

CENTRE TO CERTIFY SHRIMP FARMS

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Food processing and related industries in India: scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements and supply chain management

Big catch: India exported frozen shrimp estimated at almost \$5 billion in 2019-20.

To bolster confidence in India's frozen shrimp produce, the country's biggest seafood export item, the Centre has kicked off a new scheme to certify hatcheries and farms that adopt good aquaculture practices.

India exported frozen shrimp worth almost \$5 billion in 2019-20 to the U.S. and China — its biggest buyers. But a combination of factors had hurt export volumes in recent months, including container shortages and incidents of seafood consignments being rejected because of food safety concerns.

"We have seen some recent consignments sourced from Indian shrimp farms being rejected due to the presence of antibiotic residue and this is a matter of concern for exporters," a Commerce Ministry official said.

The Marine Products Exports Development Authority (MPEDA) has developed a certification scheme for aquaculture products called *Shaphari*, a Sanskrit word that means superior quality of fishery products suitable for human consumption.

"We already have a National Residue Control Programme for food safety issues in farm produce and pre-harvest testing system in place, but this certification was proposed as a market-based tool for hatcheries to adopt good aquaculture practices and help produce quality antibiotic-free shrimp products to assure global consumers," the official said.

Frozen shrimp is India's largest exported seafood item. It constituted 50.58% in quantity and 73.2% in terms of total U.S. dollar earnings from the sector during 2019-20. Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Odisha, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu are the major shrimp producing States, and around 95% of the cultured shrimp produce is exported.

"Overall, certified aquaculture products will help exporters to export their consignments to markets under stringent food safety regulations without the fear of getting rejected," the official explained.

The Shaphari scheme is based on the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization's technical guidelines on aquaculture certification and will have two components — certifying hatcheries for the quality of their seeds and, separately, approving shrimp farms that adopt the requisite good practices.

The certification of hatcheries will help farmers easily identify good quality seed producers. Those who successfully clear multiple audits of their operations shall be granted a certificate for a period of two years.

"The entire certification process will be online to minimise human errors and ensure higher credibility and transparency," the official said, adding that the guidelines for certification of farms are under preparation in consultation with stakeholders.

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