

POLICY BRIEF

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The future of traditional carp production in Middle Franconia, Germany

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Traditional aquaculture species cultivated in Germany are rainbow trout and common carp. The focus in this policy brief is on the farming of carp in natural earthen ponds, specifically in the Aischgrund region in the north of Bavaria (Franconia) where carp ponds characterise the traditional landscape. Pond farms here are small, family owned and operate at low levels of production. In most 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 is integral to the regional identity of this area, which in turn is linked to its touristic appeal. There are 7000 ponds in the Aischgrund with a total area of 2800 ha (including dams), many of which are joined together, making the area very important in terms of nature conservation and landscape protection. Indeed, stakeholders from the Aischgrund region have 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 are facing economic challenges, since carp consumption has been steadily shrinking over a long period of time and producers in neighbouring countries such as the Czech Republic and Poland are strong competitors. Under good 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, the young farmers will not continue to maintain the natural ponds. There are clearly both cultural and conservation implications should carp pond farms go out of business.

This policy brief has been developed from research conducted as part of the H2020-funded project, Sufisa (Sustainable finance for sustainable agriculture and fisheries). Its main focus has been to access the perspectives of the fish farmers themselves, together with a range of stakeholders who have a direct interest in the aquaculture sector in Franconia and in Germany. To that end a series of interviews, focus groups and workshops were conducted between January 2016 and October 2018. Further details are available from the main project website: <http://www.sufisa.eu/>. 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.



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Key messages

- Carp production in traditional earth ponds is recognized as being an ecologically sustainable system. The pond landscape itself is of very high ecological value in providing 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 per kilogramme of fish (€2). One fish makes two dishes of around 10€ each in the restaurant. Of this €20 the producer receives just 10% of the value added paid by the end-consumer. As such, local stakeholders in the Aischgrund region have been aiming for years to help farmers to increase sales revenues and to realise a 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 payments for farmers, in particular 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 e.g. the regional tourist and marketing office 'Aischgründer Karpfenland' (carp land Aischgrund). The main objective of this office, working together with the local pond cooperatives, is to promote the Aischgrund region for tourism, based on its positive image and the offer of 'carp kitchens' as a local gastronomic destination. Clearly, support of this kind is critical, in that the region needs 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 that distinguishes them as supporters of local fish. As a result, a small but growing network of restaurants outside Franconia have developed the aim of fostering the consumption of typical Aischgrund carp dishes and to increase the sales of carp.
- 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 because of feeding practices in intensive systems that are based on fishmeal, fish oil and antibiotics. It is important, therefore, 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. In so doing, to increase the consumption of traditionally-grown carp and to encourage more restaurants to serve it.