

Latest News from RSPCA Assured

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Your aquaculture update

From RSPCA Assured



Welcome to your festive newsletter

By Joe Bailey, Head of Farming



It's been a year of bad news and perhaps it doesn't seem right to celebrate but we should, as now more than ever there is much to be proud of.

So let's start with a positive, RSPCA Assured festive products have scooped up a whopping 28 awards and accolades in this year's taste tests for best supermarket Christmas food.

Unsurprisingly, RSPCA Assured trout and salmon products have been acknowledged. For more information on the awards, read the following article. Hooray to everyone who has produced them, sold them,

and will get to enjoy them!

RSPCA Assured, now in its 27th year, has more than 24.3 million animals on the scheme, plus many millions of salmon and trout. There is a growing trend for higher welfare products, with nearly 70% of families and young professionals recognising our logo and trusting what it stands for. The public has a real interest in how and where animals are reared.

As we celebrate this anniversary of helping to improve farm animal welfare, we're continuing to see an increased demand for higher welfare salmon and trout from both businesses and the general public, which is testament to the hard work and dedication of all members.

We have some truly fantastic producers on the scheme, who are committed to raising the bar for UK aquaculture, and we hope to see more join next year.

Golly gosh it's been a strange year for everyone but, as always, the farming community has triumphed. I'm incredibly proud of the resilience, dedication and determination you've all shown to adapt to the circumstances not only around COVID-19 but also Brexit, whilst, still ensuring the animals you care for are treated with respect and compassion.

I wish you a very Merry Christmas... and I hope for a better, less stressful, and far happier 2021 for everybody.



RSPCA Assured festive products scoop 28 top awards and accolades, including 13 for salmon and trout

By Rebecca Lenik, Public Relations Manager

From traditional turkeys and pigs in blankets to gin-infused smoked salmon and whisky and orange stuffing parcels, RSPCA Assured labelled supermarket foods have bagged a whopping 28 awards and recognitions in taste tests this Christmas.

These prestigious wins and recommendations come from leading food and glossy magazines; BBC Good Food, Good Housekeeping, Olive and Woman and Home, as well as the much-coveted Quality Food Awards.

For more information about all of this year's award-winning RSPCA Assured products and a guide to having a higher-welfare Christmas, click [here](#).

RSPCA ASSURED Christmas 2020	Smoked salmon	Other fish product	Sausages/pigs in blankets	Sausage meat/stuffing	Bacon	Other pork product	Turkey whole	Turkey crown	Other turkey product	Chicken product
Aldi	✓	✓					✓	✓		
Asda							✓	✓		
Coop	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Lidl	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Morrisons							✓			
Sainsburys	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Tesco	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓		✓

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Photo courtesy of Aquaculture UK

Award-winning duo

By Jeremy Costello, Junior Public Relations Executive

RSPCA Assured's very own Malcolm Johnstone, and the RSPCA's Aquaculture Specialist John Avizienius, have received a prestigious award at the Global Aquaculture Awards 2020.

Malcolm and John were announced as the winners of the *Animal Welfare Award* at the annual ceremony of the Global Aquaculture Awards, hosted by Aquaculture UK.

The Award recognises success in improving the welfare of farmed fish and their subsequent impact on the wildlife they interact with. An international panel of judges announced the decision at the adapted [virtual event](#).

With more than three decades of experience in the aquaculture industry, you'll know Malcolm as the Aquaculture Manager at RSPCA Assured, a position he's held since 2007.

Malcolm Johnstone says:

"Over the years, I've worked closely with John Avizienius, our work at RSPCA Assured has made a difference to the lives of millions of fish. To get recognition from peers in the industry was a humbling moment for me.

"Typically, there would have been a conference in Aviemore, Scotland, with a dinner, dance and speeches. Due to Covid-restrictions, I thankfully didn't have to get up in front of a crowd. But, it was still nice to raise a glass of something special on behalf of our efforts."

Salesforce update

By Liam Kurzeja, Head of Marketing



This past year, I've led a project to implement a leading customer relationship management database called Salesforce.

The new system will replace our existing membership database. It will provide RSPCA Assured members with a time-efficient, accessible and more personal experience. Unfortunately, due to the unforeseen circumstances of Covid-19, we were delayed piloting the live system.

However, after a short hold up, I'm pleased to announce that we've almost completed the second stage of our live pilot. Our in-house IT administrator and Salesforce partner are in the process of ironing out any final kinks in the system.

We're well on course to roll out Salesforce to our members through 2021. That being said, some species may have to wait on the progress of the mobile app being developed for RSPCA Assured assessors carrying out their on-farm assessments. However, I'm delighted to say this app is in full development, looks fantastic, and we hope to be in a position to pilot it early next year.

Thank you to those who've provided feedback and, or, participated directly in the pilot and app development to date.

The Farming Community Network: coping with change

By Glyn Evans, Regional Director for Training at The Farming Community Network

The Farming Community Network (FCN) is a voluntary organisation supporting

farmers and families within the farming community. This year we celebrate its 25th anniversary of helping people through difficult times.

Over the years, farming has experienced a great deal of change, from irregular weather patterns to fluctuating market prices. There have been a fair few challenges to overcome, but farmers are resilient people.

They have a faithfulness to the land, to the welfare of their animals, and the food we eat to stay healthy. But, there are times when that resilience is tested. Sadly, more than one member of the farming community died by suicide every week in 2019.

Here at FCN, we provide free support to the whole farming community! We listen to your concerns and queries, alongside other organisations such as: [Farming Help](#), [The Agricultural Chaplains Association](#) and rural support groups. Our [Helpline](#) is staffed daily with volunteers from 7am to 11pm, 03000 11199.

In England and Wales, we have [33 county-based groups](#) of trained volunteers who can provide face to face support. Typically, people come to us if they're experiencing poor mental wellbeing, and although we're not a mental health charity per se, our volunteers always give people time to talk through what they're feeling and signpost them to further help.

We hope to raise awareness of the stresses people face in farming, and how they have an impact on mental wellbeing. This includes helping people identify the early signs and take preventative steps to keep themselves, and others they work with or live amongst, safe. But our work goes beyond just educating; we share our understanding with policymakers who can affect agriculture and mental health.

This year, the impacts of lockdown, tiered restrictions and uncertainty about Brexit have made life unpredictable. We've experienced an unprecedented rise in calls to our [Helpline](#). But despite all of this change, our support can help you. In partnership with FarmWell, we're running a [Time to Plan](#) initiative, to help you plan ahead and better manage change.

At the end of the day, the health and happiness of us all, including the animals that are farmed, rely on the farming community. The support we provide, such as dealing with change, can benefit everyone.

For more information on how FCN can help you, [click here](#).

Desktop assessment: a two-way solution

By Dorian Cross, Field Assessment Manager

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, this year has brought real challenges for us all in the way we work.

For our assessors, not being able to visit our members on their farms was a real



disappointment. So they were really pleased to be able to return to site visits again by a mutual agreement.

As assessments are critical to the approval and continuation of certification for our members, the ability to deliver assessments remotely was adopted and has been a workable interim solution.

Notably, 'desktop' assessments have helped assessors keep pace with the timely delivery of assessments for members where site visits remain not possible.

However, this revised remote approach to assessments wouldn't have been as successful as it has been if it wasn't for the resilience, adaptability and cooperation of our members.

Until we return in full to the normality of on-site visits to farms, a huge thank you from all of our assessors and membership services team in helping remote assessments work so well.

'Get to know' our Aquaculture Manager, Malcolm Johnstone

By Jeremy Costello, Junior Public Relations Executive



People are at the heart of RSPCA Assured. Without the dedicated work of each individual, we couldn't keep improving the lives of farmed fish.

To help you get to know the people that make RSPCA Assured a success, I interviewed our Aquaculture Manager, Malcolm Johnstone:

What is your first memory of a fish farm?

I've always loved aquaculture. Near Invergarry where I grew up, there was a fish hatchery. Where I live now, there's a fish farm just down the road. It's the first place I worked when I joined the aquaculture industry.

Why did you join RSPCA Assured?

Over the years, I've had a few jobs. I was in the Royal Navy for six years, I've spent time driving lorries and have even had my own business in forestry. Before applying to be an Assessor at RSPCA Assured, I worked in aquaculture for 20 years with MOWI. Aquaculture is a relatively young industry, and I've seen it develop. The role at RSPCA Assured was an opportunity for me to help improve fish welfare with my experience of working at a practical level.

What are you responsible for?

As Aquaculture Manager, I have an overview of the whole industry. My role is responsible for expanding aquaculture by focusing on new species, international work and looking at new schemes. I often speak at events and deliver training on fish welfare. Day-to-day, I liaise with the wider industry and act as a point of contact for aquaculture on the RSPCA Assured scheme.

What do you enjoy most about your role?

The productive relationships I've formed across the industry. It's great to work with like-minded people who are passionate about the welfare of fish. Over the years, I've worked with some fantastic people who continue to inspire me to this day.

What is your proudest achievement?

Seeing the difference RSPCA Assured makes to fish welfare. We're at the point in the UK where our standards have become recognised as best industry practice. At a personal level, I started here 14 years ago as the only member of staff conducting aquaculture assessments. The hours were long, and I had to travel a lot.

It's rewarding to see how far the scheme has come. We now have four assessors specialising in aquaculture that assure the majority of salmon and trout farms in the UK. I'm proud to be part of this journey.

How has COVID-19 affected the way you work?

As most of my work is home-based, my living room was already an office. I haven't had to adjust too much. But, it's meant I haven't been able to get out and visit sites. Not being able to meet people and see the fish is a real miss. However, we're doing a tremendous job with our remote fish farm assessments.

Helpful wellbeing links

If you need help or have queries regarding desktop assessments or anything else related to RSPCA Assured, please do [contact us](#). We have also shared some helpful links on wellbeing during the Covid-19 crisis below:

[That Discomfort You're Feeling is Grief](#)

[Caring for employee mental health: a coronavirus guide](#)

[The Adaptive Challenge of COVID-19](#)

Best wishes,

RSPCA Assured

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