



Sea lice lockdown saves fish lives

Scottish Sea Farms' new Director of Farming, Gideon Pringle, might have spent the first months of his role getting acquainted with the company remotely, but since Covid travel restrictions eased, Pringle, who joined from Mowi in March, has been making up for lost time visiting farms.



What he has discovered in moving from one big farming operation to another is that while some of the issues can be the same, the way they are tackled can vary greatly.

'None of us have found the absolute answer to the major challenges so we tend to do things differently,' he said. 'But seeing the same thing done differently makes you a better farmer.'

That said, Pringle's approach to one of salmon farming's longest-standing challenges – sea lice – has not changed in recent years. He advocates a policy of zero tolerance.

'Like the coronavirus, we have to act early to lockdown sea lice.'

This involves counting 100 fish per pen every week and if a single adult female in a single pen is found, the counting stops immediately and that pen is treated as quickly as possible.

There are a number of treatment options but Pringle's preference is the veterinary medicine azamethiphos (known as Salmosan), which he said is 'working 100 per cent at the moment'.

A low dose is used but over a longer period, in a bath treatment, with the fish kept healthy in the tarpaulin with oxygenation and constant observation.

The aim of this strategy, where lice are targeted as soon as they appear, is to arrive at mid-summer with no lice on the fish.

Scottish Sea Farms is already seeing early success at five Shetland farms, where the 'zero tolerance' method has been introduced.

Sharing information with other farmers in the region has also been instrumental in bringing down sea lice numbers.

'In Shetland, we exchange data with Grieg and we each write a health report on what we're doing and the results. Both companies now have the lowest ever recorded lice levels.'

On the mainland, sea lice data is exchanged with Mowi weekly, covering the entire area where the two companies farm.

As for the future, Pringle has great confidence in the relatively novel application of modelling and believes this could ultimately transform sea lice control by helping locate new farms in the best places.

'We're just about to commission full modelling of Orkney and Shetland for sea lice, in partnership with Grieg.'

'Modelling might not eliminate lice but it could make it a fraction of what it is. That's the way forward.'



INSIDE

Innovation aids fish welfare

Great British Beach Clean

Norwegian knowledge exchange

People on the move

Starling effort

Marathon milestone



Processing team counts on in-house innovation to boost fish welfare

A Scottish Sea Farms processing supervisor's brainwave has helped further improve fish welfare and increase efficiencies during harvesting.

David Lipcsey's day job is in Scottish Sea Farms' facility in Scalloway but he also happens to be a talented IT enthusiast with an eye for innovation.

Combining his experience in processing with his programming skills, he has identified a way of counting fish as they are transferred from the wellboat to the processing facility.

He took his idea to Scottish Sea Farms Processing Manager Donald Buchanan who immediately recognised the benefits.

'It takes approximately seven minutes for the fish to leave the wellboat and arrive at harvesting, and it's essential for the welfare of these fish that

we maintain a smooth, steady flow throughout,' said Buchanan.

Lipcsey was able to programme software to count the number of fish entering harvesting machines then take that data and put it on to an app.

'The app feeds the information back to the wellboat in real-time, where the skipper can see on a tablet exactly how many fish are going through harvesting per minute and adjust the flow wherever necessary,' explained Lipcsey.

Such has been the success of the new tool, which was developed and put into operation within two months, that Lipcsey is being seconded to Scottish

Sea Farms' IT department where his skills can be put to wider use.

"The skipper can see on a tablet exactly how many fish are going through harvesting per minute"

Buchanan said: 'David's attitude of not just accepting how things have always been done but bringing about positive change makes him everything a manager looks for in staff.'

'I'm sad to lose him but delighted to see him develop his career in a way that will make a real and positive difference across the whole company.'



Creating 'bubbles' for annual beach clean

Scottish Sea Farms will once again be participating in the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) Great British Beach Clean - only with a bit of a difference due to Covid-19 guidelines.

This year's event, which runs from September 18-25, will be restricted to staff only, rather than opened up to friends, family and local residents.

In addition, each team will consist of 'bubbles' of employees who already come into contact with one another through work and will be allocated their own separate beach to clean and survey.

Coordinating the beach cleans scheduled to take place on Orkney, Shetland and mainland Scotland are Environmental Scientist Kirsty Brown,

Health and Safety Coordinator Calum Sinclair and Head of Freshwater Engineering Ewen Leslie.

Each is responsible for registering their local beach cleans, completing a survey of the litter collected and submitting the data to the MCS national database.

Said Brown: "Having participated in the Great British Beach Clean for the last two years, and achieved some impressive hauls together, we were keen to continue our support of this key nationwide campaign, both in

terms of doing our bit to look after our local beaches and also seeing how the level and make-up of litter has changed."

The MCS said such information has helped bring about environmental advances, including the plastic bag charge, the banning of microplastics in personal care products, better wet wipe labelling and growing calls for a tax on single use plastics.

To find out more about the MCS Covid-19 health and safety guidance, visit mcsuk.org

Sector group working with Norway to drive growth

Scotland's salmon farmers have embarked on a knowledge exchange programme with counterparts in Norway with the aim of boosting growth in the sector.



The initiative follows a visit to Oslo and Bergen late last year by representatives of the Scottish sector, organised by the Aquaculture Industry Leadership Group (AILG).

Scottish Sea Farms Managing Director Jim Gallagher, who co-chairs the AILG with Gael Force Managing Director Stewart Graham, said a working group had now been set up, with participation from the sector and government, here and in Norway.

'It will reflect on what was learned from the trip and how we can adapt and modify what we think is appropriate for farming in Scotland,' said Gallagher, who was in Norway along with members of the Scottish Salmon Producers' Organisation, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Marine Scotland and Rural Economy Minister Fergus Ewing.

Norwegian farmers have a more 'enabling' environment in which to farm, with innovation sites to trial new ideas. The AILG has in the past proposed similar facilities for Scotland to allow the sector to develop sustainably.

But the key to expansion, said Gallagher, is a robust regulatory framework that is efficient, proportionate and balanced.

'Today it's not. At the moment if you want a new farm in Scotland, it takes a minimum of three years.'

However, he is optimistic that progress can be achieved if all stakeholders are better informed about the opportunities in salmon farming.

'There is a drive from the Minister to enhance aquaculture's contribution in Scotland and he is trying to get a greater understanding of how to do that,' said Gallagher.

On the discussion table are a possible Scottish version of Norway's auction system, which recently saw NOK 6 billion (£500 million) invested in new licences, and new farming concepts such as Scottish Sea Farms' planned ocean farm.

'Salmon can help the post-Covid recovery with highly paid skilled jobs; we've recruited 34 more people since the start of the year, all in rural communities,' Gallagher added.

'But we need the regulatory framework to reflect the speed of change, the need for change and the need for food.'

The AILG, which was set up in 2016 with a vision of doubling the value of the Scottish salmon sector, is holding further talks with government advisers this month to discuss how aquaculture can aid Scotland's economic recovery.



'Keep outside the buoys' safety campaign launched

Scottish Sea Farms has launched a new social media campaign encouraging other marine users to stay safe around our farms by keeping outside the buoys.

The campaign, which is being promoted across our social media channels, is also being reinforced on the Scottish Sea Farms website via a dedicated page, 'Visiting our farms'.

Supporting this work to ensure the safety of marine users around farms, the Scottish Salmon Producers' Organisation is currently working on a similar sector-wide campaign, expected to launch later this autumn.

Commenting on the company's new campaign, Scottish Sea Farms Health and Safety Manager Gerry McCormick said: 'With more and more people choosing to stay close to home this year, rather than venture abroad, it seemed like the right time to remind those exploring Scotland by water of the need to exercise caution when passing our farms.'

'As with any working farm, there are potential hazards to be mindful of; in our case, everything from mooring grids to power cables, ropes and other anchoring systems, all of which can rise and fall according to the local weather conditions.'

'With buoys being a well-established signal of potential hazards on or under the water, the message of 'keep outside the buoys' was the clearest, simplest way of helping everyone keep safe while enjoying Scotland's stunning scenery.'

People on the move

Scottish Sea Farms has promoted several senior staff this summer as part of a restructuring process.



Richard Darbyshire



Will Scott



Robbie Coutts

Long serving Orkney Regional Manager Richard Darbyshire has been appointed to the all-new role of Northern Isles Regional Manager with overall responsibility for Shetland and Orkney.

Supporting him will be two Area Managers, Robbie Coutts for Shetland and Will Scott in Orkney. Both bring many years' experience of the company and local marine conditions to their newly created roles, meaning 'they can hit the ground running', said Darbyshire.

On the mainland, Peter Coull returns to the company as Senior Site Manager at Nevis, overseeing all three farms in the area. Coull worked for Scottish Sea Farms from 1996 to 2016, joining as a husbandry trainee at Nevis and working his way up to Farm Manager.

Meanwhile, in freshwater, Carlota Castaneda-Cobo has been appointed Deputy Operations Manager at Barcaldine RAS Hatchery; another newly created role and one that will provide additional support to the day-to-day running of the hatchery and directly to the Operations Manager and Freshwater Manager.



Peter Coull



Carlota Castaneda-Cobo

Bird box solution after starlings drop in

Visitors are usually made welcome at Orkney's engineering workshop but this summer's guests, in the form of starlings, presented a problem for the hardworking team in Kirkwall.

The birds were nesting in holes in the roof and covering the floor in droppings, resulting in a clean-up operation costing almost £500.

Scottish Sea Farms' Engineering and Logistics Manager in Orkney, Myles Heward, decided to contact the RSPB.

'I wanted to patch up the holes but starlings are a red listed bird because their numbers are in decline in the wild so I didn't want to take away their home from them.

'The RSPB advised waiting until the chicks had fledged and then offering alternative accommodation in the shape of bird boxes.'



Scottish Sea Farms bought 15 starling boxes from the RSPB and attached them to the outside wall of the workshop, close to the birds' chosen nesting place.

Then they waited for their feathered friends to move in, with a camera, installed by IT expert Colin Kupris, primed to capture their return on film. Within weeks, the plan had worked and the birds were back.

'It's been a success all round,' said Heward. 'Apart from keeping the birds happy, it's a big cost saving in terms of the mopping and repainting - and we're doing the right thing for the species too.'

Marathon milestone for Shetland fund raiser



Shetland social care worker Anita Georgeson had planned to hike in Mont Blanc to raise money for the care home where she works, Edward Thompson & Taing House in Lerwick.

But when Covid-19 made a trip to the Alps impossible she set herself a challenge closer to home. Her aim was to find £10,000 to buy an interactive projector that would help improve the residents' quality of life.

She decided to run a solo full marathon in Shetland, a goal she achieved last month in an impressive four hours and 25 minutes.

Even more impressive though was the grand total of £17,000 she raised, with sponsorship from the community and a £5,000 donation from the Scottish Sea Farms' Heart of the Community Trust.

Anita, who had previously completed a half marathon, said: 'It was my first full marathon and it'll be my last!'

She said she was overwhelmed with the support and generosity from everyone, including Scottish Sea Farms.

Now the care home will be able to purchase a Tovertafel Interactive projector - described by Anita as an 'amazing magic table, which will bring so much joy to the residents during these difficult and strange times' - and the extra funds raised will go towards a sensory garden for the elderly folk to enjoy.



Got a news item from your region or business area? Email thesource@scottishseafarms.com