Fisheries

Both aquaculture (fish farming) and wild-catch fisheries can offer healthy and sustainable fish products. Many fish farmers are learning to raise fish in more sustainable ways by using water filtration systems and natural fish-feeds that won’t pollute the surrounding ecosystems. As populations of wild fish continue to decline, sustainable fish farming will play an important and necessary role for meeting the demands of our food supply.

Wild-catch fisheries are learning to fish “sustainably” as well. Nets are treated with antifouling chemicals to prevent water birds from being snared, and “drag nets” are avoided, which can cause long-term damage to the ocean floor.

The U.S. requires all fish and seafood be labeled with its country of origin and method of production (i.e., wild vs. farmed). However, these standards have not received the scrutiny of experts and there is no governing agency to enforce them.

Resources

U.S. Food and Drug Administration “What You Need to Know About Mercury in Fish and Shellfish.” www.epa.gov/sitewide/swguidance/fishshellfish/outreach/advice_index.cfm

The Environmental Working Group www.ewg.org

Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch www.mbayaq.org/cr/seafoodwatch.asp

Seafood Choices Alliance www.seafoodchoices.org

Provided by your food co-op

FLORIDA
Everglen Natural Foods 315 W Garden St, Pensacola
New Leaf Market 1235 Apalachee Pkwy Tallahassee
GEORGIA
Life Grocery & Cafe 1432 Russell Rd, Macon
Savannahs Natural Foods Market 467 Monterey Ave. N.E. Athens
KENTUCKY
Good Foods Market & Cafe 452-D Southside Dr, Lexington
MAINE
Blue Hill Co-op Community Market & Cafe 4 Ellsworth Rd., Blue Hill
Rising Tide Community Market 322 Main St, Damariscotta
MARYLAND
Silver Spring Co-op 8309 Greenbelt Rd.
Tabacon Park Co-op 201 North Ave, Takoma Park
The Common Market 3728 Urs St & B, Bethesda Pike
MASSACHUSETTS
Berkshire Co-op Market 42 Bridge St., Great Barrington
Green Foods Market 144 Main St., Greenfield
Harvest Co-op Markets 181 Main Ave., Cambridge
McCausland’s Market 3 Union St., Sunderland
River Valley Market 102 North King St., Northampton
Wild Oats Co-op Market 322 Main St., Williamsburg
NEW HAMPSHIRE
Concord Cooperative Market 24 South Main St., Concord
Hanover Co-op Food Store 45 South Main St., Hanover
Hanover Co-op Market 43 Lynn Rd., Hanover
Kearsarge Cooperative Greeter 52 Newport Rd., New London
Lebanon Co-op Food Store 12 Center’s Resource Park, Lebanon
NEW YORK
Abundance Cooperative Market 62 Marshall St., Red Hook
Flushing Food Cooperative 1415 Carroll Ave., Brooklyn
GreenStar Cooperative Market 315 N. Cass Ga, Utica
701 W Buffalo St., Utica
Honest Weight Food Co-op, Inc. 484 Congress Ave., Albany
Hungry Hollow Co-op 841 Cheeche Ridge Rd., Cheeche Ridge
Lexington Cooperative Market 807 Broadway Ave., Buffalo
Syracuse Real Food Co-op 616 Keasler Rd., Syracuse
NORTH CAROLINA
Chatham Marketplace 480 Hillsboro St., Pittsboro
Deep Roots Market 3728 Spring Garden St., Greensboro
French Broad Food Co-op 90 Biltmore Ave., Asheville
Hendersonville Community Co-op 715 Old Sportburg Rd., Hendersonville
Tidal Creek Cooperative Food Market 1321 Obadiah Dr. S.S., Wilmington
Weaver Street Market 1 M. Master St., Carrboro
716 Market St., Chapel Hill
328 South Clinton St., Hillsborough
Pennsylvania
East End Food Co-op 731 Erie Ave., Fitchburg
Weavers Way Co-op 156 Broadview Ave., Philadelphia 2107 72nd Ave., Philadelphia
Wholesome Foods Cooperative 1541 West 26th St, Erie
TEXAS
Three Rivers Market 917 North Broadway, Knoxville
VIRGINIA
Brattleboro Food Co-op 2 Main St., Brattleboro
City Market/Ocean River Co-op 82 N. Whiskey Ave., Burlington
Hunger Mountain Co-op 432 Bridge St., White River Junction
Brattleboro Natural Foods Co-op 335 River St. (Rt. 106), Springfield
Farmers Market 7516 Meade St., Pittsburgh
Weavers Way Co-op 228 South Churton St., Hillsborough
Weaver Street Market 101 E. Weaver St., Carrboro
5329 Oleander Dr., Ste. 100, Wilmington
Food Market 937 North Broadway, Knoxville
COMMUNITY CO-OPS
Food Co-op Market 315 W Garden St, Pensacola
Putney Food Co-op 8 Curly Brown Way
Springfield Food Co-op 135 Race St., S. Springfield
Co-op Food Store 201 N Main St., White River Junction
Upper Valley Food Co-op 179 N Main St., White River Junction
Vermont
Holyoke Natural Foods Co-op 137 Grove Road L.V., Holyoke
Make sure fish or seafood smells clean (no strong fishy odor) and feels firm to the touch. Buy a whole fish when possible and look for a clear, glistening surface.

Brown spots or blemishes can indicate the beginnings of decay. Watch for missing scales, which can indicate the fish was handled improperly before arriving at the store. Exposed flesh or fillets should be translucent.

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Eating fish and seafood can provide good nutrition with potential health benefits. At the same time, fisheries are surrounded with environmental issues, and high contaminants in some fish may raise concerns about health. How does a person make the right choice? The following can help one choose wisely, to minimize the negatives and maximize the positives of eating fish.

Health benefits

All fish and seafood is an excellent source of high-quality protein, vitamins, and minerals, without the saturated fat found in some meats. White-fleshed fish like cod, halibut, pollack, and bass are very low in fat, and therefore an ideal source of lean protein. Fattier fish found in cold waters such as mackerel, lake trout, herring, sardines, albacore tuna, and salmon are better sources of nutritionally essential omega-3 fats — eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA).

Research shows these fatty acids perform functional roles in the body to maintain cardiovascular health, warding off heart disease and stroke. Populations who regularly eat fatty fish have less death attributed to coronary heart disease.

The American Heart Association (AHA) recommends eating a variety of fish (preferably fatty) at least twice a week, in addition to plant sources of omega-3 fats, as a preventive measure against cardiovascular disease. Omega-3 fats also have potential roles in Alzheimer’s prevention and treatment of mild depression.

Food safety

Some types of fish may contain undesirable levels of environmental contaminants like mercury, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and dioxins. Incidentally, the fish that are typically high in contaminants are often the best sources of omega-3s. For many of us this raises the question of whether the benefits of fish consumption outweigh the risks.

PCBs and other dioxins are formed as a result of combustion processes such as burning waste and fuels (like wood, coal or oil); chlorine bleaching of pulp and paper; certain types of chemical manufacturing and processing; and other industrial processes. Dioxins can also be formed as a result of natural processes such as forest fires. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), dioxin levels in the United States have been declining for the last 30 years due to reductions in manmade sources. However, these compounds break down so slowly that some will still be in the environment many years from now.

The most common health effect seen in people exposed to large amounts of dioxin is a severe skin disease with acne-like lesions. This has typically been the result of exposure from accidents or contamination events. Additional effects from large exposures include skin rashes, skin discoloration, excessive body hair, and possibly mild liver damage. Other health effects in question are the risk of cancer in adults and developmental impacts during pregnancy and childhood.

Since dioxins and PCBs are stored in the fatty tissue of fish, you can reduce your risk of exposure by removing the skin and fat before cooking.

Mercury or methyl mercury can harm brain and nervous-system development. Most fish contain trace amounts of mercury since it occurs naturally in soil, rocks, streams, lakes, and oceans. However, the prevalence of mercury as an industrial byproduct has caused some fish to contain undesirable levels.

Mercury is highest in older, larger, predatory fish such as shark, swordfish, king mackerel, and tilefish. Eating a variety of fish, and eating fish lower on the food chain, can help you minimize exposure. Since mercury is distributed throughout the muscle, skinning and trimming the fish will not reduce exposure.

The EPA and FDA mercury guidelines

The risk from mercury in fish depends on the amount of fish eaten and level of mercury it may contain. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), for most people the risk from mercury by consuming fish and seafood is not a health concern. The American Heart Association’s view is that the benefits and risks of eating fish vary depending on a person’s stage of life. For example, in middle-aged and older men, and postmenopausal women, the cardiovascular benefits of eating fish far outweigh the risks within the established guidelines of the FDA and EPA.

However, because mercury can cause harm to developing nervous systems, pregnant/nursing women and children should monitor fish intake more closely.

The EPA and FDA recommend the following for pregnant/nursing women, and women who may become pregnant:

1. Eliminate predator fish from the diet such as shark, swordfish, king mackerel, and tilefish.

2. Limit consumption of other fish lower in mercury to an average of 12 ounces (two average meals) per week. Fish and seafood that are lower in mercury and commonly eaten include shrimp, canned light tuna, salmon, pollack, and catfish. Albacore ("white") tuna has more mercury than canned light tuna so limit albacore to six ounces (one average meal) per week.

3. Check local advisories about fish caught in local lakes, rivers, and coastal areas. If no advice is available, eat up to six ounces per week of the local fish, and don’t consume any other fish during the week.

For young children, follow the same recommendations above, but serve smaller portions.