

A Snapshot of the Irish Seaweed Industry 2022

The seaweed industry in Ireland is well established and very much part of our national heritage. Protecting this resource is crucial for protecting indigenous harvesters, the local communities that rely on it, the businesses that are creating value-added products from it and, most importantly, the wide biodiversity seaweed sustains within our coastal ecosystems.



Wild Seaweed Harvesting in Ireland

Seaweeds are mainly harvested by hand in Ireland.



These harvesters tend to be males over 50, who are using this work to supplement farm or household income.



98% of the seaweed harvested is *Ascophyllum nodosum* (Asco), a brown wrack type seaweed used for production of biostimulants, animal feed and organic fertiliser (about 33,700 tonnes in 2020). These are predominately harvested from western coasts of Galway, Mayo and Donegal.



Prices received for harvested seaweed ranges from €60/wet tonne for Asco to €1,500/wet tonne for edible seaweeds.



15 other types of brown, green and red seaweeds, are harvested around Ireland for use in human food, nutrition, cosmetics and beauty products (about 687 tonnes in 2020). These are mostly harvested from western, SW and NW coastal areas.



The national value of seaweed to harvesters is estimated to be €2.7 million, or an average of €10,000 per harvester.



At least 270 people are harvesting seaweed on a part-time basis and supplying it to various seaweed processing businesses, mostly located along the west coast of Ireland.



Revenue from the harvesting of Asco, 98% of all seaweed harvested in Ireland, generated about €2 million for harvesters (74% of annual revenue), while harvesting of all other species or 2% of wild seaweed harvested, generated about €700,000 for harvesters (26% of annual revenue).



The Seaweed Processing Industry

Seaweed processing businesses range from small artisanal operations to large multinational enterprises.

By volume, Asco is the most common seaweed processed into agricultural products; from low-value fertilisers and animal feed, to high-value biostimulants used in horticultural applications.

Other seaweeds are used in beauty (bath leaves, lotions and soaps), cosmetic, dietary supplement, pet food and human food products.

All processors are classed as SMEs with 92% identified as micro businesses (less than €2 million in annual revenue), 4% small businesses (less than €10 million) and 4% medium sized business enterprises (less than €50 million)

A majority of processors (81%) focus on producing 1-2 product ranges

Two-thirds of processors are making intermediary ingredients for other businesses to make into marketable products.

The most common type of seaweed processing consists of drying and milling. Other businesses are using biochemical techniques to extract beneficial compounds.

The processing industry employs an estimated 429 employees, 84% on a full-time basis.

The value of products sold from Irish harvested seaweed is estimated at €45 million per year. When adding revenue from one Irish processing company importing 60-70,000 tonnes of calcified seaweed (maerl) per year from Iceland, the value of products sold from Irish based processors doubles to €80-90 million per year.

The value of processed seaweed ranges from €1 to €10+ per kilo depending on the species and type of product produced.



THE SEAWEED INDUSTRY, BOTH HARVESTERS AND PROCESSORS, EMPLOY ABOUT 700 PEOPLE AND CONTRIBUTE AROUND €90 MILLION ANNUALLY TO THE IRISH ECONOMY