



Land-based coho firm Finger Lake is targeting US-wide production. Photo: Global Aquaculture Alliance

US land-based coho salmon producer planning nationwide expansion

Plans come after company became the world's first recirculating aquaculture system (RAS) coho salmon farm to be awarded the Global Aquaculture Alliance's Best Aquaculture Practices certification.

by

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Land-based coho salmon producer Finger Lakes Fish, which markets its fish under the Local Coho brand name, said it is attracting investor interest in its plans to build a second production site in Illinois as part of a wider strategy to go nationwide.



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The company, with a fledgling land-based operation in Auburn, New York, on Thursday became the world's first recirculating aquaculture system technology (RAS) coho salmon farm to be awarded the Global Aquaculture Alliance's (GAA) Best Aquaculture Practices (BAP) certification.

"Our long-term goal is to build several of these facilities across the country to serve local markets," Phil Gibson, a board member and the company's marketing advisor, told **IntraFish**. "Our next target is in Illinois."
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Last month Gibson said Finger Lakes garnered interest for its next project at an investment conference in Chicago. Company executives are currently researching possible sites, looking into the possible scope of the next project and how the size of the market shapes up.

"It's probably going to be sometime next year, probably later in the year before we actually put anything in the dirt so to speak," Gibson said.

Depending on the outcome, the Illinois site could even serve neighboring states. "The size of it will probably be larger," he added.

No one size fits all model

Finger Lakes' initial production in New York is expected to be around 180,000 pounds, or 80 metric tons, but, when the site is complete, it will be able to produce 450 metric tons.

But that figure is unlikely to be a model for every site the company plans to build nationwide, and will instead involve executives weighing up the market before decisions on capacity are taken.

Finger Lakes, whose New York site is still under construction, has backers including Gibson, a former head Safeway seafood buyer and other retail execs.



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The company's confidence in the longer-term prospects for the US coho salmon market is matched by Chilean producers.

'I'm a believer'

On the BAP certification Gibson said he has been a keen supporter of the GAA's programs for the past 15 years since he became aware of them.

"I have been a believer in the step-by-step principles that they operate under to allow people to, when they can, get more sustainable in their practices."

Finger Lakes partners chose to produce coho deliberately to avoid selling Atlantic salmon, which it sees as a commodity.

While the BAP certification will make little difference to consumers who have scant knowledge of it, Gibson said eco-certification is a strong selling point to retailers.

The company recently started harvesting fish at around 6 pounds, but the ideal weight for foodservice customers is between 8 and 9 pounds.

"It's going to be after the first of the year before we start harvesting in any numbers to speak of."

While Finger Lakes hatches its own eggs it is unable to label its products as non-GMO because of some of the feed components currently used.

But as alternative feed ingredients to fishmeal and fish oil became more readily available in the United States, Gibson said he expects this to change.

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"What we are hearing from the feed companies is that it could be a year or two from now."