

# POLICY BRIEF

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## The future of traditional carp production in Middle Franconia, Germany

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The traditional aquaculture species cultivated in Germany are rainbow trout and common carp. This policy brief focuses on the farming of carp in natural earthen ponds, specifically in the Aischgrund region in the north of Bavaria (Franconia), where carp ponds are the main characteristic of the traditional landscape. Pond farms here are small, family owned and operate at low levels of production. In majority of the cases, farmers earn over 90% of their income from employment in agriculture or other sectors. Nevertheless, despite the relatively low levels of economic output, carp farming represents an integral part of the regional identity of this area, which in turn is linked to its touristic appeal. There are 7000 ponds in the Aischgrund region with a total area of 2800 ha (including dams). Many of these ponds are joined together, making the area highly important in terms of nature conservation and landscape protection. Highlighting this, stakeholders from the Aischgrund region have recently applied for registration as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Carp farming is a low-intensity system with mainly positive impacts on the natural environment. For that reason, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) recognises traditional carp production in Germany as one of the most sustainably farmed fish in the world. However, many carp farmers in the Aischgrund region have been facing economic challenges due to steadily decreasing carp consumption over a significant period of time. Additionally, producers in neighbouring countries such as the Czech Republic and Poland represent strong competitors. Under favourable production conditions, this may not be of direct *economic* significance to the region. However, predation by birds (especially cormorants) can lead to losses of up to 50% of young fish. Should carp farming no longer be profitable, these young farmers will no longer have an incentive to continue the maintenance the natural ponds. It is clear that both cultural and conservation implications are at stake should carp pond farms go out of business.

The following key messages are intended to draw attention to the main issues that have arisen from the research and which have potential policy implications for the future viability and continuation of carp farming in Germany.

### Key messages

- Carp production in traditional earth ponds is recognized as representing an ecologically sustainable system. The pond landscape itself is of very high ecological value in that it provides habitats for a large variety of water related flora and fauna. The main production challenge for carp farmers is the significant risk of losses, which can be up to 60 or 80% of stocked fish per pond. The main predators



are cormorants and otters, with increasing numbers of beavers damaging pond facilities. In this respect, the reduction of production risks caused by cormorants is seen as key factor for the future of fish farming in this area.

- Most fish farmers in the Aischgrund produce small volumes, meaning that they sell either to fish wholesale companies or directly to local restaurants, the so called 'fish kitchens'. The prices received by the producer are relatively low at 2€ per kg. One fish is valued to make two dishes worth around 10€ each in the restaurant. Of this €20, the producer receives just 10% of the value added that is paid by the end-consumer. As such, local stakeholders within the Aischgrund region have established the goal throughout the years of helping farmers to increase sales revenues by acquiring a higher producer price of €3.50 / fish, which would ensure the farms' viability even under the current threatening conditions.
- Rural Development Plans offer various options to provide area-based payments for farmers, particularly for agri-environmental purposes. However, these payments do not apply for pond areas which is a major concern for those who aim for the protection of traditional carp ponds. The European Fishery Fund has been providing support for local institutions to found initiatives e.g. the regional tourist and marketing office 'Aischgründer Karpfenland' (carp land Aischgrund). Working together with the local pond cooperatives, the main objective of this office is to promote the Aischgrund region for tourism, based on its positive image and the offer of 'carp kitchens' as a local gastronomic destination. It is clear that support of this kind is critical, in order for the region to maximise the benefits of its unique character.
- The Aischgründer Karpfenland provides member restaurants (both within the region and outside Franconia) with a special designation/certification that distinguishes them as supporters of local fishing producers. As a result, a small but growing network of restaurants outside Franconia have developed with the aim of fostering the consumption of typical Aischgrund carp dishes to increase sales.
- Locally, carp is accepted as part of the seasonal Aischgrund cuisine. This is different to Germany in general, where aquaculture tends to have a bad image mainly due to feeding practices in intensive systems that are based on fishmeal, fish oil and antibiotics. Therefore, it is important to reinforce local consumer perceptions and to inform non-local consumers that carp farmers only feed locally grown cereals and legume crop mixtures; furthermore, that they do not use fishmeal or other concentrates. This could lead to increased consumption of traditionally-grown carp and encourages more restaurants to serve it.

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