



New Project to Facilitate Transnational Access to Leading European Aquaculture Research Facilities

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AQUAEXCEL²⁰²⁰, a research infrastructure project funded under the EU's Horizon 2020 programme and coordinated by the French National Institute for Agricultural Research (INRA), has kicked off this month with the aim to further support the sustainable growth of the European aquaculture sector. **AQUAEXCEL²⁰²⁰** will integrate a large group of leading European aquaculture research facilities and aims to advance aquaculture research and innovation in Europe. One of its key aspects will be to provide subsidised access to top-class aquaculture facilities, as well as numerous highly pertinent services for researchers from academia and industry.

Aquaculture provides about half of the fish for human consumption worldwide. The demand for fish is rising, but fisheries are not expected to grow due to fully or over-exploited fish stocks. Aquaculture production seeks to meet this increasing demand for fish, but while the aquaculture sector is growing in the rest of the world, it has stagnated in Europe in recent years. Sustainable growth of the aquaculture sector in Europe, based on efficient and environmentally responsible production of high value fish products, can be achieved by ensuring excellent scientific research and by the results being translated into innovation and industrial growth.

AQUAEXCEL²⁰²⁰ will help to achieve this target by integrating 39 top class European aquaculture research facilities that cover all relevant scientific fields, fish species and systems. The project will provide a single access portal to high-quality, harmonised services and resources tailored to the needs of the European aquaculture community, support and conduct world-class research and provide the basis for a European aquaculture innovation system from basic research to applied science.

Nearly half of the project's €9.7 million budget will go into the provision of transnational access to research facilities and harmonised services for both academic and private sector users from industry, especially SMEs. Academic and industry researchers will then be able to perform their research projects with "free of charge" access to top EU aquaculture research infrastructures which are not available in their country of origin.

AQUAEXCEL²⁰²⁰ will also provide training for transnational access users, aquaculture researchers, technical staff and industry stakeholders. A series of face-to-face and distance learning courses on aquaculture technology and fish biology will be offered over the five year duration of the project.

AQUAEXCEL²⁰²⁰ will develop standardised guides and new tools for aquaculture research including a dedicated e-infrastructure which will support both actual and virtual research experiments. More than 10 new fish species (including Bluefin tuna, sole, perch) will be made available for aquaculture research purposes.

The **AQUAEXCEL²⁰²⁰** coordinator, Dr Marc Vandeputte, is a researcher in fish genetics and coordinates aquaculture research at INRA. He explains: “We have gained much experience in the successful forerunner-project AQUAEXCEL, which was funded by the EU from 2011 to early 2015. The new project, **AQUAEXCEL²⁰²⁰** will build on the outcomes of AQUAEXCEL, such as new modelling and phenotyping tools, standardised experimental fish lines and remote access solutions – and already successful transnational access. It aims to bring aquaculture research in Europe to a new level by 2020. It will do so by providing the aquaculture community with crucial tools, facilities and novel services to conduct advanced fish research.”

AQUAEXCEL²⁰²⁰ officially began on 1 October 2015 and will run until October 2020. From 2-4 November 2015, the project will hold its kick-off meeting in Montpellier, France. The project’s partners will convene to refine the project’s plans and start with the practical work of this promising collaboration.

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