

# Final comment period for WWF tilapia standards

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The final step in the process of creating global standards for tilapia farming began Tuesday, when the tilapia aquaculture dialogue kicked off the last public comment period for the standards.



Tilapia farm in Mexico. PHOTO: Regal Springs Tilapia

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Feedback received during the second 60-day public comment period will be used by the dialogue's steering committee to revise and finalize the standards this summer.

The committee includes representatives from Regal Springs Trading Company, Sustainable Fisheries Partnership, New England Aquarium, Aquamar, Rain Forest Aquaculture and WWF.

The committee has already completed one revision of the document, based on feedback received from more than 40 people during the first public comment period.

Significant changes they have made include lowering the forage fish equivalency ratio required by producers, prohibiting the conversion of any wetlands, increasing the efficiency of production, and fostering the sustainable management of pelagic fisheries and soy production.

"We have received very valuable input so far from academics, producers, development agencies, feed companies, NGOs and others," said Carl Baum, a consultant for Rain Forest Aquaculture and a member of the committee.

"It is an indication that there is a need for credible tilapia standards in the market place. We want to keep that momentum going during the final comment period so that the end product helps transform the way we think about farming tilapia."

The goal of the standards is minimizing the key environmental and social impacts associated with tilapia farming, such as non-native tilapia introductions, water pollution and chemicals used to treat diseases or preserve tilapia being released into the water, WWF says

Most of the standards will be metrics-based, which WWF says is the only way to effectively know whether the industry's impact on the environment is reduced. The standards will be performance-based, encouraging innovation at the farm level.

"Other standards for tilapia farming exist, but the dialogue standards will be more credible, largely because they are the product of an open, consensus-oriented process that has involved input from more than 150 people," said World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Aquaculture Specialist Aaron McNevin, who coordinates the dialogue.

"We've created the support and demand for these standards while we developed them, which is the benefit of the multi-stakeholder process."

The process, which began in 2005, is in line with the world's most reputable guidelines for developing environmental and social standards, which were created by the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labeling Alliance. It is similar to the process used by the pangasius aquaculture dialogue, which is in the midst of the first public comment period for its draft standards.

WWF coordinates these and six other aquaculture dialogues.

The tilapia standards will be adopted by the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) to manage when that entity is in operation. WWF announced in January it is going to help create the ASC, which will be responsible for working with independent, third-party entities to certify farms in compliance with the