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## EUROPEAN CONSUMERS' AWARENESS AND INFORMATIONAL NEEDS FOR FISH FARMING PRACTICES

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### Introduction

For many consumers, aquaculture is not a well-known sector of food production (Fernández-Polanco & Luna 2012). In EU, the consumers who consume fish and seafood less frequently are those who have no understanding of the information accompanying the products (Cantillo et al., 2021). Hence, increased awareness of consumers on fish farming practices and their sustainability can be one potential way to increase farmed fish consumption. To study the potential ways to increase the awareness, we assessed consumers' perceptions on the quality and quantity of current information on fish farming, and wishes for information.

### Material and methods

A subcontracted market research agency conducted online cross-cultural surveys in three countries (Finland n=412 people, France n=417, Spain n= 413). The master questionnaire, developed in English and translated into national languages, included items about the participants' fish consumption, objective knowledge, information received today and wishes for more information, and socio-demographic characteristics (e.g. country, gender, age, education level). The development of the questionnaire was based on the qualitative results of focus-groups done in the earlier phase of the project (Mariojouis et al., 2021). SPSS Statistics (version 26) was used for the analysis of correlations between the frequency of fish consumption, knowledge on aquaculture and respondent's nationality.

### Results and discussion

Results show that there is a relatively weak knowledge of fish farming in the three countries, as only 14% to 24% of total respondents indicated they know aquaculture 'well' or 'very well', and 33% stated that they do not know fish farming at all. Spanish population confirms having better knowledge about fish farming than Finnish or French respondents.

We asked how the consumers qualify the received information, and most respondents stated that information given is 'neutral', but much more frequently in Finland (59%), and less in France (34%), Spain being in an intermediate situation with 46%. The second qualification is "mostly positive" in Spain (23%) and Finland (18%), while it is "mostly negative" in France (25%). Interestingly, the opinion of 'sufficient information' is expressed by a larger share in Finland (23%) and Spain (20%) than in France (10%), and among males (22%) compared with women (16%). The answer 'no opinion' was chosen by 24% of respondents in both Finland and France, and 20% in Spain.

Results show a clear interest of respondents for receiving information about fish farming and most respondents consider it as useful. Spanish respondents are the most interested (84% for the total 'very useful' and 'useful'), followed by Finnish respondents (70%), and French respondents (67%).

While in the three countries the available information about fish farming is considered insufficient by most of the respondents, the starting point for communication is not the same:

France has the strongest share of consumers expressing they have no knowledge about fish farming (40%) and that information about fish farming is insufficient (61%). The overall profile is characterized by low knowledge and an opinion on available information as neutral or negative.

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Spain has the largest share of consumers having some knowledge about fish farming (only 24% knowing 'not at all'), but they also mostly consider that available information is insufficient (60%) while 20% say it is sufficient. The overall profile is a relatively high level of knowledge, and an opinion of a rather good quality of available information.

Finland is an intermediate situation: the respondents with no knowledge about fish farming represent 34% of total population, there is the highest share of total respondents saying the available information is sufficient (23%). The overall profile is characterized by a relatively low knowledge about fish farming and an opinion about available information being neutral or positive, while the need for receiving information is less high than in Spain and France.

### **Conclusions**

There is a rather low consumer awareness about aquaculture and the specific production system practices. Understanding of the knowledge gaps and consumer perceptions will benefit to design actions to increase awareness about aquaculture. Informed consumers could be more positive towards the emergence of new and sustainable production approaches, without being misled by the negative information that may follow when new technological advantages in food production are adopted.

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