

Scottish Sea Farm's seaweed scheme wins M&S award

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Scottish Sea Farms has been recognised at the M&S Select Farm Awards 2023 for a pioneering trial to encourage settlement of seaweed in salmon pens, removing the need for plastic cleaner fish hides.

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The award, announced at the Royal Highland Show at Ingliston in Edinburgh, was presented to Farm Manager Michael Keenan and fish husbandry colleague with fish health specialism Sam Wright, who oversaw the day-to-day running of the project.

Scottish Sea Farms, the exclusive supplier of M&S Select Farms Scottish salmon, was one of four winners of the awards scheme, which celebrates leading UK food producers.

"We've always been very open to trialling new technologies and approaches at Scallastle," said Keenan, "but particularly so this latest kelp initiative because of the potential benefits for the cleaner fish and wider marine environment.

"To now have this ongoing improvement drive recognised by M&S is a really proud moment for all of the team who have worked so hard."

Studies have shown that seaweed absorbs CO2 and removes nitrogen and phosphorous from the ecosystem. And because kelp has a natural, anti-biofouling property, it is very low maintenance compared to plastic hides.

During the trial, conducted last year, not only did the seaweed do well, but the salmon and cleaner fish (both wrasse and lumpfish) in the pens thrived too, said Keenan.

“We had one pen with real kelp only, one with plastic hides, and one with both artificial and real kelp and we noticed a difference quite quickly. The cleaner fish, which we use as a biological control for sea lice, showed a clear preference for the natural kelp.

Morna Marr, Scottish Sea Farms Commercial Manager, who oversaw a visit by M&S to Scallastle last year, said, “It was great to be able to show customers the initiative in practice, and see first-hand the salmon and cleaner fish thriving.”

This is the fourth occasion that Scottish Sea Farms has been presented with the Innovation Award, bringing the total number of M&S Awards received over the years to 12-strong, ranging from Plan A “Future of Farming”, Rural Communities and Low Carbon Farming Pioneer to Outstanding Producer, Young Producer of the Year and M&S Champion of Champions.