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New Chile salmon council boss upbeat on export outlook despite tough year for industry

Chilean salmon exports may see a better year in 2021 because of new e-commerce and retail opportunities, Joanna Davidovich, the newly installed executive director at the recently formed Chile Salmon Council said.

Since joining the new trade group, whose members AquaChile, Mowi, Cermaq and Salmones Aysen account for around half of Chile's national salmon production, it has been something of a baptism of fire for Davidovich.

Her arrival at the height of the pandemic in June coincided with the industry facing stern criticism on the environmental impacts after a series of high profile escapes.

It has been a difficult year for the Chilean salmon industry because of the recent damaging national truckers strike on top of the pandemic that saw producers hit by falling demand in key markets such as the United States, Brazil. Chinese buyers shunned imported salmon after COVID-19 traces were found on a chopping board in a wholesale market in June.

A string of Chilean producers also lost Russian market access when authorities there slapped restrictions on salmon from the South American nation because officials said they detected chemical residues and unauthorized substances from Chile.

That access is gradually returning but there is still work to do for those still shut out.

Despite all of this, and as Chilean salmon producers try to mount a comeback in the Chinese market through a digital marketing campaign, Davidovich is upbeat about the prospects for 2021.

"We have seen this year a greater penetration of new distribution channels, such as electronic commerce and retail, which, added to the recovery in demand from the the hotel and restaurant sector, indicate a better scenario for our exports," she said.

Last month Chilean authorities announced stricter rules aimed at preventing salmon escapes.

New regulations are also aimed at preventing the sinking of cages, which occurred recently in a case involving salmon farmer Blumar.

"We believe that it represents a step forward in the prevention of escapes, which is exactly where we must put the focus," Davidovich said.

In addition to her experience in economic analysis and public policy design, Davidovich held various positions in the Chilean government, namely director of the Competitiveness Office for the Ministry of Economy, executive director of the Productivity Commission of the Confederation of Production and Trade, chief of staff for the Ministry of Economy and chief of staff for the Ministry of Public Works.

She is also currently the vice president for the board of directors at the port of San Antonio.