

Organic wine from the Netherlands

Dutch wine tastes pretty good. On a scale of 5 points, consumers awarded the wine an average of 3.4. According to market researcher Dr Frans Verhees from Wageningen UR, the taste will still have to improve if winemakers want to move into new markets. “In the gift market, customers are willing to pay the higher price because of the story behind the wine, but serious wine buyers are looking for quality.” Thanks to the emergence of new mildew-

resistant and early-ripening varieties, organic wine production in the Netherlands is growing. With increasing production, marketing has become an important issue. Therefore a survey was carried out among wine buyers, at the initiative of the association of winemakers in Groesbeek and the Wijnbouwcentrum Nederland. It turns out that only two per cent of Dutch consumers prefer to buy wine produced in their own country.

To improve the image of locally produced wines, courses, wine certifications and the introduction of a quality label could help. A better image could stimulate the production of quality Dutch wines. It would not be advisable to try and compete on price with the common wine-producing countries. Verhees: “Cost prices are relatively high here, so the market for Dutch wine will always remain a niche market.”



“We are working on new methodes to measure stress levels and welfare in fish”

Marnix Poelman

Currently there are no certified organic fish farmers active in the Netherlands, but interesting innovative concepts are being developed. “The Netherlands is an important global player in the use of recirculation systems to raise fish and shrimp”, explains researcher Marnix Poelman of IMARES of Wageningen UR in Yerseke. “This system does not use a continuous stream of water: almost all the water is recycled in large breeding tanks. It is purified through filters and other technical means. The Netherlands would like to obtain an organic certification for these recirculation systems.” The Dutch firm AgroEco is leading these efforts.

In a conventional fish production system the objective is to increase production. In an organic fish production the idea is to create conditions in which the fish can behave as naturally as possible, even if this reduces production capacity. “If a fish grows normally, is not sick, eats well and is not damaged, we generally assume that it feels good”, says Poelman. “But these are definitely not the best parameters for animal welfare. That’s why we are working on new methods to more accurately measure stress levels and welfare in fish.”

Throughout the world there are various certifications for organically grown fish, but these pertain to pond systems or net cultures in open water: the cage constructions that can be found along the Canadian and Norwegian coasts, among other places. Poelman: “A European organic label for fish production is currently being developed. This label sets a number of requirements for aquaculture products such as the maximum fish density in the system, the allowable percentage of vegetable matter in fish feed, and various environmental demands. Poelman and his colleagues are evaluating

these regulations and are drawing up welfare criteria for organically raised fish. The IMARES expertise is used to contribute to the discussions in Brussels.

At this moment the focus is on common cultivated fish species, such as tilapia and catfish. But shrimp could also be produced organically in the Netherlands. Furthermore, IMARES started a feasibility study for the organic production of mussels. In this case the focus is on ecological aspects and water quality. “We have great expectations”, says Marnix Poelman. “With mussels very little input is needed: it is almost organic to begin with. The only aspects that need to be optimised are the collection of mussel seed and the processing requirements.

Literature

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