

Strict standards

WHILE the word “organic” can apply equally to food from a home garden where no synthetic inputs are used, and even food gathered or hunted in the wild, it is now increasingly associated with food produced and labelled according to strictly regulated standards.

“In many countries, including Malaysia, certification is a matter of legislation, and commercial use of the word “organic”, outside of the certification framework, is illegal,” said Chris Sharp, director for Organic Aquaculture Development, Fish Protech Pty Ltd. Sharp has been developing organic standards for the Fish Protech systems for the last two years.

Malaysia now has organic certification guidelines for plant-based foods but not for aquaculture products.



Organic fish harvested from Protech Yu’s farm in Kuching.

“Aquaculture is growing, but unfortunately a lot of the growth involves environmentally unsound ways of growing fish and shrimp,” said Sharp.

“We need a way to redirect aquaculture towards environmentally sound production. And organic certification is a good way to do that because it provides a very strong, positive incentive for fish farmers. That incentive is that they can get a premium price for their products.”

Before proper organic standards can be applied to aquaculture good, these reforms are needed: technology that eliminates risks of disease transfer and fish escapes, feed that does not deplete global fish stocks, elimination of antibiotics and chemical use, and phase-out of genetically modified fish.

“To be certified organic, the seafood should not contain harmful chemicals or antibiotics, should not have been fed with non-organic feed, and should not have been reared in a manner causing damage to the environment,” said Sharp.

He believes Malaysia will benefit greatly from establishing proper organic aquaculture certification standards. “There will be healthier food in the market and good potential for exporting organic aquaculture products.”