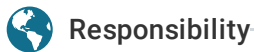




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Responsibility

Shrimp feed bags recycled in Mexico

1 July 2010

By Hortensia Acosta and Vladimir Morales

Winning program has environmental, social, business benefits

In the VIMIFOS program, thousands of feed bags are recycled and processed into plastic pellets used to make recycled plastic utensils.

The shrimp-farming industry in Mexico currently uses about 8 million polypropylene bags to distribute shrimp feed to producers between April and September. Historically, 95 percent of these bags have been disposed of as waste, with only 5 percent used in other shrimp farm activities.

Based on the need to better utilize these bags, VIMIFOS, a leading feed manufacturer based in Sonora, Mexico, took on the task of finding an efficient way to turn the problem into an opportunity to create value for this “trash” and establish a program that is friendly to the environment.

The venture would address the problem of trash accumulation at shrimp farms, which helps companies comply with certification practices needed to export to the European Union and United States. Bag sales would benefit local charities. In addition, the program would support recycling and minimize the environmental impacts of aquaculture activities.

Plastic recycling

The first step was to find a company that wanted to buy the bags collected by the program. VIMIFOS contacted several companies that buy and process polypropylene into plastic pellets used for manufacturing recycled plastic utensils. This use changed the concept of bags as garbage, for they instead became raw material for the plastics industry.

The next steps were to develop adequate logistics for the collection of bags and find machinery to compact them into bales that could be efficiently shipped. A collection center was established for the large number of bags produced by the program.

Little by little came the needed tools, and the resulting first shipment weighed 3 mt. At first, the operation lacked a crucial pressing machine, but the bag supplier helped locate a rough but working hydraulic press. In a few months, the next shipment of 13 tons was acquired by companies recycling polypropylene.

This generated a small but symbolic financial return, which was channeled to needy children in the area. The viability of the project was confirmed, and the challenge became how to do it on a larger scale.

Results

Together with its clients, VIMIFOS carried out a major collection of polypropylene bags during the pilot plan in 2009, and in 2010 has set an aggressive goal of bag collection. In the pilot phase, the Santa Margarita, Acuícola Santa Inés, Acuícola Boca, Acuícola 11 de Diciembre, Acuícola Santa Magda and 11 de Diciembre de 1996 farms participated actively.

All the proceeds from sales of recycled bags were donated to the Centro de Atención Integral (Center of Integral Attention), a facility dedicated to providing therapy for special-needs children. The funds will be invested in the construction of facilities for hydrotherapy and music therapy.

Ecologically, the bag program prevented pollution by recycling 1.6 million polypropylene bags, and on the social front, it made a substantial financial donation to a local charity. As a form of value adding toward customers' compliance with good practices certification, VIMIFOS also strengthened its relationships with clients.

Perspectives

VIMIFOS is very aware of the need to return to nature part of what it has given, so it supports the development of projects that benefit society and the environment. Through its We Want a Healthy Planet program, VIMIFOS made a firm commitment to provide benefits to aquaculture producers, the environment and society in general.

The results achieved so far are encouraging, and in 2010, VIMIFOS is looking to establish the bag program permanently among clients, friends and producers who are not yet involved; to continue reducing industry impacts; develop local recycling culture; promote care of our environment and promote charitable aid to needed sectors of society.

(Editor's Note: This article was originally published in the July/August 2010 print edition of the Global Aquaculture Advocate.)

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