Pest to protein: Indian aquaculture farmers explore economic and sustainability benefits of insect-based feed

Insects are emerging as a viable source of sustainable alternative ingredients – primarily insect protein concentrate or insect meal and insect fat oil – across the globe. Multiple startups have emerged over the last decade to mass produce and process insects into animal feed ingredients. The growth of aquaculture and the increasing demand for feed, with stagnating supplies of conventional ingredients – like fish meal, fish oil, krill meal and krill oil – have created tailwinds for the insect industry.

India holds a huge potential to become a world leader in this activity, due to its tropical climate suitable for insect growth, and abundant availability of food waste and organic by-products useful as food for insects. Insects are the natural food for fish and birds. With enhanced palatability, superior digestibility, high protein content, excellent amino acid profiles and immunity-providing natural peptides, insect meal can increase the overall productivity of the compound feed when incorporated in the right quantities.

It is worth noting that, while insect-based aquafeed shows great promise, there are still challenges to overcome – such as scaling up of farming operations, ensuring quality control, and standardisation of feed production. Nonetheless, it has the potential to contribute to the sustainability, efficiency and growth of the aquaculture industry.

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