

Aquaculture Now Feeds More of the World Than the Oceans Do but Growth Is Slowing Just as Demand Climbs

New World Agriculture Forum report finds the constraint on the next twenty years of aquaculture is not technology, but the failure to move proven solutions to where they are needed.

AMSTERDAM, September 2026—Global aquaculture has quietly become the world's most important source of aquatic food, overtaking the oceans as the primary supplier of fish for human consumption. But a new report from the World Agriculture Forum (WAF) warns that the sector's growth is decelerating sharply, at precisely the moment global demand continues to rise.

The Report, *Blue Economy Rising: Oceans, Aquaculture, and the Future of Food Security* synthesises evidence and perspectives from a WAF High-Level Policy Dialogue convening voices from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), India's Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), and aquaculture practitioners and investors across Africa and Europe. The report finds that global aquatic food production reached a record 142 million tonnes in 2024, with aquaculture now supplying more aquatic animals for human consumption than capture fisheries, which have been flat for nearly two decades. Yet FAO projects aquaculture's annual growth rate will fall by 60 percent over the coming decade from 4.0 percent (2012–2022) to 1.6 percent (2022–2032) driven by water constraints, disease, limited suitable sites, and tightening effluent regulation.

The report's central argument is that this slowdown is not a technology problem. Proven solutions already operate profitably at commercial scale: India grew its aquaculture sector from under 1 million tonnes to nearly 20 million tonnes over 75 years of sustained public investment; biofloc systems operating commercially in Ghana have cut land use twenty-fold and water use thirty-fold while discharging no effluent; and in South Africa's Western Cape, diverting just 1 percent of existing irrigation water into fish farming could match the country's entire wild-caught hake quota without any new land or water rights.

What is missing, the report argues, is the alignment needed to move these solutions from where they've been proven to where they're needed most spanning governance capacity, investment structured around demonstrated value rather than promise, and the inclusion of the smallholders, women, and coastal communities who form the backbone of the sector but remain the most consistently excluded from its financing and decision-making.

The report sets out nine recommendations for governments, investors, and international institutions, among them, aligning national policy with FAO's Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture, sustaining multi-decade public investment in research infrastructure, mainstreaming circular and zero-discharge production systems, and prioritising energy and cold-chain investment in emerging markets such as sub-Saharan Africa.

The report closes with a caution rather than a victory lap: the sector's growth curve is decelerating on its own timeline, and it won't pause to wait for governance to catch up. Whether the next twenty years of aquaculture match the achievements of the last twenty, the report argues, will be decided less by what is discovered in a laboratory than by what gets built between the laboratory and the farm.

***About the World Agriculture Forum (WAF)** is a global, Neutral platform connecting diverse stakeholders to drive sustainable agricultural development through policy advocacy, trade facilitation, and technology-driven solutions. WAF unites governments, farmers, agribusinesses, experts, and development institutions to bridge implementation gaps and drive sustainable agriculture and food systems transformation towards a resilient, food-secure future. With a strong focus on collaboration, innovation all along the value chain, and public-private partnerships, WAF is committed to transforming agriculture worldwide.*

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