

Aquaculture industry looks at developments **Technology Conference explores ways of moving cages further offshore**

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ST. ANDREWS - Those with investments in the aquaculture business in Canada and the United States are meeting here to share developments in technology that could expand the aquaculture business and create healthier salmon by moving cages further from the shore.

More than 100 people were on hand for Wednesday's opening day of the two-day Canada-U.S. Technology Partnership in Sustainable Open Ocean Aquaculture at the Fairmont Algonquin hotel in St. Andrews.

The opening day featured scientists, environmentalists and technologists who discussed equipment they have developed that could be used out in the ocean to withstand wind, waves and natural deterrents while nurturing the salmon and being environmentally friendly.

In Charlotte County most if not all of the inshore spots for aquaculture nets are taken and the industry is forced to move further out into the ocean or move to other parts of the world to expand production.

Tim Jackson of the National Research Council is co-chairman of the conference. He said Charlotte County was early getting into the aquaculture business and has a vast history of experience that gives Canada a competitive edge over other countries such as the United States when it comes to new aquaculture technology.

"This is an area where there is a lot of opportunity for innovation, there is a lot of skill and experience in the traditional aquaculture industry."

Jackson said the province decided to partner with the United States in this conference to share the different experiences and skills each country brings to the table to develop the best way to farm in the open ocean.

He said the expertise from Charlotte County has already spilled over to other areas such as Newfoundland and Labrador, which saw a big aquaculture growth through investments from New Brunswick-based companies.

Christopher Bridger, general manager of AEG, a St. Andrews-based company that is creating new technology for off-shore aquaculture, said he attended the conference to see what other companies were coming up with and to learn from them. His product, which houses a million salmon in open water with fewer labourers needed to go out to the cages to feed the fish, will be marketed worldwide to places such as Europe Asia and Australia that do not have the benefit of protected shorelines to house aquaculture farms.

"Right now the New Brunswick government is debating what offshore aquaculture means and what policies have to be in place," said Bridger. "If they would allow us to submit an application today, I'd say tomorrow it would be submitted. We are ready and we would have full-scale equipment in the water by fall. We are submitting quotes to other countries, so there is no reason why we couldn't be doing it here as well."

Jamey Smith, president of the New Brunswick Salmon Growers Foundation, said offshore aquaculture could create more jobs in the area and could increase the area to compete with aquaculture areas growing internationally.

"We have a great opportunity in the marketplace, demand for salmon is strong," said Smith.

"The evolution of industry is towards larger sites, more efficient and sustainable production and the open ocean provides an opportunity for us to do that. It could easily mean a huge jump in the number of jobs and

sustainability of jobs."

The province's task-force on self-sufficiency identified aquaculture as one of the sectors with the most growth potential in New Brunswick.

Smith said the industry needs the government's help not only with investments but also in terms of policy development.

Smith said there are about 3,000 aquaculture business in Charlotte County and if more sites and the capacity at those sites are increased, it would mean growth in the communities.

"We want to do it in sustainable way with proven technology and experience and confidence," said Smith. "It is the Maritime way - we like to do these things with confidence and we are in that opportunity right now."

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