

Gone Fishing

Farm raised or wild caught? there's no easy answer

I love shrimp, but buying them has been problematic in recent years. Most of what I see available is farm raised in a process called aquaculture. Some environmental groups say US-farmed shrimp are healthful and raised in a planet-friendly manner, but that we should avoid anything from Asia or South America. Yet other sources single out particular Asian or South American countries as having sound, sustainable aquaculture.

It's not surprising that many people assume any wild-caught sea creature is preferable to one raised on a "farm." But guides like the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch warn against all imported wild-caught shrimp and even some from areas in the States. They also promote farm-raised fish such as tilapia, as long as it comes from the US.

Seafood is a great source of protein, and most wild species provide the healthful fatty acids known as omega 3s. Farm-raised versions tend to be lower in omega 3s because their diets include vegetable matter instead of algae and aquatic plants. Wild salmon, for example, are more nutritious than farmed.

Many of the world's great fish species have been overfished, meaning they've been caught more quickly than they can reproduce on a long-term basis. Aquaculture will soon eclipse wild fisheries as the primary source of fish and shellfish worldwide, and that's a positive development in many countries. There are difficult choices ahead, so your best defense is to be informed about the source of your dinner.

Printable, pocket-sized versions of Seafood Watch are available on the Monterey Bay Aquarium's website (www.montereybayaquarium.org). You can download an app there as well. Visit the sites listed in our sidebar for additional seafood recommendations, information about fisheries and sustainability, and the state of the planet's oceans. *TFL*

Download the guide for your region. Select a Seafood Watch pocket guide at www.montereybayaquarium.org.

READ MORE

"Another Side of Tilapia, the Perfect Factory Fish" by Elisabeth Rosenthal, 5/2/11; "The Whitefish's Burden" by Paul Greenberg, 12/15/11, New York Times n "Is New England Cod Fishing Sustainable?" by Mark Conathan, www.thinkprogress.org, 2/13/12 n "Turning the Tide: The State of Seafood," www.montereybayaquarium.org, 2011

GET HOOKED ON THESE SITES

Blue Ocean Institute www.blueocean.org

Includes a comprehensive guide to seafood, with ratings based on abundance, habitat concerns, and catch methods or farming practices.

FishChoice www.fishchoice.com

Provides information about a wide range of seafood products, both farmed and wild caught.

FishWise www.fishwise.org

Offers purchasing guides, recipes, and information about the seafood industry.

Living Oceans Society www.livingoceans.org

Canada's largest marine conservation organization.

New England Aquarium www.neaq.org

Offers ocean-friendly seafood choices and information about sustainability and conservation.

Sustainable Fisheries Partnership www.sustainablefish.org

A watchdog organization that monitors fisheries and aquaculture for their environmental impact.