

Bord Iascaigh Mhara  
Irish Sea Fisheries Board



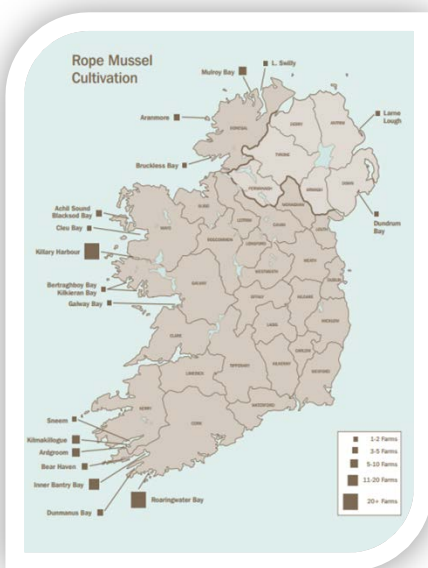
## SDC Product Innovation Shellfish Category

Development of new Irish mussel product  
with interactive “Mussel App”

## Project Objectives:

- To explore new market opportunities for Irish Mussels
- To create a trade mark brand that Irish processors can sell their Irish mussels under.
- Identify effective ways to communicate the quality of Irish mussels to the end consumer.

*Irish Mussel exports in 2013 were valued at €20.5m, exporting to countries such as Netherlands, France and Italy.*



Location of rope mussel production in Ireland

## Introduction

The Irish Mussel industry produces the Blue Mussel (*Mytilus edulis*), by two forms of production:

- **Bottom Mussels:** Mussels are naturally grown on the seabed and harvested by specialised dredging equipment. In 2013, approximately 5,527 tonnes of bottom mussels were produced, with around 95% from Co. Louth, Co. Kerry and Co. Wexford.
- **Rope Mussels:** Mussels are cultivated on rope structures in an aquaculture environment and make up about 65% of the total Irish mussel production, amounting to 10,000 tonnes in 2013. Around 76% were produced in the south in Co. Kerry and Co. Cork.

There are a number of challenges facing the Mussel industry in Ireland which need to be addressed to help to move the industry forward.

**Lack of technology** - New technologies need to be investigated to maximise the meat yield from mussel shells. Also we need to look at new innovative ways to offer more cooking solutions for consumers.

**Bio-toxins** - These are a major issue for all rope mussels farmers, as the toxins in the water can cause bays to close and thus a loss of output and revenue for the farmers. It also creates difficulty in ensure a steady supply of mussels for the market. However, nothing can be done to relieve this situation as it down to nature.

**Licensing** - This is a difficult issue as there is a backlog of licensing in the system slowing the approval procedure. Also, in some bays, there has been over licensing granted and this has caused issues such as reduced mussel size and lower meat content.

**Processor and Producer Relationship** - Due to the lack of a strong positive working relationship between processors and producers, there has been little or no joint approach into the long-term development of the industry. Issues like supply planning need to be fully addressed by both sides.

**Marketing and Sales** - It is estimated that around 90% of Irish Mussels are exported traditionally in the EU, to countries such as France, Italy and the United Kingdom. However there has been a growing market for Irish Mussels outside of the EU, such as the United States and China. Irish Mussels however face major competition within the EU from other EU Mussels suppliers such as Spain and the Netherlands and from non-EU Mussels suppliers such as Chile and New Zealand.

## Market Research

### 1. To explore new market opportunities for Irish Mussels

According to a report in to Irish exports from 2010 to 2014 carried out by BIM, Irish Mussels have an excellent reputation in France, where export figures are over 3,700 tonnes annually. This is Ireland's most important market, followed by the Netherlands, in which 2,397 tonnes are exported.

While, in the first quarter of 2015, there was a global decline in the trade of mussels, Europe saw a 2.4% increase in imports. However Ireland is a small player in a large market. France, our most important market is dominated by four major suppliers, Chile, the Netherlands, Spain and Italy, who combined have 78% of the market. Ireland may find it difficult to compete with these cheaper mussels.

Mussels are mostly sold still in shell, either in a net bag or vac-packed, often with a sauce as a meal solution. A growing trend is smoked mussel meat, marinated in either an oil or sauce for the consumer to "eat on the go".

To survive, mussels processors need to look at other markets, such as Switzerland, who enjoy a strong organic market in which Irish Mussels could develop a strong market share. Irish mussels were the first in Europe to obtain Organic Certification. Around 50% of Irish mussels are certified organic.

### 2. Identify effective ways to communicate the quality of Irish mussels to the end consumer.

#### "Wild Atlantic Mussel" Mobile phone App

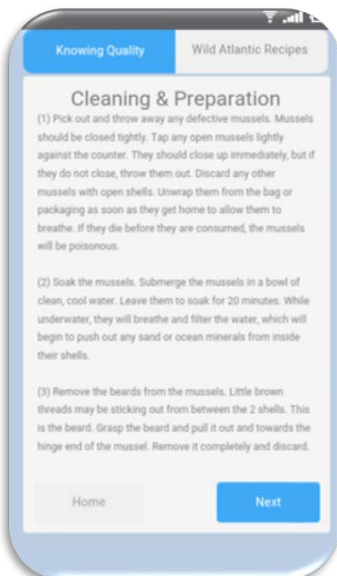
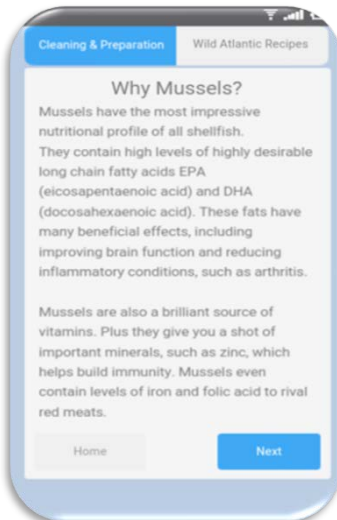
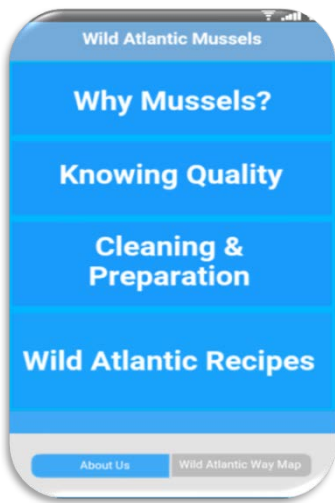
This app was designed to guide and inform consumers on how to buy, clean and prepare mussels to create delicious and nutritious meals. Currently there is no app like this available in the app store.

The app includes information on mussels and their health benefits, how to recognise good quality mussels, how to prepare and clean mussels and some simple mussel recipes. For the user it offers greater confidence in purchasing mussels and with the recipes, gives users options on how to cook the mussels.

This app has the potential to be further developed to be used as a marketing tool for Irish mussels.

#### Information Leaflet:

The information leaflet was designed for use at fish counters and for instore tastings, for consumers to help take "the fear" out of mussels. It clearly shows the advantages of consuming mussels with their excellent health benefits. Also it explains to the consumer what to look for when buying mussels and offers a range of recipes for the consumer to try. There is also a link (QR code) on the leaflet to the "Mussel App".



Screenshots from the "Mussel App"

**3. To create a trade mark brand that Irish processors can sell their Irish mussels under.**

In Scotland, over 70% of Scottish mussels are sold by the Scottish Shellfish Marketing Group Ltd which comprises of 18 growers. The organisation began by trying to improve transportation issues by pooling resources and now the group have gone on to add greater value to their mussels, thus having a better leverage on price, quality and access to multiples.

The mussel market is very challenging, with cheaper products available in the market place. Rope grown Irish mussels are of a high quality due to fact that they are bigger, thus offering a higher meat yield for the consumer.

Irish Mussel producers need to differentiate their product in the global market. By working under the same brand, they will be able to pool their resources to reach a larger market. Creating an Irish brand will also contribute to better recognition in international markets. By working together they will be able to achieve savings which will help with their competitiveness.

The following stages need to be completed:

**Stage 1-** Secure companies willing to engage in a trademark brand

**Stage 2-** Trademark a brand name

**Stage 3-** Formulate a unique selling point (USP)

**Stage 4-** Build relationships, set up website, French industry trade press, advertising.

**Stage 5-** Reach global markets.

## Conclusions

**Further research needs to be done to look into a trademark brand – company co-operation and involvement.** If this brand can be successfully created, it would offer processors better selling power and greater access to new markets.

**Liaise with other agencies re consumer information and consumer knowledge.** Consumers are continuously changing their purchasing and eating habits; processors in particular need to keep with changing demands such as pack sizes for smaller households or a switch in taste, e.g. emerging Peruvian flavors.

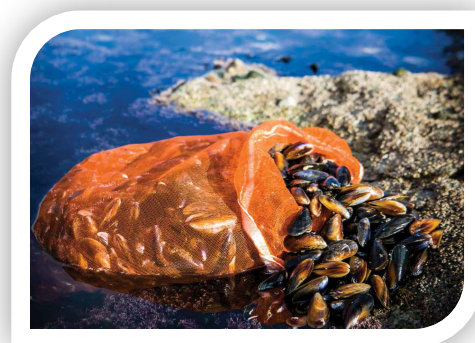
**Examine challenges industry faces.** There are still many challenges facing the industry, many outside of the control of BIM, such as the bio-toxins in the seawater. However issues like more productive communication with the key players in the industry should be promoted and facilitated.

**Further development of the “Mussel App”.** Develop the app to have information on Irish producers/processors and also information on where consumers can buy Irish mussels nationally and internationally.

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*Irish Mussel producers need to differentiate their product in the global market and gain more market share.*

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