

“Seaweed business today can be compared to the early days of wind power”

says Mikkel Stage (Danish AgriFish Agency)

Summary of the debate 8th of October 2015 at the Nordic Seaweed Conference 2015

The theme of the debate was: “what should future projects aim at in order to support businesses and commercialization?”

Panel participants represented industry, research and authorities:

- Mikkel Stage, Head of Section at The Danish AgriFish Agency, Denmark
- Bert Groenendaal, R & D project coordinator, SIONEN Industries NV, Belgium
- Anne Belinda Bjerre, senior researcher at Danish Technological Institute and assigned professor at Aalborg University, Denmark

All agreed that the most important future focus points are:

- developing biorefineries with the drivers being high value added products, (organic) food and feed;
- increasing biomass yields and yields of specific components (i.e. proteins) through selective breeding and offshore cultivation, and through strengthened collaboration with Asia;
- making seaweed known and accepted by decision makers as well as the common public as a sustainable source of food and raw materials, through increased and focused information flow
- addressing and valorizing the full potential of seaweeds for mitigation and hereby addressing circular economy (N, P and CO₂)

Major knowledge gaps were defined as:

- metal composition and speciation of seaweeds (in particular As) and further into biorefined products;
- impact of large scale cultivation on the marine environment, including potential diseases and potential spreading of genetic resources,
- impact on cultivation of climate change

The main obstacles/barriers to a flourishing seaweed industry were identified as:

- weak market pull
- legislation and regulation
- market access

There is a need for a European/Nordic Center of Excellence working for developing seaweed cultivation and exploitation in westerns countries and meeting the challenges the industry is facing through collaboration between industry, science and authorities in EU. Many challenges are common in EU, and decisions should be lifted to a higher level: legislation, regulations, Marine Strategy including marine spatial planning and environmental managing.

Research protocols, results, guidelines and data should be gathered/compiled, standardized and shared. Selective breeding programs must be preceded by international agreements on transfer of genetic resources

There is still a need for subsidizing the development from public/governmental funding.