

New eco-label to focus on developing countries

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Artisanal fishermen in Senegal received the very first stamp of approval bestowed by new Swiss eco-label Fair-Fish.



Already sold in Switzerland, Fair-Fish tilapia will soon be available in Germany and Austria.

Begun in 2004, Fair-Fish aims to bring the issues of sustainability, fair trade and animal welfare under one label, while helping fishermen in developing nations attain the environmental certification they need to become more attractive to European consumers.

"Considering Senegal is our pilot project, everything has gone extremely well," Fair Fish project manager Heinzpeter Studer told IntraFish.

The Fair-Fish label is starting small, but aims to grow quickly and spread to other countries. Some 200 Senegalese hand-line fishermen are already fully certified. By the end of the year they will be exporting more than one ton of fish per week to Europe -- mostly pangasius and mullet.

The fishery has also been certified by the Societe Generale de Surveillance (SGS).

For the time being, Fair-Fish labeled product is being sold exclusively in Swiss retailers and restaurants. However, a surge in sales has led to expansion plans for Germany and Austria as more fishermen become certified and more product becomes available.

Senegalese fishermen with the Fair-Fish stamp are already getting double what they would make if they sold their fish through local distribution channels, Studer said.

"Between the price markup and the notoriety, a big part of our job at this point is simply gate keeping," he said. "All the local fishermen would like to be a part of it, but we need to make sure we choose the right ones, and don't grow too fast."

While Fair-Fish recognizes it might never compete with other major eco-labels, it looks to capitalize on the tremendous need for certifiable sustainability in developing countries, Studer said.

After Senegal, it will continue branching out into Western Africa.

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