

AQUAEXCEL continues on its successful path to further boost European aquaculture: launch of AQUAEXCEL3.0

Press release: December 2020

Eagerly awaited by the European aquaculture community familiar with the many benefits that the previous AQUAEXCEL projects provided, **AQUAEXCEL3.0** has now officially launched. **AQUAEXCEL3.0** aims to further boost the European aquaculture sector by, amongst others, expanding the Transnational Access programme to support even more external research teams collaborating with its high-quality facilities, providing free training courses on the latest topics and engaging closely with industry to ensure research is aligned with industry needs.

Aquaculture now provides over half of seafood for human consumption worldwide. To meet the increasing demand for seafood globally, aquaculture is growing annually and has been the fastest growing animal production sector in the world for decades now. However, within the EU aquaculture production has been lagging behind and there remains a high dependency on imported fish for consumption. The aquaculture industry landscape is also changing, with new consumer preferences, growing concern for environment and animal welfare issues, new standards and effects of global climate change.

Sustainable growth of the sector can only be achieved through efficient production of high value fish products in an environmentally and ethically responsible way, supported by high-level research and innovation. In order for the EU aquaculture sector to maintain its global leadership in aquaculture research and support the sustainable development of the sector, an open and inclusive dialogue between industry, science and policy, as well as between experts across different disciplines is required.

AQUAEXCEL3.0 builds on the achievements of the previous AQUAEXCEL (FP7) and AQUAEXCEL²⁰²⁰ (H2020) projects, with the ambition to boost this effort in a user-centric approach. **AQUAEXCEL3.0** will continue to have fish as its main target but will widen its scope by including shellfish and macroalgae research facilities to push towards lower trophic level aquaculture.

Dr Marc Vandeputte, AQUAEXCEL3.0 coordinator, said *“The continued engagement of the EC to support the AQUAEXCEL network really gives a chance to any researcher in Europe to run a project with the top aquaculture facilities available. This is a unique opportunity to give the best support to the best ideas. Aquaculture also needs better support for the public, and for this we will work on improving fish welfare and on recycling nutrients with algae, shellfish, worms and insects which can be used directly or as raw materials for aquaculture feeds”*.

AQUAEXCEL3.0 will help to further boost European aquaculture by integrating 40 top class research facilities from biology to technology in all types of rearing systems, covering all major EU farmed species as well as promising new species, including at lower trophic levels. The project will expand access to high-quality services and resources, covering all scientific fields relevant to research and innovation in aquaculture. Through a strong partnership, the project will boost excellent research and sustainable innovation for both public and private sectors working in aquaculture.

Almost 200 Transnational Access projects are planned over the duration of the 5-year project. These are expected to consolidate the global leadership of European aquaculture research, as researchers will be able to perform their research projects free of charge, with access to infrastructures which are not available in their country of origin. **AQUAEXCEL3.0** will also provide online training courses that build upon the newest results and experience from previous courses. In addition, improving the use of animal experiments for research according to Reduction, Refinement and Replacement is integral to the **AQUAEXCEL3.0** concept.

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To keep up to date with the AQUAEXCEL network, please visit aquaexcel2020.eu. A new project website is coming soon.

Notes for the Editor:

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The project will run for five years from 2020 to 2025, with a total budget of €9.9 million

The **AQUAEXCEL3.0** consortium is composed of 22 partners from across Europe, and essentially builds on the same consortium from AQUAEXCEL²⁰²⁰. The consortium as a whole is made up of the key aquaculture research facilities in Europe, operated by the most recognised scientific teams, covering all relevant aquaculture systems, environmental, species and complementary scientific expertise. The project is coordinated by INRAE in France. INRAE is France’s new National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment, created in January 2020. INRAE carries out mission-oriented research for high-quality and healthy foods, competitive and sustainable agriculture and a preserved and valorised environment. Website: www.inrae.fr

Dr Marc Vandeputte is the **AQUAEXCEL3.0** project coordinator and he is the coordinator of aquaculture research at INRAE. After working in general aquaculture in Africa and France, he joined INRAE, previously INRA, in 1996. He also coordinated former AQUAEXCEL (FP7) and AQUAEXCEL²⁰²⁰ (H2020) projects that have run from 2011 to 2020.

INTRIGO Ltd in Ireland is the project dissemination partner.



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