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The circular economy is the way forward

The European Union's Green Deal was to be a strong marker of Ursula von der Leyen's presidency at the helm of the European Commission. The leadership that it showed was a good signal towards more environmental responsibility and internal alignment within the EU. In IFFO's view, representing the marine ingredients industry, this deal should trigger even more innovation in the sector and contribute to increased efficiency and competitiveness.

The European Commission's observation seemed to us to be clear and lucid: EU's industry accounts for 20 percent of the EU's emissions. More than 90 percent of biodiversity loss and water stress come from resource extraction and processing. Only 12 percent of the materials used by EU industry come from recycling.

While the EU's roadmap says that "the European Union needs a Marshall Plan-type investment effort to fuel the recovery and modernise the economy", EU officials want to demonstrate that climate protection will be linked with an economic perspective. Does this sound realistic or have priorities shifted amid the pandemic outbreak?

From the marine ingredient industry's perspective, we are fully convinced that the circular economy is the way forward and is not only compatible with, but also a condition to growth. The Marine Ingredients Industry has been involved for years in a circular process which finds a usage for every part of a resource. Today, the use of trimmings and by-product from seafood processing represents one third of total world fishmeal production. This figure is already quite impressive! Recycling products that otherwise would have been discarded has enabled the industry to develop and the farming sector to provide consumers all over the world with fish, poultry and pigs fed with nutritive natural marine ingredients.

However, there is room for more trimmings and by-products to be included in Marine Ingredients. It is a good thing that the 11th Petersberg Climate Dialogue held at the end of April discussed with 30 countries how to emerge from the current global health crisis with the goal of EU greenhouse gas emissions reductions of 50-55 percent by 2030 compared to 1990.

The EU's food supply system is being challenged amid the COVID-19 outbreak

The EU's food supply system – like the whole world's – have been affected by the disruption to the usual cross-border flow of seasonal workers caused by restrictions to free movement, despite "green corridors" being set up to allow free circulation of goods and workers across EU borders. Indeed, the EU Commission published guidelines mid-March aimed at protecting the proper functioning of the Single Market. It noted that the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) had found no evidence that coronavirus could be transmitted through food.

The current crisis has made it more visible that the agri-food supply chain is highly integrated and operating across borders. In the EU, around three billion tonnes of agri-food are transported every year, according to the EU commissioner for agriculture, Janusz Wojciechowski.

Now, some key topics such as environmental impacts of livestock should be addressed. As some manufacturers of commercial fish feed are substituting fishmeal with plant-based ingredients in a move driven by economic incentives and an outspoken claim to improve the sustainability of aquafeed, this approach needs to be investigated and recent studies have challenged it already.

As demonstrated by the Institute of Aquaculture (University of Stirling, UK), not only are marine ingredients more sustainable in terms of carbon footprint, they have all the essential nutrients to ensure good animal welfare, growth rate and fillet quality. PhD researcher Wesley Malcorps, who led the international, multidisciplinary team, said that "substituting fishmeal for plant ingredients [...] would shift resource demand from the oceans onto the land, potentially adding pressure to the land-based food production systems, which are already under pressure to meet global demand for food, feed, biofuels, and biobased materials. In turn, this would affect the environment and biodiversity, as well as the availability and prices of crops. The study, "The Sustainability Conundrum of Fishmeal Substitution by Plant Ingredients in Shrimp Feeds", was published in 2019 in Sustainability.

Furthermore, fishmeal and fish oil, as the foundation of formulated feed, pass on their nutritional benefits to humans and should be used strategically to combine health and nutrition requirements with continuity of supply.

Petter Martin Johannessen joined IFFO in 2018 as Director General. He was previously Global Business Director for Risk and Management Sourcing at Cargill Aqua Nutrition and before that Supply Chain Director and Global Sourcing and Purchasing lead at EWOS Group. He also worked at PWC and Kavli Holding. He holds a Diploma in International Marketing and a degree in Business Administration from the Norwegian School of Management. He has also studied petroleum economy, economics and science at the University of Bergen.