



LOCAL SEAFOOD FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How are local Fish Regulated?

In 1976, the Fishery Conservation and Management Act (now known as the Magnuson Stevens Act) created eight regional fisheries management councils to develop management plans for their fisheries. The original intent of the Act was to limit fishing by foreign vessels in U.S. waters, and while it subsidized the growth of the U.S. fishing fleet, it did nothing to address overfishing and other resource conservation issues. Since then, Magnuson-Stevens has been reauthorized twice, each time increasing conservation measures, including mandates on annual catch limits and accountability measures to reduce bycatch and end overfishing. The U.S. now has some of the best managed fisheries in the world, although small-scale domestic fishermen continue to struggle as the seafood market expands globally, consolidation of fishing rights increases and imported farmed fish competes with domestic wild-caught fish. Tighter restrictions mean domestic fishermen are limited in how often they can fish and how much fish they can land.

What protocols do local fishermen follow?

U.S. fishermen must navigate a maze of regulations before arriving with fish at market. Fisheries management involves regulating when, where, how, and how much fishermen are allowed to catch. One way this is achieved is by setting a total allowable catch for each species and then distributing catch shares. NOAA Fisheries Service (NMFS) is the Federal agency responsible for fisheries management in the United States waters 3 to 200 miles offshore. Coastal states are responsible for inshore waters out to 3 miles off the coast. The 30 U.S. coastal states often manage their fisheries through interstate marine fisheries commissions and sometimes through state-specific management programs. NOAA plays a supportive and advisory role in the management of living marine resources in coastal areas under state jurisdiction, and the states generally operate in partnership with NOAA, attempting to make management as consistent and science-based as possible.

Apart from the Magnuson-Stevens Act, U.S. fisheries must comply with many other regulations. Some of these include the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA), the Administrative Procedures Act (APA), the Regulatory Flexibility Act (RFA), the Inter-jurisdictional Fisheries Act (IFA), the Atlantic Coastal Fisheries Cooperative Management Act (ACFCMA), and the National Marine Sanctuaries Act (NMSA). International agreements and organizations, such as the International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission, and the United Nation's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, also play roles in shaping management of U.S. fisheries.

How are Fishermen regulated by Greenmarket?

Greenmarket's grow-your-own policy applies to fishermen as well as farmers.

Greenmarket Fishermen must use their own boat, nets, pots, and traps in Mid-Atlantic waters. They must personally catch the majority of what they sell. If they do purchase fish, they can only purchase up to three species at a time and it must come from regional fishermen.

At Greenmarket, we back up these rules with routine inventories and inspections, so you can be assured that you will be getting only local seafood at your neighborhood Greenmarket.

Where do your Greenmarket fishermen come from?

All of the Greenmarket ocean fishermen are based out of Long Island. Their proximity to New York City means that fish arrives to market as fresh as it can be.

Fishermen that dock in the Long Island harbors are governed by the Mid Atlantic Management Council and primarily fish in that region or nearby.

Additionally, Greenmarket has two trout fishermen from upstate that practice aquaculture. These fishermen manage ponds on their land where they feed and raise the trout before catching them.

Are any of the fish I eat endangered?

First, one must make a distinction between "endangered" and "overfished." The former is very specific to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and their Red List of threatened and endangered species. When it comes to fish, "overfished" is more often the concern.

According to NOAA Fisheries Service, overfished means that a fish population is below a certain level determined by scientists to be sustainable.

Are there overfished species available at Greenmarket? While some of the species you see at market may be considered overfished by scientific standards, if it is being sold at the market, it was legally harvested under some of the strictest catch requirements in the world that are working to bring that fish population back to sustainable levels. If scientists determine a fish to be overfished, managers put regulations in place that restrict fishing and lower harvest. This reduces what fisherman can catch to a point that the population can rebound, but an appropriate amount may still be caught and sold at market.

Shopping from conventional sources is much more complicated because the majority of seafood sold in the US is imported. Some reports estimate that as much as 85% of the seafood consumed in the US is imported, largely from countries with little fisheries enforcement or aquaculture standards.

Is mercury contamination a real problem with seafood? And why are the fish contaminated?

Mercury contamination can be a cause for concern with seafood, especially for children and pregnant and nursing mothers, but there actually have been no documented cases in the U.S. of mercury poisoning from eating seafood, so it is important to weigh the real health benefits of making fish a regular part of your diet with potential risks.

Contaminant levels vary greatly among different types of fish, depending on the species location, size, age and diet. The FDA publishes a list of average concentrations of mercury in fish and shellfish at

www.cfsan.fda.gov/~frf/sea-mehq.html

FDA Recommendations on Seafood:

Fish and shellfish are an important part of a healthy diet. Fish and shellfish contain high-quality protein and other essential nutrients, are low in saturated fat, and contain omega-3 fatty acids. A well-balanced diet that includes a variety of fish and shellfish can contribute to heart health and children's proper growth and development. So, women and young children in particular should include fish or shellfish in their diets due to the many nutritional benefits.

However, nearly all fish and shellfish contain traces of mercury. For most people, the risk from mercury by eating fish and shellfish is not a health concern. Yet, some fish and shellfish contain higher levels of mercury that may harm an unborn baby or young child's developing nervous system. The risks from mercury in fish and shellfish depend on the amount of fish and shellfish eaten and the levels of mercury in the fish and shellfish. Therefore, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are advising women who may become pregnant, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and young children to avoid some types of fish (Shark, swordfish, King Mackerel, and tilefish) and eat fish and shellfish that are lower in mercury.

Unfortunately, little emphasis is placed on the actual source of the contamination. In many instances mercury comes from industrial sources, such as coal-fired power plants, which winds up in the water, accumulating in species that may then find their way onto our dinner plates. For more information on Mercury in the atmosphere, check the EPA website (<http://www.epa.gov/mercury/about.htm>).

Are some fishing methods better than others?

There are no perfect fishing methods, but some are better than others. Different fishing methods are usually defined by the “gear” or equipment used. The sustainability, however, is less dependent on the type of gear than how the gear is used. Below is a brief description of the different gear types commonly used:

Gill net: A curtain-like mesh net that is dropped into the water. The mesh size allows for the heads of fish to pass through the opening, but the gills get caught.

Long Line: These can either target on bottom fish like lingcod, halibut, pacific cod and sablefish, or pelagic fish like swordfish. They are a series of many short lines, each baited with a hook, suspended vertically from a main line that is dragged horizontally through the water. They can carry thousands of hooks and stretch for miles.

Purse Seine: This gear is typically used for catching open-sea schools of fish. The boats set a net, encircle a school of fish, and then the bottom of the net is drawn together.

Trawl: A vessel that drags a funnel-shaped net through water to harvest fish. The mesh size can be varied to catch a particular group of fish, but it is generally considered more indiscriminate than others because the net scoops up almost everything in its path.

Hook-and-Line: This is the kind of fishing most people are familiar with. The fishermen use a fishing pole and bait to target a variety of fish, ranging from open ocean swimmers, like tuna and mahi mahi, to bottom dwellers, like cod. Pole fishing is environmentally responsible and a good alternative to longlining. Pole fishermen have very low bycatch rates.

Traps/Pots: These are submerged wire or wood cages that attract fish with bait and hold them alive until fishermen return to haul in the catch. Traps and pots are usually placed on the ocean bottom, often to catch lobsters, crabs, shrimp, sablefish and Pacific cod. They generally have lower unintended catch and less sea floor impact than mobile gear like trawls.

Troll: A gear that catches fish by “trolling” bait or lures. Trollers often target Pacific salmon and have relatively low by-catch. Usually this means four to six main wire lines are fished at a time, each with a 50 lb. lead “cannon ball” weight and between eight to twelve nylon leaders spaced out along its length. Each nylon leader contains a lure or baited hook. Trollers come in a variety of lengths and styles, but can be largely recognized by the long mast poles that are used to relay the wire lines out into the water.

What is “bycatch?”

Bycatch refers to the marine life that is incidentally caught along with the targeted species. In large scale operations, it is often discarded dead, which many see as a very wasteful practice. On the other hand, bycatch can often also include other lesser-known species of fish that might not have been intentionally targeted, but that can be sold at market. A farmers market or a Community Supported Fishery (CSF) is a great way to market these items and prevent their waste.

In U.S. fisheries, managers, researchers, and fishermen are continually working to reduce bycatch. For fishermen, it takes time and energy away from catching the target species. Managers try to reduce bycatch and its impacts in a number of ways, such as working with fishermen and researchers to develop new gear that is more efficient in catching the target species, closing areas to fishing where or when the probability of bycatch is high, or even closing fisheries altogether to protect the non-target species.

What is “Discard?”

Discarded catch refers to the portion of the catch returned to the sea as a result of economic, legal, or personal considerations. In other words, when a fisherman catches more fish than his quotas allow, that fisherman will most-likely ‘discard’ all of the fish that went over his limit to avoid costly fines and penalties. Most of these fish are usually dead by the time they are returned to the ocean.

Are fish seasonal? Which ones are the most abundant?

We may not think of seafood as being seasonal, but like fruits and vegetables, it is. As wild creatures, fish have clear-cut, seasonal cycles of breeding, roaming and spawning that dictate where and when they can be caught. Some types of seafood are seasonal because of the fishing regulations in place.

Can I trust sustainable seafood certifications?

Many of these labels are tantamount to “bluewashing”—the seafood industry’s answer to “greenwashing.” Criticisms of organizations like the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) include the fact that it is difficult to remove a certification once it has been given and some of the fisheries they have certified are not sustainable. Others argue that emphasis should not be on consumers to make decisions because the information out there can be misleading and confusing. There is no consensus on what defines a sustainably managed fishery. The fact that every fishery is different leads to inconsistencies and confusion for consumers.

What can you do to support local and sustainable seafood?

- **Buy local!** Removing links in the supply chain and purchasing from regional sources makes it easier to know which boat the fish came off, how long the boat had been out, and how and where the fish were caught. Buying local also means that your fish will be fresher and taste better. Doing so helps support a more sustainable way of life and better jobs in traditional fishing communities. Eating local seafood means fishermen get a better return on less catch—which in turn means the ocean gets a break. Money spent locally tends to stay in the community. Buying from a community-based fisherman also ensures to some extent that you are eating fish that is "in season" rather than perpetuate the century-old demand for "any seafood, any time" regardless of the ecological consequences.
- **Eat fish that looks like fish!** Stay away from overly processed fish that is turned into squares or fingers or some other shape. And don't be afraid of whole, bone-in fish. Good cooks know that's where the flavor is!
- **Avoid fake or imitation seafood products.** Majority of fake seafood products comes from factory style fishing operations. Alaska Pollock is probably the number one fish that is on the market today in just about every form and shape. It's turned into surimi to make fake lobster or crab or some other fake seafood product. Incidentally, like herring, Alaska Pollock is an important part of the North Pacific's food web.
- **Eat wild seafood whenever possible.** Some shellfish and trout are farmed in operations that produce healthy animals and do not compromise the ecosystem in which they are grown. However, it is often difficult to get the information that will allow you to make an informed decision. With a few exceptions, shrimp is usually farmed in coastal areas of Asia and South/Central America where it destroys wetlands, introduces chemical pollution and disease, and may foster poor treatment of laborers. Most shrimp consumed in the U.S. is farm raised and imported. Also, for all farm-raised seafood, do not trust an "organic" label, as true standards are not yet developed. If you can't get the information you need, opt on the side of caution and go wild!
- **Be flexible and try diverse varieties**
- **Ask how, where, and when your fish was caught.** Doing so lets your seafood dealer or waiter or chef know you care about their buying choices.

For over 30 years GrowNYC's Greenmarket staff, volunteers and farmers have been working together to promote regional agriculture, preserve farmland and ensure a continuing supply of fresh, local produce for all New Yorkers. To learn more about GrowNYC's Greenmarket, gardening, recycling and education programs, visit www.growNYC.org.

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