

BURLEIGH DODDS SERIES IN AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE

Seaweed and microalgae as alternative sources of protein

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Seaweed and microalgae as alternative sources of protein

Contents

Series list	x
Acknowledgements	xvii
Introduction	xviii

Part 1 Types of macroalgae and microalgae

1 Seaweed as a potential protein supplement in animal feeds <i>Sung Woo Kim, North Carolina State University, USA</i>	3
1 Introduction	3
2 Novel protein sources for animal feeds	5
3 Seaweed production for foods and feeds	6
4 Nutrient composition of seaweeds	7
5 Seaweeds as protein supplements in feeds	10
6 Conclusion	11
7 Where to look for further information	11
8 References	11
2 Solar energy conversion, oxygen evolution and carbon assimilation in cyanobacteria and eukaryotic microalgae <i>Gaozhong Shen, The Pennsylvania State University, USA</i>	17
1 Introduction	17
2 Evolution and diversity of the photoautotrophic cyanobacteria and microalgae	19
3 Photosynthesis and conversion of solar energy	23
4 Functions of photosystems in converting light energy into chemical energy	31
5 Photosynthetic CO ₂ assimilation	36
6 Potential of cyanobacteria and microalgae	38
7 Conclusion and future trends	41
8 Where to look for further information	42
9 References	42

3	Extraction of proteins and other functional components from red seaweed (<i>Rhodophyta</i>) <i>Charlotte Jacobsen, National Food Institute - Technical University of Denmark, Denmark; Alireza Naseri, LACTOSAN A/S, Denmark; and Susan Løvstad Holdt, National Food Institute - Technical University of Denmark, Denmark</i>	51
	1 Introduction	51
	2 Extraction of polysaccharides: carrageenan and agar	53
	3 Single extraction of proteins	58
	4 Multi-extraction of proteins and carrageenan	65
	5 Extraction of phenolic antioxidants	67
	6 Conclusion and future trends	71
	7 Where to look for further information	72
	8 References	72
Part 2 Cultivation and processing		
4	Developments in commercial scale farming of microalgae and seaweeds <i>Sarah E. Loftus and Zackary I. Johnson, Duke University, USA</i>	79
	1 Introduction	79
	2 Microalgae cultivation	80
	3 Seaweed cultivation	90
	4 Conclusion and future trends	96
	5 Where to look for further information	97
	6 Acknowledgements	98
	7 References	98
5	Developments in algal processing <i>Schonna R. Manning and Reuben D. Gol, University of Texas at Austin, USA</i>	105
	1 Introduction	105
	2 Harvesting and dewatering	109
	3 Drying algal biomass	118
	4 Biomass disruption	122
	5 Nutrient recovery	128
	6 Product considerations	133
	7 Where to look for further information	134
	8 References	135

6	Bioprocessing of microalgal proteins and their applications in the cosmetic, nutraceutical and food industries <i>Jordan Wilson, Ainnatul A. Ahmad Termizi, Elvis T. Chua and Peer M. Schenk, The University of Queensland, Australia</i>	147
	1 Introduction	147
	2 Applications of microalgal protein in the food, nutraceutical and cosmetic industries	149
	3 Extraction of microalgal proteins	154
	4 Bioavailability and digestibility	157
	5 Conclusion	160
	6 Where to look for further information	160
	7 References	161
7	Environmental impacts of seaweed cultivation: kelp farming and preservation <i>Jean-Baptiste Thomas, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden; José Potting, EnviroSpotting, The Netherlands and KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden; and Fredrik Gröndahl, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden</i>	165
	1 Introduction	165
	2 LCA methodology	166
	3 Case study: the Seafarm life cycle assessment	169
	4 Overall impacts of the supply chain	172
	5 Environmental impacts of a kelp juvenile hatchery	177
	6 Environmental impacts of kelp cultivation	179
	7 Environmental impacts of preservation: to dry, freeze or ensile?	183
	8 Conclusion	186
	9 Limitations of LCA	187
	10 Future trends in seaweed-related LCA	188
	11 Where to look for further information	189
	12 References	191
Part 3 Applications		
8	Nutritional and anti-methanogenic potentials of macroalgae for ruminants <i>Deepak Pandey, Nord University, Norway; Morteza Mansouryar, University of Copenhagen, Denmark; Margarita Novoa-Garrido, Nord University, Norway; Geir Næss, Nord University, Norway; Viswanath Kiron, Nord University, Norway; Hanne Helene Hansen,</i>	195

University of Copenhagen, Denmark; Mette Olaf Nielsen, Aarhus University, Denmark; and Prabhat Khanal, Nord University, Norway

1	Introduction	195
2	Nutritional value of macroalgae	200
3	Digestibility of macroalgae as a feed or feed ingredients	204
4	Anti-methanogenic properties of macroalgae	209
5	Processing and seasonal effects on anti-methanogenic properties of macroalgae	216
6	Future perspectives	218
7	Conclusions	218
8	Where to look for further information	219
9	Funding	219
10	References	219
9	Developing seaweed/macroalgae as feed for pigs <i>Marta López-Alonso, Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, Spain; Marco García-Vaquero, University College Dublin, Ireland; and Marta Miranda, Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, Spain</i>	229
1	Introduction	229
2	Challenges in using macroalgae for feed applications	230
3	Composition of macroalgae	232
4	Biological functions and health-promoting effects of macroalgae and macroalgal-derived extracts in pig nutrition	238
5	Conclusion and future trends	244
6	Where to look for further information	245
7	Acknowledgements	246
8	References	246
10	Microalgae: a unique source of poultry feed protein <i>Sahil Kalia, Andrew D. Magnuson, Guanchen Liu and Xin Gen Lei, Cornell University, USA</i>	255
1	Introduction	255
2	Nutrient composition of microalgae as alternative feed protein and bioactive nutrient sources	256
3	Effects and values of microalgae as a supplement in broiler diets	263
4	Effects and values of microalgae as a supplement in laying hen diets	268
5	Potential of microalgae as a supplement in diets for other poultry species	272
6	Conclusion and future trends	274
7	Where to look for further information	275
8	References	275

11	Developing macroalgae and microalgae as feed for fish <i>Mo Peng, Jiangxi Agricultural University, China; Chunxiang Ai, Xiamen University, China; Zhi Luo, Huazhong Agricultural University, China; and Qinghui Ai, Key Laboratory of Mariculture (Ministry of Education of China), Ocean University of China, China</i>	281
1	Introduction	281
2	Effects of using macroalgae and microalgae in aquatic feed: growth performance and composition	282
3	Effects of using macroalgae and microalgae in aquatic feed: disease prevention and fish health	288
4	Effects of using macroalgae and microalgae in aquatic feed: reproductive performance and meat quality	291
5	Uses of macroalgae and microalgae in fish feed	294
6	Challenges in using macroalgae and microalgae in fish feed	296
7	Conclusion and future trends	298
8	References	298
	Index	315

Introduction

With traditional sources of protein considered as major contributors to climate change, there is growing interest in alternative, more 'climate-smart' sources of protein. This collection assesses the viability of using macroalgae (seaweed) and microalgae as sustainable protein sources.

Part 1 of the book discusses the different types of macroalgae and microalgae and how they can be used as alternative sources of protein in the food animal sectors. Chapters focus on areas such as using algae in animal feeds, the use of cyanobacteria and eukaryotic microalgae for solar energy conversion, and the extraction of proteins and other functional components from red seaweed. Part 2 focuses on the cultivation and processing of algae, specifically developments in commercial scale farming, developments in algal processing, bioprocessing of microalgal protein and the environmental impacts of seaweed cultivation. Part 3 of the book highlights the use of algae in ruminant, pig, poultry and fish diets.

Part 1 Types of macroalgae and microalgae

The first chapter of the book discusses algae as a potential protein supplement in animal feeds. Chapter 1 begins by highlighting novel protein sources for animal feed and the key factors for selecting alternative protein sources for both human and animal nutrition. The chapter also examines the production of algae for foods and feeds, then goes on to discuss the nutrient composition of different algae. A section on algae as protein supplements in feed is also included. The chapter then provides a summary that emphasises the potential importance of using algae as an alternative in providing nutrients to animals.

The next chapter focuses on solar energy conversion, oxygen evolution and carbon assimilation in cyanobacteria and eukaryotic microalgae. Chapter 2 starts by discussing the evolution and diversity of the photoautotrophic cyanobacteria and microalgae. It then moves on to examine photosynthesis and conversion of solar energy, focusing on areas such as light-harvesting antenna and pigments, the importance of chlorophyll and how phycobilins can fill the gap of chlorophylls. The chapter also discusses carotenoids and how they can facilitate excitation energy transfer and photoprotection. A section on the functions of photosystems in converting light energy into chemical energy is also provided, which is then followed by an analysis of photosynthetic CO₂ assimilation and the potential of cyanobacteria and microalgae.

The final chapter of Part 1 examines the extraction of proteins and other functional components from red seaweed (*Rhodophyta*). Red seaweeds are a major industrial source of agar and carrageenan. They also contain high amounts

of other polysaccharides and higher amounts of proteins than brown seaweeds. Some species of red seaweed also contain polyphenols with antioxidant activities as well as being a source of carotenoids and phycobiliproteins. However, there are currently no commercial-scale methods for extracting those bioactive compounds. Chapter 3 provides an overview of various methods for extracting all these functional compounds from red seaweeds. Whereas the main emphasis is on the extractions of proteins, extractions of polysaccharides (carrageenan and agar) and antioxidants (phenolic compounds) are covered. Multi-extraction approaches for extractions of bioactive compounds from red seaweeds are also described.

Part 2 Cultivation and processing

Part 2 opens with a chapter that discusses the developments in commercial scale farming of microalgae and seaweeds. Chapter 4 highlights how expanding markets for microalgae and macroalgae products have led to increased development of commercial farming operations. While microalgae and macroalgae, or seaweed, have historically been harvested in many parts of the globe, more recent developments seek to improve productivity, decrease production costs, increase scale, and mitigate environmental impacts of cultivation. The chapter includes some of those recent developments and identifies future focus areas for research and development.

Chapter 5 considers the developments in algal processing. The chapter outlines various developments in processing technologies used for the treatment of algal biomass with discussion of scalability, cost, time, and efficacy. Topics cover methods for harvesting and dewatering algae, drying algal biomass, biomass disruption, and nutrient recovery, including case studies with lessons learned. The final section presents biomass applications and product considerations. While there is no universally adopted approach for processing algal biomass, these studies provide the foundation for making informed decisions, considering the unique properties of the algae and the integrity of the desired end products.

The subject of Chapter 6 is bioprocessing of microalgal protein and their applications in the cosmetic, nutraceutical and food industries. Microalgae have long been recognised for their nutritional value and high protein contents. They are highly productive and can be grown without competing for arable land or freshwater resources. Most microalgal protein contains all essential amino acids and is hence more suitable as a meat replacement than any other plant protein. Microalgal products are also readily suitable for cosmetic and nutraceutical applications due to their significant health benefits. The chapter provides an overview of the use of various protein-rich microalgae in food, feed, nutraceuticals, and cosmetics. The latest technical advances in protein

extraction from microalgae are presented, together with an overview of current knowledge on bioavailability and digestibility of microalgal proteins.

Chapter 7 addresses the environmental impacts of seaweed cultivation, focusing specifically on kelp farming and preservation. The chapter starts with a short overview of the life cycle assessment (LCA) methodology, and how it can be used to quantify the environmental impacts of seaweed supply chains. After a discussion of the overall environmental impacts of the preserved seaweed supply chain, the chapter focuses on specific life cycle stages: spore preparation and seeding of juvenile seaweed onto string in the hatchery, seaweed cultivation, harvesting preservation and storage of harvested seaweed. The chapter ends with a summary and discussion of future trends in the subject.

Part 3 Applications

The first chapter of Part 3 examines the nutritional and anti-methanogenic potentials of macroalgae for ruminants. Chapter 8 begins by discussing the nutritional value of macroalgae, then goes on to examine its digestibility as a feed or feed ingredients. The livestock production sector is facing challenges to find alternative feed resources and nutritional strategies to mitigate enteric methane (CH_2) emissions from ruminants. Recently, marine macroalgae have emerged as potential anti-methanogenic feed ingredients due to their ability to suppress enteric CH_4 production in ruminants. The anti-methanogenic properties of macroalgae have been ascribed to the contents of secondary metabolites, such as halogenated compounds e.g. bromoform in red species, and polyphenols or isoprenoids in brown species. The chapter also analyses the anti-methanogenic properties of macroalgae. A section on the processing and seasonal effects of these properties is also provided, before concluding with an analysis of potential future research trends and a section that emphasises the importance of using macroalgae as alternative ruminant feeds.

The next chapter addresses developing macroalgae as feed for pigs. Macroalgae are a promising source of nutritional ingredients including proteins, polysaccharides and minerals. The need to increase animal and feed production has increased interest in macroalgae as underutilised resources with promising applications as alternative animal feeds. Chapter 9 summarises the nutritional attributes of macroalgae in terms of macro and micronutrients as a source of protein and other compounds in pig nutrition. The benefits of macroalgae or macroalgal derived extracts in feed are discussed together with future trends and challenges in the development of effective feed formulations.

Moving on from Chapter 9, Chapter 10 examines microalgae and its importance as a source of dietary protein, lipids and other compounds for poultry. The chapter reviews effects of supplemental full- or de-fatted microalgal biomass in diets for broiler chickens, laying hens, and other types of poultry on

their production performance, meat and egg qualities, nutrient metabolism, and molecular responses. Different sources of microalgal biomass have shown excellent potential to replace a good amount of soybean meal and/or corn without adverse effects. Meanwhile, microalgae are used to enrich chicken meat and eggs with N-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids and bioactive phytochemicals for adding human health-promoting values to these animal products. The dual application of microalgae for producing biofuels and replacing conventional feed protein stands as propitious mediator to reshape the junction between intensifying animal agriculture and meeting the global needs for energy, food, and environmental sustainability.

Chapter 11 focuses on developing macroalgae and microalgae as feed for fish. The rapid expansion of aquaculture industry is severely restricted by the shortage of key feed ingredients such as fishmeal and fish oil. Application of marine plants (macro and microalgae) as dietary ingredients could potentially overcome the limitation of key feed ingredients used in aquafeed. The chapter summarises the current knowledge of the use of macro and microalgae in aquafeed and their effects on overall fish performance.

Chapter 1

Seaweed as a potential protein supplement in animal feeds

Sung Woo Kim, North Carolina State University, USA

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Novel protein sources for animal feeds
- 3 Seaweed production for foods and feeds
- 4 Nutrient composition of seaweeds
- 5 Seaweeds as protein supplements in feeds
- 6 Conclusion
- 7 Where to look for further information
- 8 References

1 Introduction

Global meat demand has been steadily increasing due to population and economic growth, putting pressure on feed supply to support animal production (FAO, 2003). Protein supplements are typically the most expensive components in animal feeds (Kim et al., 2019). The price of protein supplements varies largely depending on their source. Traditional protein supplements include oilseeds, animal coproducts, and distillers grains. Soybean meal is currently the most widely used protein supplement in animal feeds. Two hundred and thirty-eight million metric tons (MT) of soybean meal were used in animal feeds globally in 2020, representing almost 70% of all oilseed meal consumed (ASA, 2020; FAS, 2021). The use of soybean meal in animal feeding increased from 165 million MT in 2010 to 238 million MT in 2020, representing an annual increase of 3.8% (Table 1). The use of dried distillers grains (DDGs) in animal feeds has also become popular since 2000, increasing rapidly to 39 million MT in the US (ERS, 2020a).

Improvements in yield have been a major factor enabling crop production to meet this demand. In the United States, for example, soybean yield improved from 2.89 MT/ha in 2010 to 3.56 MT/ha in 2018 (NASS, 2018). However, there has also been a need to expand agricultural land use to support crop production to meet the demand for foods and feeds (NASS, 2018; ERS, 2020b; FAS, 2021). An

Table 1 Global production of soybean meal (million metric ton)¹

Year	Argentina	Brazil	Canada	China	EU	India	Mexico	Paraguay	USA	Other	Total
09/10	26.6	26.1	1.0	38.6	10.0	6.2	2.9	1.2	37.8	14.7	165.2
10/11	29.3	28.2	1.1	43.6	9.7	7.5	2.9	1.3	35.6	15.9	175.0
11/12	27.9	29.5	1.1	48.3	9.2	8.2	2.9	0.7	37.2	15.8	180.9
12/13	26.1	27.3	1.2	51.5	10.0	8.6	2.9	2.3	36.2	16.1	182.2
13/14	27.9	28.5	1.2	54.6	10.3	7.0	3.2	2.8	36.9	18.1	190.4
14/15	30.9	31.3	1.3	59.0	11.4	6.2	3.3	2.9	40.9	21.3	208.5
15/16	33.2	30.8	1.5	64.5	11.8	4.4	3.5	3.0	40.5	22.8	216.0
16/17	33.3	31.3	1.4	69.7	11.4	7.2	3.6	2.9	40.6	24.5	225.9
17/18	28.4	34.3	1.5	71.3	11.8	6.2	4.2	3.0	44.7	27.4	232.7
18/19	31.2	33.4	1.6	67.3	12.8	7.7	4.4	3.1	44.3	28.7	234.4
19/20	33.8	34.0	1.5	66.9	12.6	6.4	4.7	3.0	44.9	30.1	237.8

¹ Data were adapted from FAS (2021).

estimated 11% of the land is used globally for crop production, covering about 40% of the land potentially available for agriculture (FAO, 2003). However, there are clear limitations to further expansion of agriculture land due partly to the availability of water (McDaniel et al., 2017; Sloat et al., 2018). About 10% of land currently used for agriculture could face water shortages (Fitton et al., 2019). Limitations in available agriculture land and water will potentially limit further expansion of animal production and could even threaten the existing level of production (Sloat et al., 2018). There is, therefore, a need to consider alternative nutrient sources to support growing animal production.

It is important to note that there are a number of challenges in using alternative protein sources. Protein sources from plants contain compounds that interfere with nutrient digestion or impairing animal intestinal health. These compounds are collectively called antinutritional factors and include trypsin inhibitor, lectin, glycinin, β -conglycinin, raffinose family oligosaccharide, and β -galactomannan (Kim et al., 2003; Hong et al., 2004; Taliercio et al., 2014). While the digestive tract of mature animals can cope with most of these antinutritional factors, this is not true for young animals which suffer inflammatory response and oxidative damage in the intestinal epithelium, leading to impaired nutrient digestion and absorption and ultimately reduced growth (Zhao et al., 2014; Yin et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2017; Sun and Kim, 2017).

To avoid problems with antinutritional factors, animal-based protein supplements, mostly rendered animal coproducts, have been used extensively in feeding young animals. These coproducts include meat meal, meat and bone meal, poultry coproduct meal, fish meal, blood coproducts (blood meal, blood cells, and blood plasma), and milk coproducts (dried skim milk, whey protein concentrates, and casein) which are mostly free of typical antinutritional factors. However, the use of rendered animal coproducts has been limited by restrictions in supply. Global production of fish meal, as an example, has fallen from 7 million MT in 1995 to 5 million MT in 2019 (Tacon et al., 2011; Rabobank, 2019). Some rendered animal by-products have also been banned for their potential associations with zoonotic diseases and are less acceptable to consumers (Kim et al., 2019).

2 Novel protein sources for animal feeds

With these limitations in the amount and types of protein supplements available, animal nutritionists have been seeking alternative sources to replace conventional protein supplements. Key factors for selecting alternative sources include safety for both animals and consumers, nutritional value and palatability to animals, affordability and availability in large quantities, consistency in composition, and environmental sustainability (Hard, 2004; Jędrzejek et al., 2016; Dee et al., 2018).

Emerging candidates for alternative protein supplements include:

- insect protein,
- single cell-based protein, and
- seaweed.

Larvae of selected insects such as black soldier flies and yellow mealworms can accumulate proteins (35–55%) and lipids (10–40%) and have been extensively reviewed (Rumpold and Schlüter, 2013; Makkar et al., 2014; DiGiacomo and Leury, 2019). Single-cell protein is derived from microorganisms (cells), including bacteria, fungi, microalgae, and yeast, with the latter being most developed (Spark et al., 2005; Shen et al., 2009; Espinosa et al., 2020). Reviews of the use of single-cell proteins include Kim et al. (2019) and Jones et al. (2020). The focus of this chapter is on the use of seaweed in animal feeds.

3 Seaweed production for foods and feeds

Seaweed is the common name for a wide range of multicellular macroalgae growing in the marine environment. Seaweed is often classified into three groups:

- Chlorophyta (also known as green macroalgae),
- Phaeophyta (also known as brown macroalgae), and
- Rhodophyta (also known as red macroalgae).

Seaweed has a crucial role in maintaining marine ecology as a source of nutrients and oxygen (Krause-Jensen and Duarte, 2016).

There are nearly 6000 species of seaweeds with a limited number of species used as food and feed sources. Currently, almost 30 million MT/year of seaweed is produced globally, mainly for biomass and food production, with only 1% used for animal feeds (Rajauria, 2015). Seaweed has long been cultured and used as food in Asian countries in particular (FAO, 2018). Production of cultured seaweed increased twofold from 14.3 MT in 2006 to 29.4 MT in 2015. China and Indonesia are major producers accounting for 47% and 38% of global production, respectively, followed by the Philippines (5.3%) and the Republic of Korea (4.1%), as shown in Fig. 1 (FAO, 2018).

Cultured seaweeds from China and Korea are mainly used for foods, whereas those from Indonesia and the Philippines are mainly for the extraction of carrageenan and agar used as an ingredient in food processing and other applications (FAO, 2018). The major cultured seaweed in China is *Saccharina japonica* (a brown seaweed), whereas Korea mainly produces *Pyropia tenera* (a red seaweed) (Abbot, 1988). Major cultured seaweeds from Indonesia and

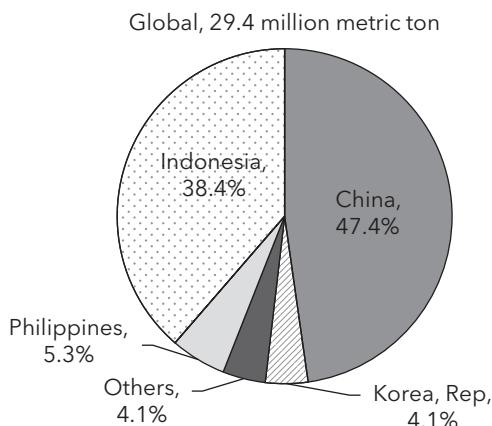


Figure 1 Global production of cultured seaweeds (FAO, 2018).

the Philippines are *Eucheuma* and *Kappaphycus* (Hurtado et al., 2017; Lucas and Southgate, 2012). In the northern Atlantic regions, *Ascophyllum nodosum* (a brown seaweed) is not cultured but extensively harvested for biomass and animal feeds (Anderson et al., 2006; Braden et al., 2007).

4 Nutrient composition of seaweeds

The nutrient composition of seaweeds varies significantly depending on species. On a dry matter basis, seaweeds are mainly composed of carbohydrates (30%-55%), minerals (20%-30%, mainly ash), and protein (7%-30%) with minor amounts of fat (1%-9%) and phenolic compounds (MacArtain et al., 2007; Kumar et al., 2015; Makkar et al., 2016; Ganesan et al., 2020). In general, green and red seaweeds have higher protein content than brown seaweeds (Cabrita et al., 2016). Nutrient composition within a species can also vary depending on season and environmental conditions. Protein and carbohydrate contents are generally highest in young seaweed at the end of winter, whereas fat and ash contents are highest in the spring (Dawes, 1987; Kumar et al., 2015).

Excluding water, carbohydrates are the major component of seaweed, comprising alginates, carrageenans, and agar (MacArtain et al., 2007; Rioux et al., 2007). Seaweed also contains β -glucans (Babadilla et al., 2013; Nakashima et al., 2018). These are indigestible polysaccharides with a potential role as prebiotics (O'Sullivan et al., 2010; Charoensiddhi et al., 2020; Lopez-Santamarina et al., 2020). Seaweeds contain high levels of minerals such as K (1.5%-4.5%), Na (0.5%-4%), and Ca (0.4%-2%), while the content of other minerals varies depending on the type of seaweeds (Holdt and Kraan, 2011). According to Cabrita et al. (2016), Lorenzo et al. (2017), and Circuncisão et al. (2018), green seaweeds are generally high in Mg (about 2% in green seaweeds

Index

- Acetate formation 216
Acrylic Perspex aquaria 177
ADC. see Apparent digestibility coefficient (ADC)
ADG. see Average daily gain (ADG)
African catfish 295
Agarpectin 58
Agarose 58
ALA. see α -linolenic acid (ALA)
Alcalase 61-63, 67
Algae Biotechnology Laboratory 154
Algal blendstocks 133
Algal peptides 152
Algal processing
 biomass disruption 122-123
 electroporation 127
 liquid shear processes 125-127
 microwave treatments 127
 non-mechanical methods 127-128
 solid shear processes 123-125
drying algal biomass
 belt drying 120-121
 drum drying 121
 freeze-drying 122
 microwave drying 121-122
 oven drying 120
 solar drying 118-120
 spray drying 121
harvesting and dewatering 109-110
 centrifugation 112-113
 filtration 113-114
 flocculation 115-118
 flotation 114-115
 gravity sedimentation 111-112
nutrient recovery 128-129
 carbohydrates 131-132
 lipids 129-131
 proteins 132-133
- overview of 105-109
product considerations 133-134
Algal protein 149
AlgaVia® whole algae protein 150
Alginic acid supplementation 244
 α -Linolenic acid (ALA) 272
Amino acid profiles 8-10, 63
 essential 158
 non-essential 158
Ammonium sulfate precipitation 155-156
Analytical-purity-grade phycocyanin 156
3,6-Anhydro-galactopyranosyl 58
Animal-based protein 147, 157
Antenna systems 24
Antibacterial properties 289
Antinutritional factors 5
Antioxidant capacity 291
Apparent digestibility coefficient (ADC) 151
Aqueous two-phase extraction (ATPE)
 155-156
Arthrosphaira 107, 121
Ascophyllum nodosum (brown seaweed) 7, 10, 198, 230
Asparagopsis armata 208
Astaxanthin 151
Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*) 283, 287
ATPE. see Aqueous two-phase extraction (ATPE)
Autoflocculation 117
Average daily gain (ADG) 242
- Ball mills 123
Bead milling 296
 β -carotene 52
Bioactive components 198
Bioactive peptides 235
BIOCARB-4-FOOD 246
Bioflocculation 118

- Black seabream 287, 295
 Blue-green algae 18
 see also Cyanobacteria
Botryococcus braunii 130
 B-PE 27
 Bromochloromethane 213
 Brown macroalgae species 200, 211, 232
- Carbohydrates 201-202, 236
 Carotenoids 29-30, 294
 Carp (*Cyprinus carpio*) 283
 CAT. *see* Catalase (CAT)
 Catalase (CAT) 291
 Cationic polymers 116
 CCA. *see* Chromatic acclimation (CCA)
 CCMs. *see* CO₂ concentrating mechanisms (CCMs)
 CEENE. *see* Cumulative energy extraction from the natural environment (CEENE)
 Celluclast 65
 Celluclast plus Shearzyme 62, 67
 Celluclast plus Viscozyme 62
 Chl a 25, 26
Chlamydomonas reinhardtii 133
 Chl b 25
 Chl c 25
 Chl d 25
 Chl f 25
Chlorella
 ellipsoidea 134
 vulgaris 120, 130, 133, 149, 153
 Chloroform 213
 Chlorophyll (Chl) 24-26
 Chlorophyta 6
 see also green macroalgae species
Chondrus crispus 70
 Chromatic acclimation (CCA) 28
 Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) 152
 CML baseline method
 abiotic depletion (AD) 175, 178, 181
 acidification (AC) 175, 178, 181
 climate impact (GWP100) 175, 178, 181
 eutrophication (E) 175, 178, 181
 fresh water ecotoxicity (FWET) 175, 178, 181
 human toxicity (HT) 175, 178, 181
 marine ecotoxicity (MET) 175, 178, 181
 ozone layer depletion (OLD) 175, 178, 181
 photochemical oxidation (PO) 175, 178, 181
 terrestrial ecotoxicity (TET) 175, 178, 181
- CML 2001 method 182
 CO₂ assimilation
 carboxysomes 37-38
 mechanisms and carbon fixation 36-37
 pyrenoids in eukaryotic algae 38
 CO₂ concentrating mechanisms (CCMs) 37
 Commercial scale farming
 future trends 96-97
 microalgae cultivation
 crop protection 87-88
 fermenters 84
 inorganic carbon 90
 labor resource 90
 light and temperature condition 85-86
 mode 84-85
 nutrients 89-90
 open ponds and
 photobioreactors 81-84
 pH condition 86
 salinity condition 86
 water source condition 88-89
 overview of 79-80
 seaweed cultivation
 climate and temperature
 condition 93
 coastal and offshore farms 92
 contained tanks 92-93
 crop protection 95-96
 labor resource 96
 light condition 93
 nutrients 95
 propagation and reproduction 91-92
 salinity condition 94
 water movement 94
 Common carp 295
 Comparative LCAs 167
 Continuous modes 85
 COPD. *see* Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
 Corbion Biotech 84
 Corrinoid/porphinoid enzyme 213
 CP. *see* Crude protein (CP)
 'Cradle-to-grave' LCA. *see* Full LCA
 Crossflow filtration 114
 Crude protein (CP) 10
 Cumulative energy extraction from the natural environment (CEENE) 174
 Cyanobacteria 18, 31, 36, 105
 diversity 20-21
 evolution 19-20
 potential 38-40
 Cyanobacterial diversification 18

- Cylindotheca closterium* 130
Cyt b_of complex 35–36
- DAF. see Dissolved-air flotation (DAF)
 Daniel Jouvance 153
 DDGs. see Dried distillers grains (DDGs)
 DDT. see Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT)
 Deep-bed filtration 113–114
 Defatted diatom microalgae *Staurosira* biomass (DFA) 266
 Defatted green microalgae biomass (DGM) 266
 Defatted microalgae 296
 Dermochlorella (St. Malo, France) 153
 Developing macroalgae and microalgae, feed for fish challenges in 296–298 conclusion and future trends 298 disease prevention and fish health 288–291 growth performance and composition 282–288 optimal levels of 284–285 reproductive performance and meat quality 291–294 uses of 294–296
 Developing seaweed/macroalgae, feed for pigs biological functions and health-promoting effects of 238–244 challenges in using macroalgae 230–232 composition of 232–238 conclusion and future trends 244–245
 DFA. see Defatted diatom microalgae *Staurosira* biomass (DFA)
 DGM. see Defatted green microalgae biomass (DGM)
 DHA. see Docosahexaenoic acid (DHA)
 DHA-rich microalgae 267
 Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) 297
 Dietary inclusions, different microalgae in diets for poultry species, effects 273 on egg production, effects 270–271 species, effects 264–265
 Dior 153
 Dioxins 297
 Direct-flow filtration 113
 Direct solar drying 119
 Dissolved-air flotation (DAF) 114, 115
 Docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) 263, 287
 Downstream processing 108
- Dried distillers grains (DDGs) 3
Dunaliella salina 121, 150, 151, 153
Durvillea antarctica 120
- EAA. see Enzyme-assisted extraction (EAA); Essential amino acids (EAA)
 EABA. see European Algae Biomass Association (EABA)
Earthrise California Spirulina 150
 Ecoinvent database 182
 Edible astaxanthin lipstick 154
 EFSA. see European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)
 Eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) 263, 287
 Electric Sky™ by Spira Inc. 150
 Electrostatic patching 115
 Endosymbiosis 22–23
 Enhance microalgae 246
 Enteric methanogenesis 196
 Enzymatic hydrolysis 296
 Enzyme-assisted extraction (EAA) 59–64, 231
 EOM. see Extracellular organic matter (EOM)
 EPA. see Eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA)
 Essential amino acids (EAA) 52, 200
 EU. see European Union (EU)
Eucheuma denticulatum 52, 53
 Eukaryotic algae 17 plastids evolution 22–23 pyrenoids in 38
 Eukaryotic algal groups 105
Eucheuma denticulatum 68–69
 European Algae Biomass Association (EABA) 245
 European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) 245
 European sea bass (*Dicentrarchus labrax*) 283, 287, 293
 European Union (EU) 203
 Evodos-style centrifuge 113
 Exsymol (Monaco) 153
 Extracellular organic matter (EOM) 109
 FaRLiP 26
 Farred light (FRL) 26, 28
 FCC-viscosity 67
 Feed conversion ratio (FCR) 263
 Feeding macroalgae 204
 Fermentation 296
 Fish immunity 289–291
 Food and Agriculture Organization 147
 Food protein 147
 Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) 246
 Freeze-dried microalgae 158

- FRL. see Farred light (FRL)
- FSAI. see Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI)
- Fucoidan 230
- Fucoxanthin 237
- Fucus vesiculosus* 230
- Fuji Chemical Industries Co. Ltd. 154
- Full LCA 167, 168
- Furcellaria lumbricalis* 67, 71
- 'Gate-to-grave' LCAs 167
- Genome plasticity 18
- Gilthead seabream (*Sparus aurata*) 283, 295
- Global production
- cultured seaweeds 7
 - soybean meal 3, 4
- Glucans (laminarin) 236
- Glutamic acid 235
- Glutathione peroxidase (Gpx) 291
- Gracilaria chilensis* 120
- Green gap 26-29
- Green macroalgae species 200, 211-212, 232
- Green seaweeds 10
- Grow Kit Bioreactor 150
- Growth performance and digestion 242
- Gut function 242-243
- Haematococcus pluvialis* 126, 151
- Halogenated compounds 213
- Hatchery failure 179
- Hatchery processes 174
- Hawaii Space Exploration Analog and Simulation (HI-SEAS) 150
- HDL-C. see High-density lipoprotein cholesterol (HDL-C)
- Heterocysts 20
- Heterotrophic cultivation 84
- High-density lipoprotein cholesterol (HDL-C) 266
- High-pressure processing (HPP) 59
- High-purity grade phycoerythrin 156
- Himanthalia elongata* 122
- HI-SEAS. see Hawaii Space Exploration Analog and Simulation (HI-SEAS)
- Homogenization 126
- Horizontal tubular photobioreactors 83
- HPP. see High-pressure processing (HPP)
- Hybrid striped bass 293
- IgG. see Immunoglobulin G (IgG)
- IgM. see Immunoglobulin M (IgM)
- ILCD-methodology 169
- Immune function and antioxidant capacity 243-244
- Immunoglobulin G (IgG) 263
- Immunoglobulin M (IgM) 263
- Impact hotspots 174
- IMTA. see Integrated multi-trophic aquaculture (IMTA)
- Indirect solar drying 119
- Integrated multi-trophic aquaculture (IMTA) 297-298
- Integrated pest management 87
- International MoonBase Alliance 150
- Intrinsic viscosity (IV) 67
- In vitro* protein digestibility (IVPD) 201
- Isoelectric precipitation 155
- IV. see Intrinsic viscosity (IV)
- IVPD. see *In vitro* protein digestibility (IVPD)
- Kappaphycus alvarezii* 53, 94
- Knife mills 123
- KOH 56, 57
- Laminaria* spp. (brown seaweed) 10
- digitata* 233
- Laminarin 230
- Land-based seaweed tanks 92, 93
- Larvae 6
- LCA. see Life cycle assessment (LCA)
- LDL-C. see Low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C)
- LHC. see Light-harvesting complex (LHC)
- Life cycle assessment (LCA) 166, 169
- Light-driven photosynthetic reactions 18
- Light-harvesting complex (LHC) 21
- Lipids 203-204
- and other compounds in macroalgae 236-237
- LoLiP *Synechococcus* 29
- Longline cultivation infrastructure, environmental impacts of 179-182
- Low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C) 266
- Lush Cosmetics 154
- Macroalgae
- evaluation flowchart 199
 - in fish feed, use of 295
 - polysaccharides 202
 - and potential mechanisms, anti-methanogenic factors in
 - direct impacts 212-215
 - indirect impacts 215-216

- for ruminants
 anti-methanogenic properties
 of 209-216
 digestibility of 204-209
 future perspectives 218
 nutritional value of 200-204
 processing and seasonal effects on
 anti-methanogenic properties
 of 216-218
 species and anti-methanogenic
 potential 210
 supplementation effects 239-241
- Macroalgal species 199
- Macro and microalgae
 for fish, digestibility and palatability
 of 296-297
 product quality of 297
 products, safety of 297
- MAE. see Microwave-assisted extraction (MAE)
- Marine macroalgae 198
- Marine picocyanobacteria 21-22
- Marine plants 288
- Mature kelp 172
- Meat quality 292-294
- Membrane fouling 113
- Methane 196
- Methanogens and methanogenic pathways,
 inhibition of
 halogenated compounds 213-214
 isoprenoids 215
 polyphenols 214-215
 polysaccharides 215
 terpenes 215
- Microalgae 31, 36
 conclusion and future trends 274-275
 in fish feed, use of 295-296
 nutrient composition of 256-262
 potential of 38-40, 272-274
 supplement in broiler diets, effects and
 values of 263-268
 supplement in laying hen diets, effects
 and values of 268-272
- Microalgal protein
 bioprocessing
 bioavailability and digestibility 157-
 160
 food, nutraceutical and cosmetic
 industries, applications in 149-154
 general composition of 148
 microalgal proteins, extraction
 of 154-156
 multiple sectors benefit 149
- protein content of 148
 extraction 155
- Microwave-assisted extraction (MAE) 130-132
- Microwave treatments 127
- Mineral contents in macroalgae 237-238
- Minerals 202-203
- Monomer 27
- Monounsaturated fatty acids (MUFA) 257
- Multiple microalgal species and casein protein
 apparent biological value of 159
 apparent digestibility 159
 net protein usage 159
- n-3 PUFA 267, 287
- Nannochloropsis oceanica* 157
- Nannochloropsis oculata* 153
- NASA Goddard 150
- National Renewable Energy Laboratory
 (NREL) 98
- Neochloris oleoabundans* 156
- Net protein usage (NPU) 158
- Nile tilapia 293, 295
- Nitrogen fixation 20
- N. oculata* proteins 157
- Non-cellulolytic bacteria 214
- Non-renewable (nrCED) sources 175, 178,
 181
- Nonstarch polysaccharide degrading
 enzymes (NSPase) 266
- North Ronaldsay (Orkney) sheep 198
- NPU. see Net protein usage (NPU)
- NREL. see National Renewable Energy
 Laboratory (NREL)
- NSPase. see Nonstarch polysaccharide
 degrading enzymes (NSPase)
- NSP-degrading enzymes 286
- Nylon seeding lines 177
- Occludin (OCLN) 243
- OCLN. see Occludin (OCLN)
- Omega-3 Index (OMI) 152
- Omega-3 PUFA 52
- OMI. see Omega-3 Index (OMI)
- Oxygenic photosynthesis 17, 23
 evolution 19-20
- Oxygenic photosynthetic prokaryotes 18
- Palmaria palmata* 10, 60, 61, 65, 66
- PAR. see Photosynthetically active radiation
 (PAR)
- PBPs. see Phycobiliproteins (PBPs)
- PCBs. see Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs)

- PEF. see Pulsed electric field (PEF)
- PEG. see Polyethylene glycol (PEG)
- Pentapharm 153
- PESR. see Post-extraction solid residue (PESR)
- Pest-specific monitoring 88
- Phaeodactylum tricornutum* 121, 154
- Phaeophyta 6
see also Brown macroalgae species
- Phlorotannins (PT), 214
- 3-Phosphoglycerate 36
- Photoautotrophic algae cultivation 90
- Photobacterium damselae* 289
- Photosynthetically active radiation (PAR) 25
- Photosynthetic electron transfer 31
- Photosystems functions
- electron transport and energy transduction, Cyt b₆f complex 35–36
 - light energy into chemical energy 31
 - power reduction for strong reductants production, PS I in 32–35
 - water splitting and oxygen evolution, PS II in 31–32
- pH-shift technique 59
- Phycobiliproteins (PBPs) 26, 27, 53, 156
- Phycoerythrobilin 53
- Plant-based proteins 157
- Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) 297
- Polyelectrolytes 116
- Polyester silk longline 180
- Polyethylene buoy 180
- Polyethylene glycol (PEG) 156
- Polypropylene glycol (PPG) 156
- Polysaccharidases enzymes 60
- Polysaccharides 51, 215
- Polysiphonia fucoides* 70
- Pophyridium cruentum* 126
- Porphyra purpurea* 70
- Post-extraction solid residue (PESR) 62
- Post-weaning 243
- Potential anti-methanogenic factors of macroalgae 212
- Potential protein supplement, animal feeds
- novel protein sources 5–6
 - overview of 3–5
 - seaweed
 - nutrient composition of 7, 10
 - production, foods and feeds 6–7
 - as protein supplements 10
- PPG. see Polypropylene glycol (PPG)
- Preserved seaweed supply chain
- air-cabinet drying 175
- ensiling 175
- freezing 175
- hang drying 175
- Proactive pest management 87
- Prochlorococcus* 21–22
- Protein and amino acid profile in poultry diets 258–262
- Protein content in macroalgae 233–235
- Protein extraction efficiency 61
- Protein purification techniques 155
- Protein-rich microalgae in food, examples 150
- Proteins extraction from red seaweed
- carageenan, multi-extraction of 66–67
 - multi-extraction 65–67
 - overview of 51–53
 - phenolic antioxidants extraction 67, 70–71
 - polysaccharides extraction
 - agar extraction 58–59
 - carageenan extraction 53–57 - single extraction
 - chemical and physical extraction 59
 - enzyme-assisted extraction (EAA) 59–64
 - physical extraction with water 58
- Proteins, solubilization of 154
- extrinsic factors 155
 - intrinsic factors 155
- Protozoans 216
- Pseudosciaena crocea*. see Yellow croaker
- Pseudotropheus acei*. see Yellow-tail cichlid
- PT. see Phlorotannins (PT)
- Pulsed electric field (PEF) 127, 133
- Pyropia tenera* 6
- Reactive-purity-grade allophycocyanin 156
- ReCiPe impact assessment method 175
- Red macroalgae species 200, 209–211, 232
- Redox homeostasis 291
- Red seabream 286, 293
- Red seaweeds 10
- Refined carrageenans 56
- Renewable (rCED) sources 175, 178, 181
- REP. see Rumen escape protein (REP)
- Reproductive performance 291–292
- Rhodophyta 6
see also Red macroalgae species
- Ribulose-1,5-bisphosphate carboxylase/oxygenase (RuBisCO) 36, 37, 40
- R-PE 27

- RuBisCO. see Ribulose-1,5-bisphosphate carboxylase/oxygenase (RuBisCO)
- Rumen environment affecting
methanogenesis, changes 215-216
- Rumen escape protein (REP) 201
- Rumen fermentation and animal performance effects 205-207
- Ruminant livestock species 195
CH₄ emissions from 197
digestive system 196
feed components 196
major pathways by microbial fermentation 197
methane production and emissions 196
- Saccharina japonica* 6
- Saccharomyces cerevisiae* 274
- SAE. see Sonication-assisted extraction (SAE)
- Salting-out effect 155
- Sargassum fulvellum* 93
- Sargassum vulgare* 289
- Saturated fatty acids (SFA) 257
- SBM. see Soybean meal (SBM)
- Seafarm life cycle assessment
case study, choice of 169-170
seafarm project, the 170-172
- Seafarm project 170-172
cultivation system employed 171
in late summer 172
- Seaweed cultivation, environmental impacts of
case study 169-172
future trends 188-189
of kelp cultivation 179-183
of kelp juvenile hatchery 177-179
LCA limitations 187-188
LCA methodology 166-169
of preservation 183-185
supply chain, overall impacts of 172-177
- Seeding 91
- Semi-continuous mode 85
- Semi-refined carrageenans 56
- Senegalese sole 293
- SFA. see Saturated fatty acids (SFA)
- SFE. see Supercritical fluid extraction (SFE)
- SGR. see Specific growth rate (SGR)
- Shearzyme 65
- Single-cell protein 6
- SOD. see Superoxide dismutase (SOD)
- Solar energy, photosynthesis and conversion facilitating excitation energy transfer and photoprotection, carotenoids in 29-30
- light absorption and excitation energy transfer, chlorophylls in 24-26
- light-harvesting antenna and pigments 23-24
- phycobilins filling 26-29
- Sonication 125
- Sonication-assisted extraction (SAE) 130-132
- Soybean 155
- Soybean meal (SBM) 255
- Specific growth rate (SGR) 283
- Spirulina (Arthrospira)* 149-150
face mask 153
- Spore preparation process 177
stage 178
- Spray seeding 177
- Stacked-disk centrifuge 113
- Stokes' Law 111
- Submersion seeding 177
- Sugar kelp 172
- Supercritical fluid extraction (SFE) 130, 131
- Superoxide dismutase (SOD) 291
- Surface filtration 113
- Sweep flocculation 115
- Synechococcus* 21-22
- Synechococcus* PCC 7002 39, 40
- Synechocystis* sp. PCC 6803 39
- Synthetic aliphatic halocarbons 214
- Three-phase partitioning (TPP) 155, 156
- Three-spot gourami 292
- Thylakoid membranes 31
- Tilapia (*Oreochromis*) 283
- Total phenolic content (TPC) 70
- Total suspended solids (TSS) 109, 110
- TPC. see Total phenolic content (TPC)
- TPP. see Three-phase partitioning (TPP)
- Trichopodus trichopterus*. see Three-spot gourami
- Triton Algae Innovations 84
- Tryptophan 157
- TSS. see Total suspended solids (TSS)
- Type A thermophilic *Synechococcus* 29
- Ultrasonication 296
- Ulva lactuca* 10
- Undaria pinnatifida* 269
- Unilever 154

- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) 268
University of Queensland (UQ) 154
USDA. *see* United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

Vegetative propagation 91, 92
Vertical tubular photobioreactors 83
VFAs. *see* Volatile fatty acids (VFAs)
Viscozyme 65
Volatile fatty acids (VFAs) 196

Waste-LCAs 167
Water holding capacity (WHC) 268
World Health Organization 147

Xanthophylls 237

Yellow croaker 291
Yellow-tail cichlid 292

Zebrafish 293
Zonula occludens 1 (ZO-1) 243