

Recommendation n. °:38

Algaculture in the Outermost Regions

The demand for algae (all species) in the European Union (EU) is growing and is expected to become a €9 billion market by 2030. Algae constitute an important source of new activities: human and animal nutrition, chemistry, biofuels, bioplastics, pharmacology, ecosystem services, integrated multi-trophic aquaculture (IMTA), etc.

While the aquaculture sector should be a real development opportunity for European economies, the European algae production has declined and now represents only 0.2 percent of world production and less than 0.1 percent if only algae from algaculture is considered.

Thus, algaculture, like European aquaculture in general, is lagging significantly behind, although the European Commission (EC) wants to encourage the development of this activity, as shown in the EC Communication: "*Towards a strong and sustainable EU algae sector*".

The valorization of algaculture continues to be a little-known reality in most of the Outermost Regions (ORs). There are, however, some small companies that produce *spirulina* or *macroalgae* for their domestic markets, at La Réunion, the Azores (*5essentia*) and Guadeloupe (*Vimera*). These companies, driven by biotechnology enthusiasts, are struggling to achieve profitability and a degree of resilience that will allow them to face the future with confidence. *Spirulina* producers in the ORs face competition from products from third countries, whose production costs are much lower than those of European producers. It should also be noted that in the ORs of the Antilles, obtaining concessions to grow macroalgae is especially difficult, since the proliferation of *sargassum* in the Caribbean basin is seen as a real plague.

While the CCRUP, shares the EC's ambition to develop a thriving seaweed farming industry, we must caution that they cannot, for one side, encourage the development of seaweed farming and, on the other, ignore the reality of the international competition.

In our opinion, the EC is not sufficiently aware of this reality, or doesn't have it sufficiently anchored in the center of its decisions.

Although the Over-Cost Compensation Plan compensates for the extra costs of the ORs compared to the continental EU, and is an undeniable advance, it does not close the gap between the ORs production costs and those of the Asian countries.

Therefore, the CCRUP recommends finding solutions that allow producers in the ORs to compete in the European markets, otherwise:

- The commercial opportunities for our producers will remain confined to very limited niche markets;
- Restrict opportunities in these niche markets will not allow advancing to production scales that can reduce production costs;
- The wishes expressed for the development of our sectors will remain as illusions.

The difficulties and long deadlines required to obtain aquaculture concessions are regularly mentioned as a major obstacle. These obstacles are amplified, considerably, in a context where the invasion of certain algae, as in the Azores (*Rugulopteryx okamura* algae) and in the Caribbean (*sargassum*) disturbs ecosystems and generates disturbances in impacted areas. This situation, felt by the local population as a calamity, is the cause of a big apprehension, because the population believes that algaculture can bring new problems (invasion by other species).

The CCRUP recommends the strengthening and acceleration of support for research on solutions for the invasion of *sargassum* and *Rugulopteryx okamura*, and more specifically for applied research directed towards its valorization, so that it may no longer be a plague and become a rentable resource. We also recommend that **the EC support programs to inform the public about the advantages of algaculture.**

The President of the Executive Committee of the CCRUP,

(David Pavón González)