (full citations in report)