

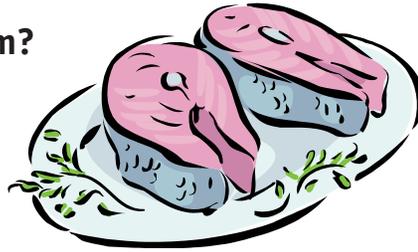
Where Does *Your* Fish Come From?

Fish are the last major wild food in the human diet.

But as more and more vessels work a limited number of fisheries, nearly a quarter of world fish stocks are now over-exploited and half are fully exploited, producing catches at or close to their sustainable limit. Scientists estimate that industrial fleets have fished out at least 90 percent of all large ocean predators in just the past 50 years—including tuna, marlin, swordfish, sharks, cod, halibut, and flounder.

With the depletion of wild fish schools, virtually all growth in the global harvest today comes from farmed fish. Aquaculture output has doubled in the last decade, and it now accounts for 30 percent of the total harvest. For some species, like salmon, farmed production now surpasses the wild harvest. Yet some farmed fish can be harmful to both human health and the environment because of high levels of contaminants, the spread of disease to wild stocks, and the practice of feeding farmed fish with wild species.

Fortunately, an explosion of eco-labels and consumer guides in recent years has helped both shoppers and vendors become more informed about their seafood choices, helping them protect their own health as well as support more responsible fishing practices.



DID YOU KNOW...?

- * In 2003, the world's fishers harvested a record 132.5 million tons of fish and shellfish from streams, oceans, and other water bodies—nearly seven times the harvest in 1950. China alone harvested more than one third of this, followed by Peru, India, Indonesia, and the United States.
- * Today, fishers from developing countries catch three out of four wild fish (by weight), and the developing world earns more from seafood than from any other agricultural commodity. Yet many of the 200 million people worldwide who depend on fisheries for a living cannot afford to eat the fish they catch and handle.
- * By 2020, aquaculture could produce nearly half of all fish harvested. In China, which raises 70 percent of the world's farmed fish, it already accounts for nearly two thirds of total fish production.
- * Wealthier nations purchased 82 percent of the \$61 billion of seafood imports in 2002. Shrimp alone accounts for 20 percent of the global seafood trade.
- * Fishing fleets are now catching 70 percent less cod than they were 30 years ago, and world cod populations could disappear within 15 years, according to WWF. The North American catch has declined by 90 percent since the early 1980s, while the North Sea catch is now just 25 percent of what it was 15 years ago.
- * A 2004 study in *Science* found that some farmed salmon have higher levels of PCBs, dioxin, and other contaminants than wild salmon, a potential human health risk.

CHALLENGE YOURSELF AND OTHERS:

Next time you go to your favorite seafood restaurant or to the fish counter at your supermarket, ask if the seafood is farmed or wild-caught. Was it sustainably harvested? Encourage vendors to find out more about their options, and suggest that they offer more sustainable choices.

SUCCESS STORIES

- ❖ The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) has certified 15 fisheries worldwide for responsible fishing practices, and 21 more are under review. Consumers can now find more than 230 products carrying the MSC "eco-label" in 24 countries.
- ❖ As of April 2005, a new law requires U.S. supermarkets to identify the country of origin of any fish they sell, as well as whether it is farm-raised or wild-caught. The rule

applies to most fresh and frozen fish and shellfish, including lobsters, crabs, and oysters.

- ❖ In 2006, Wal-Mart, the world's largest retail chain, announced it would begin certifying all seafood for its North American market as "sustainably sourced" in 3–5 years. The Red Lobster seafood chain said it would certify its farm-raised shrimp, and Compass Group USA, a large U.S. foodservice company, said it would shift purchases away from threatened fish species.



SIMPLE THINGS YOU CAN DO:

- ✓ Educate yourself about the risks of eating certain kinds of seafood. Try to cut back on your consumption of species that may cause harm to your health or to the environment.
- ✓ Before purchasing seafood at a supermarket or restaurant, consult a consumer's guide, such as the Monterey Bay Aquarium's "Seafood Watch" chart, to learn what species to buy or avoid.
- ✓ If you are pregnant, avoid eating large fish that may contain high levels of mercury, including shark, swordfish, king mackerel, and tilefish. The U.S. government also advises limiting consumption of albacore tuna.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- 🔗 **U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (www.fao.org/fi)** provides information on world fish stocks, global fisheries agreements, and aquaculture, and offers searchable databases on fisheries production and trade.
- 🔗 **Marine Stewardship Council (www.msc.org)** is a non-profit organization that certifies well-managed fisheries worldwide and helps consumers identify environmentally preferable seafood products through its MSC label.
- 🔗 **Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch Program (www.mbayaq.org/cr/seafoodwatch.asp)** aims to raise awareness about the importance of buying seafood from sustainable sources and offers a guide to help consumers make informed choices.
- 🔗 **Seafood Choices Alliance (www.seafoodchoices.org)** provides fishermen, chefs, and other seafood purveyors with a searchable database they can use to make sound choices about seafood, in order to provide the best options to their customers.
- 🔗 **FISHOnline (www.fishonline.org)** offers a searchable database and guide to sustainable seafood that covers over 60 types of fish commonly sold in the United Kingdom by fishmongers and supermarkets and in pubs and restaurants.
- 🔗 **Got Mercury? (www.gotmercury.org)** offers a calculator that allows consumers to individually gauge their mercury exposure from eating various types of seafood.