**AquaFarm, NovelFarm and AlgaeFarm 2023: great audience, great content, great success**

*Pordenone, February 22nd, 2023.* Pordenone Exhibition Centre continues to be the world's reference venue for events dedicated to innovative and sustainable food production in water and on land. The 2023 edition of the three events AquaFarm, NovelFarm and AlgaeFarm ended with impressive numbers. Visitors increased by 62% compared to 2022 and by 25% when compared to the last pre-covid edition. The numbers are also positive referring to the 130 exhibitors, 33% from abroad, almost 7,000 square metres of exhibition area in Halls 4 and 5.

As usual, the strong point of the three events was the contents with over 30 conferences scheduled with 150 speakers from all over the world. The topics were the most up-to-date in various sectors. For AquaFarm the highlight was on the two big problems faced by fish and shellfish farmers at the moment: rising energy costs and climate change. Both of them included, rather than descriptions of critical points, the proposal of a series of partial individually solutions that turn out to be decisive if adopted in synergy.

The aim is to adapt to change on one hand and provide for one's own energy needs through self-production on the other. Supporting livestock farmers in these demanding activities are, as always, the European FEAMPA funds, which in this EU budget cycle have seen the A for aquaculture added to the P for *pesca* (fishing). A popular session with operators, EU officials and regional councillors explored the characteristics, requirements and scale of funding coming through the regions.

On a more scientific front, there was great interest in the session on the fish microbiome and its modulation through feed and probiotics, according to many experts the future of nutrition in aquaculture. There was no lack of technology and end product market sessions, which featured a series of fascinating company stories on the wavelength of the constant search for quality and innovation.

NovelFarm is a unique event in Italy for its exclusive focus on soilless and vertical farming, general topics that offer a chance to discuss issues of great interest to the Italian 'growers' community and often placed on the frontiers of research. To give just an example, genetics and varietal selections for vertical farming have led to a demand from researchers and operators to open the door to research also in Italy on NBTs, the New Breeding Techniques, starting with the applications of CRISPR. The objective is not just to obtain attractive varieties for the market faster, but to re-domesticate (de novo domestication) the cultivated species and also other 'new' ones with great potential for the new growing environment represented by vertical farms.

Meanwhile, soilless continues to grow. It is considered as a strategic factor also by the FAO to sustainably and safely feed the world's population. By now, a large consumer segment such as the IV Gamma has adopted it as a primary technique for its needs, which focus on the need to shorten logistics chains, eliminate residues, deseasonalise the offer and adapt to the public's demands in almost real time, as was discussed in the specific session organised in collaboration with FreshCut News.

Non-food crops have long been grown on vertical farms, e.g. officinal plants, high-quality fodder for calves, and even those species that can be used as 'molecular factories' of active ingredients, industrial substances and even vaccines and antibiotics. All themes of a very well attended session.

Technological evolution also offered novelties in this edition, starting with the new technique of phogonics, the development of aeroponics, the increasing sophistication of the lighting and fertigation strategy, and automation.

Finally, AlgaeFarm, the main event of a sector that is economically growing in Italy but, above all, strategic for the conversion of the global economic system in a direction that has less impact on the environment. Here the main topic is the domestication of microalgae, which, unlike in agriculture, are bred in their 'wild' form. For many experts, the future of microalgae lies in this revolutionary new step. A talk by the Los Alamos-based New Mexico Consortium of Research Institutions and Operators, which is blazing new trails in solving one of the main limitations of microalgae cultivation: the biomass production yields, which are still too low to provide widely used products at an acceptable cost. That kind of research is not well-known in Europe, even among specialists, and it is pertinent that AlgaeFarm, AquaFarm and NovelFarm provided an opportunity for discussion and debate.

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