

North Carolina Restaurants Weigh in on the Gulf Oil Spill Disaster

As of the writing of this article, the oil in the Gulf continues to pour forth. So, with this one event that could prove to be one of the world's largest environmental disasters ever, many people are asking how this will affect the nation's shrimp and oysters supply. Some restaurant owners are getting questions from their customers and they need to know how to address them.

According to Michael Massimi, a scientist at Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program, "So far, we're looking at fairly significant fishing closures, but still plenty of coastal estuary and good shrimping to the west of the spill."

But, people still want to know if these shrimp and oysters will be contaminated? Since, all seafood in the U.S. is subject to fairly strict inspections, it's very unlikely. In fact, most shrimp and oysters sold in restaurants today are primarily farm raised.

Asheville NC Seafood Restaurant Shares Thoughts

While the supply of fresh Gulf seafood is a concern, farm-raised is an option during these difficult times.

"The good thing about serving farm-raised shrimp," says George Baxevanis, owner of Fishermans' Quarters II, a family seafood restaurant in Asheville, NC, "is that we are able to keep the cost down for our customers. If we served wild shrimp the cost would probably rise about 20 percent, or more."

For instance, a few weeks ago, Earp's Seafood Market in Raleigh, NC sold oysters in the shell for \$40 per bushel; now, they're \$50; blame it on the oil spill.

Thus far, the spill's effect on restaurants and retailers is varied depending on who their suppliers are as well as how many suppliers they have for oysters and shrimp.

For instance, Wegmans, a supermarket chain, will get shrimp from the east coast of Florida starting in mid-May and off the coast of North Carolina as the season progresses. Wegmans also buys shrimp from Thailand and Vietnam.

What is certain is that the life cycle of shrimp in the Gulf will be affected by the spill. Shrimp reproduce and lay their eggs in the Gulf, which is now largely covered in dispersed and floating oil, and then move inshore to the estuaries, which are also at risk.

"However, most shrimp we eat comes from overseas, but Gulf shrimp does account for nearly 75 percent of domestic production," adds Baxevanis. Just check out the numbers below.

How Much Seafood Comes from the Gulf of Mexico?

The Gulf region has the largest landings of domestic shrimp. According to information from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, young, post-larvae shrimp species migrate in the spring from the estuaries to the Gulf, and impact to the shrimp in that region will increase as the oil slick approaches near-shore areas.

The below information is provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and reports on all seafood; all figures are for 2008:

- 1.27 billion: Pounds of seafood harvested by commercial fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico.
- 188.3 million: Pounds of shrimp produced in the Gulf.
- 4: Percentage of shrimp eaten by Americans that comes from Louisiana.
- 67: Percentage of the American oyster harvest that comes from the Gulf.
- 9: Percentage of the shrimp consumed by Americans that is harvested domestically.
- 24 million: Recreational fishing trips in the Gulf region.