

Sustainable Seafood

Our oceans, lakes, rivers and streams are increasingly affected by the seafood we choose to consume. The way in which we catch, farm and then consume the world's bounty of aqua life hangs in the balance. Fishermen, chefs and most importantly – consumers – are all beginning to realize the importance of education when it comes to what they fish for, sell and consume. It's become a global issue and there is mainstream effort to keep pressure on the subject.

The good news is that the pressure appears to be reaping some benefits. Chefs play a big role; they are the middlemen between the fishermen and the consumers.

Chefs have a large responsibility – to educate the consumer and to deliver to the consumer a product that is tasty, responsible and economical.

Keep Best Practices in Mind

To help chefs educate consumers, EarthEasy.com compiled a list that categorizes fish into three groups: Better Choices; Moderate Risk; and Best to Avoid. Now, keep in mind that such lists are only healthful recommendations; nothing is written in stone. Moderate consumption is key.

Some fisheries around the globe have remained healthy due to strong and sustainable management practices and responsible fishing or harvesting. There are success stories that help to explain the leaps and bounds that this movement has made in the past decade. Here are just two:

Shellfish Farming

Successful shellfish farming is one testament to good aquaculture practices at work. So, when you order shellfish at your favorite seafood restaurant, if it is farm raised, you may want to ask if it is grown on rack lines or ropes. This ensures that the habitat of the bottom of the estuaries does not get disturbed or destroyed.

Striped Bass

The almighty striped bass is making a comeback! Decades ago, it was unsafe to eat due to increasing concerns over polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB) or highly toxic industrial compounds in the meat. It was also under pressure because it was overfished. Today, this is one of the best managed Atlantic coast fish to date and is much safer to eat. It is also a great alternative to many other highly desirable fish such as Black Sea Bass, Rock Cod, Red Snapper, Grouper and Orange Roughy.

Seafood and Technology

There are many groups that recommend what seafood to buy and what to stay away from. No one seems to do a better job than The Monterey Bay Aquarium which produces the famous “Seafood Watch Pocket Guides.” These pocket guides will educate and inform you about fish that have been deemed: Best choices, good alternatives, avoid, and the super green list.

This pocket guide is a must for any person who loves their seafood. To get your own copy, visit: www.montereybayaquarium.org. You can download your own pocket guide and get on the road to becoming an educated seafood consumer.

Seafood Watch raises consumer awareness through their pocket guides, Web site, mobile applications and outreach efforts. They encourage restaurants, distributors and seafood purveyors to purchase from sustainable sources when possible.

Seafood Watch recommendations are science-based, peer reviewed, and use ecosystem-based criteria. Since 1999, they have distributed tens of millions of pocket guides. Their iPhone application has been downloaded more than 70,000 times, and they have close to 200 partners across North America, including the two largest food service companies in the U.S.

For chefs, there is also a buyer’s guide. This is an invaluable tool for professional chefs around the world. The site also has a “Culinary Chart of Alternatives.”

So, as you can see, saving the world’s fisheries is a combined effort that starts with making well-informed seafood choices.