

5 Questions on Innovation with Dr. Thierry Chopin, Chopin Coastal Health Solutions Inc.:

1. How do you encourage innovation in your organization?

We need to think outside the fish cage (this is the box for us!). By combining fish, seaweeds and invertebrates in **integrated multi-trophic aquaculture (IMTA)** systems, we look at a holistic approach to healthy coastal solutions: environmental sustainability, economic stability through crop diversification, and increased societal acceptability of the aquaculture sector.

2. What are some of the biggest barriers to innovation?

Common sense is, in fact, not so common and people can have a hard time accepting it when developing innovative, and sometimes relatively simple, solutions that make sense. The apathy for changes, especially regulatory changes, can be frustrating. One should realize that we are still in the infancy of western IMTA (after all, we have been improving agriculture for centuries and it is still not perfect). Science and society need time to think and evolve. I know that IMTA will not happen overnight, especially in the western world, which presently prefers monocultures, linear processes and short-term profits. We will need patience, determination and persistence to get people to see the advantages of growing complementary species together, creating circular economy processes and seeking sustainability in the long term.

3. Why do you think innovation is important for Saint John and the province?

We have the perfect coastal setting here; why sit on a missed opportunity and miss the boat too?! Beautiful shorelines; right conditions for the growth and cultivation of seaweeds and other marine resources. It is up to us to innovate and design the appropriate aquaculture practices to secure the development of the responsible food production systems of the future.

4. What are some simple things you've done to drive change?

I am not sure it is simple, but, as a scientist, I have had to get out of the comfort of the ivory tower. I see an evolution of the type of conferences I have attended over the years. I started with seaweed-oriented scientific conferences; I, then, went to more and more aquaculture-oriented conferences; now, I am also participating in conferences attended by decision-makers and influencers, since they are the ones who can make the Blue Revolution mature into the greener Turquoise Revolution.

5. What success have you had with innovation in your organization?

When people do not remember my name but say "Oh, yes, you are the seaweed man" or "the IMTA man", I know that the concept of Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture is progressing in the minds of people and that they are starting to understand that seaweeds are not only excellent seafood products (and are in many other applications of our daily lives), but also that they provide key ecosystem services to humans and nature. We are progressing!