

THE SZARVAS DECLARATION 2023

Pond carp farming is a unique aspect of European freshwater aquaculture. In addition to the production of sustainable and healthy food, pond carp farming creates, maintains and protects complex socio-economic and environmental values. It is in perfect harmony with circular Blue Bioeconomy and One Health concepts and contributes in achieving the goals of the European Green Deal, the Blue Transformation of the FAO and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Recognizing the science-based evidence of these complex multiple benefits of pond aquaculture, producers are committed to preserving these values, maintaining the millennia-old traditions of pond aquaculture based on Common carp rearing.

Noting global trends in production and the high demand for sustainability, circularity, resilience and the necessity of short food supply chains, European carp producers are committed to strengthening their efforts to take a greater part in the production of sustainable and healthy freshwater aquatic food in the EU.

Responding to economic and environmental challenges, producers strive to develop their production systems based on scientific research, taking into account realistic options and differences in the environmental and social conditions of each region as well as the specificities of technologies used.

Agreeing that stronger cooperation among producers and stakeholders along the carp value chain is necessary with special emphasis on increased lobbying and representation at a European level, including more focused and professional communication initiatives.

STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF EUROPE IN GLOBAL CARP AQUACULTURE AND MAINTAINING ITS TRADITIONS AND VALUES

Emphasising that urgent targeted actions are needed to ensure that freshwater finfish farming continue to provide inclusive, effective and sustainable pathways of production and reduce dependence on imports, secure livelihoods, underpin food security and highlighting the real need of the sector to be addressed in a coherent and consistent manner across EU policies and within national as well as regional strategies and action plans.

The long-term objectives regarding EU aquaculture should be its recognition as a principal area in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and consequently, the development of a standalone Common Aquaculture Policy, including forms of tailored support which could increase sustainable production. In any such policy the Commission must pay greater attention to better exploiting the potential of traditional low trophic freshwater finfish aquaculture to achieve EU blue bioeconomy goals.

The short and medium-term objectives regarding national strategies should be the simplification of administrative procedures and bureaucracy and streamlining access to water and space for aquaculture, in particular with regard to the construction of new fishponds, water management and environmental and nature conservation restrictions during operation, alongside consideration of the application for subsidies.

Regulation of predator control within the farm's boundaries should be both simplified and supported, in recognition of the problem of pond farming systems being abandoned (due to predation) and the consequent degradation of habitat that ensues. Evaluation and appropriate compensation of the factors threatening the environmental and economic sustainability of pond production system should be considered, with special regard to the development of a European management plan for cormorants and otters and compensation for the damage caused by them.

Sustainable development of pond fish farming cannot endure without economic viability. This activity should be attractive for both young farmers and investors, increasing carp production and diversifying products and ensuring a stable market supply at affordable prices.

The maintenance of natural values generated by pond aquaculture must be acknowledged and appropriate financial support must be provided through alignment of such structural funds as the European Rural Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), as these activities are strongly connected to EU rural development goals and aspirations for freshwater aquaculture production.

As representatives of the European communities of carp pond farming, an occupation which has developed through millennia and has been passed from one generation to another, evolving as a response to the needs of local communities whilst creating within them a sense of identity and continuity, from ancestors to descendants, we identify and recognise this activity as part of the Europe's intangible cultural heritage. We agree to cooperate in the enrolment of pond farming activity as part of the FAO Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAAHS) and the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage System.

Carp aquaculture research and innovation should target better understanding of the challenges and opportunities of fishpond management particularly concerning climate change; the investigation of the role of fishponds in preserving natural values; good quality seed supply based on coordinated science driven breeding programme; more efficient nutrient management of ponds; as well as the development of sustainable intensification; and the strengthening of the circular economy. Further efforts are needed to facilitate knowledge transfer as well as the application of research and innovation results in practice.

Strengthening the integration of pond farming with other terrestrial food systems, which beyond the joint use of nutrients and raw materials is based on the need to strengthen circular farming and the recognition of the potential for interdependence and joint action in resource sharing, rural development, market organisation, joint innovation, development of European food policy strategies and joint actions for sustainable food systems.