

SEAFOOD CONNECTION: BAGDA AND OSP

| Staff Report |

When asked why they exported Black Tiger shrimps from Bangladesh, Seafood Connection's Director of Wholesale Johan Brouwer confidently said, "because you get better tasting and quality organic products from here which the customers and our clients in Europe appreciate". From that point onward, he discussed how their project was initiated in Bangladesh, and how their success so far, makes them hopeful about extending it in a larger capacity.

Bangladesh has developed into one of the world's largest producers of inland fisheries, with an estimated 3,410,254 metric tons of fish produced during 2012-2013 as per Department

of Fisheries (DoF). This number depends, immensely, on our export of shrimp (the second largest export sector) –the same report by DoF states 5,0333 metric tons of frozen shrimps has been exported in 2012-2013 of which 37274.39 metric tons were Black Tiger or Bangladeshi Bagda.

After a little glitch in the production and export for the previous few years, the cabinet approved a draft in August 2014 called "The National Shrimp Policy 2014"—aiming to improve shrimp production and raising export earnings which was BDT 3,376 crore in 2013. In this meeting, Cabinet Secretary M Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan addressed the journalists and said the new policy would "help

Table: Year-wise Annual Export of Frozen Shrimp 1999-2000 to 2012-2013

Year	Quantity in Metric Ton	Value in Crore Taka
1999-00	28514	1612.2
2000-01	29713	1885.2
2001-02	30209	1447.8
2002-03	36864	1719.9
2003-04	42943	2152.8
2004-05	46533	2281.6
2005-06	49317	2698.4
2006-07	53361	2992.3
2007-08	49907	2863.9
2008-09	50368	2744.1
2009-10	51599	2885.2
2010-11	54891	3568.2
2011-12	48007	3640.2
2012-13	50333	3376.2

Table: Exported Bagda in 2012-13

	(MT)	Core Taka	million USD
Bagda	37274.39	2359.94	303.52

Source: EPB (Export Promotion Bureau) and FIQC (Fish Inspection and Quality Control), Department of Fisheries).



Farmer at the gher

improve shrimp industry, raise employment opportunities and export earnings.” The shrimp sector was added in the national fisheries policy in 1998, however, Bhuiyan said “the indicative guidelines regarding shrimp in that policy were insufficient.”

The same sentiments, for employment were echoed by the representative of the leading Dutch company dedicated to the import, export and distribution of high quality

been certified with ISO 22000 for ensuring food safety.

Having seen the potential in Bangladesh—a scope for cultivating fresh organic shrimps for their customers—Seafood Connection started The Organic Shrimp Project (OSP) in Satkhira two years ago. They have two factories there and OSP was formed specifically to export frozen Bagda to retailers in Germany and Switzerland. Currently, 3000 farmers are benefiting from this project, “we aim to hire 6000 by the next two years,” Brouwer confidently said.

Seafood Connection, strategically chose the location of their ponds in embanked areas (polders). Bagda is cultivated in the natural mix of coastal saltwater and freshwater which in Bengali is called gher (brackish aquaculture). The nutrient-rich water of the Sundarbans makes the region where OSP is set up naturally fertile. The high nutrient content of the water allows an organic aquaculture technique without any industrial feed input or water contamination.

The Dutch officials travel to the factories and farm locations every few months to monitor OSP and see how the farmers are progressing. However, Seafood Connection has employed a field team of 50 locals who train these farmers on a regular basis. The field officers visit the farmers, report on the production and inspect the collection centers. During the time of harvest, the OSP farmers start early in the morning by adding different

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deep-frozen fish products—Seafood Connection. Besides being the largest supplier of Alaskan Pollock in the Netherlands and market leader in pre-sliced Alaska Kibbeling—two varieties of North Atlantic marine fish—the Seafood Connection is also focused on the supply of sustainable fish products acquired from aquaculture. They have

species of fish in cages of different mesh sizes. In comparison to the conventional market, Seafood Connection has established its own collection centers. Usually, in the conventional market, the farmers bring their shrimp without ice to the market where the shrimp are graded in the open air. For the OSP-project, the farmers receive a plastic box with ice in the evening before the harvest. They use this to bring their shrimp to the collection centers where these are graded. Seafood Connection kept in mind the warm climate conditions of Bangladesh, when they started the project. “We took every possible step so that the OSP-shrimp doesn’t suffer that much from the temperature and the quality of the OSP-product stays fresh,” Brouwer mentioned.

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One major factor of frozen shrimp export is that it has opened a door of opportunity for scores of local farmers by generating jobs and in the process, improving their standard of living. When asked how their work in Bangladesh has been successful, Brouwer referred to the cycle of generating better quality product and how that invariably results in better pay of the local farmers. Brouwer also suggested that the demand of Bagda is essentially reliant on the way the farmers are trained and treated here.



Black tiger, ready to be exported



Processing in the plant

And in Europe, the farmers’ work is “greatly appreciated.”

By the end of our conversation, Brouwer succinctly expressed why Bagda is popular in Europe, “because it tastes good and its quality is superior. And because of its taste, it has won prizes in Europe.” He told us that such a unique quality of shrimp becomes “difficult for competitors to match” and that the farmers take really good care of the product from the moment of harvesting—by treating the product with ice and putting it in plastic boxes—till when the product arrives the factory fresh. According to Brouwer, Seafood Connection has dedicated their “time, energy and money to make this [project] work, to make it grow.” Establishing and maintaining farms in other countries are quite a difficult task, however Seafood Connection has built a bridge of camaraderie with local companies. In the case of OSP, Seafood Connection cooperates with Mostafa Group—who are in Brouwer’s words—“committed to grow this project and make it a success.”

Seafood Connection has bigger dreams with OSP, they are still in their starting phase but if things work out, they see themselves increasing their scale and incorporating twenty to thirty thousand farmers in the years ahead. So far, the OSP has been awarded the first prize by the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany in 2013. 