



## Amanda Smith: One of a growing number of women who work in aquaculture

Amanda Smith will often get asked this question: Are you on the side of aquaculture or the environment?

Her answer is short and simple.

“Both,” she says with a smile.

Smith is a Marine Environmental Biologist with Sweeney International Marine Corp., a St. Stephen-based company that provides aquaculture environmental management services in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.

“I don’t see aquaculture as a ‘one side versus the other’ situation,” says Smith, who lives in St. Stephen. “I’m a biologist who works in the aquaculture industry and an environmentalist too. I feel I play an important role in preserving our oceans while helping our fish farmers to develop this industry.”

Smith is one of a growing number of women who work in Canada’s \$2.1 billion aquaculture industry, which has become a magnet for women seeking full-time, year-round employment in coastal communities. Key roles in research and development, fish health, environmental sustainability, processing and communications are increasingly being filled by women. Approximately 40 per cent of Canada’s 14,500 aquaculture jobs are held by women.

Smith says she knew little about aquaculture before joining SIMCorp in 2009. The focus of her science studies at Dalhousie University was genetics.

“My research focused on fruit flies. This is totally a switch, but I love it,” she says.

She began her career working at the Atlantic Reference Centre of the Huntsman Marine Science Centre in St. Andrews and then with the education department of the Atlantic Salmon Federation. When a job came up at SIMCorp, Smith was eager to learn about aquaculture.

Started by Bob Sweeney about 10 years ago, SIMCorp has grown to 18 staffers, three offices throughout Atlantic Canada and a laboratory. In the summer months, much of SIMCorp’s work focuses on environmental surveys at fish farms.

In New Brunswick, every farm is required to have an on-site environmental assessment during each year of production, which can be government audited.

Smith loves the summer the best because she can get out on the water to do her work.

Assessments of impacts by fish farms on the ocean floor begin 50 meters from the cage. She uses a video camera to observe the health of the sea floor and any changes that may occur as she moves closer to the cage edge.

“We take a sediment sample from the sea floor next to the cage and analyze it for sulphide, an indicator of organic enrichment,” she says.

If she notices anything such as excess feed on the floor, organic growth on the net or faunal populations that differ drastically as she moves in towards the farm, she notifies the farmer and they work together to solve it.

She then compiles her findings—including the video footage—for the farmer and the provincial regulators.

Smith says she loves getting the chance to study the ocean floor.

“We’re one of the few people who actually see the ocean bottom,” she says. “A lot of sites are beautiful. Many people believe that the area underneath fish farms is a dead zone, which is untrue” she says.

She also helps conduct comprehensive environmental assessments when farmers apply for new sites or to change the boundaries on existing farms.

“We collect sediment, video footage, data about currents, about the traditional fishery, wind and wave information. We even look at the labour force in the area,” she says.

Smith says she’s glad she found her way into the aquaculture industry and if she decides to get her Master’s degree in the future, she’d like to focus her research on fish farming.

“Aquaculture has given me a tremendous opportunity to do what I want to do and still stay in Charlotte County,” she says.