

Dining Out And Appraisal Of Farmed Fish



Spanish consumers who ate seabream and other fish prepared at restaurants tended to know more about farmed seafood in general.

Summary:

Consumers' lack of familiarity with aquaculture products and farm practices can cause aversion to farmed seafood. Surveys in Spain found that consumers who ate seafood at restaurants knew more about farmed species and ate more cultured seafood than those who only ate seafood at home. Inclusion of aquaculture products on restaurant menus helps increase the knowledge and consumption of farmed seafood by customers. Thus, the hospitality business is a useful channel to spread positive messages about aquaculture.

Dining out has been identified in several studies on seafood consumption as a significant factor causing differences in behavior and purchase decisions. In most cases, the influence from the hospitality industry in affecting consumers' habits has benefited the seafood industry, as in Australia, where different reports pointed to dining out as one of the key factors for the increased demand for seafood products.

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Consumption at restaurants includes stimuli of different natures beyond the meal component. Situational factors can be an influence in minimizing the negative attributes of fresh fish, such as bones and smell, and increasing the health expectancies of eating seafood. Dining out is strongly linked with consumers' lifestyles, which also influence food quality requirements and assessments. And although restaurateurs can hold different preferences, most are favorable to aquaculture products, mainly due to the seafood's freshness, attractive prices and stability in supply.

Consumer Surveys

Using data from face-to-face surveys conducted in Spain as part of a multiannual study on aquaculture consumption and appraisal funded by the Spanish Ministry of Fisheries, differences in knowledge and perceptions of farmed species were examined.

Two groups of consumers were asked in 2006 and 2007 whether they ate seafood at restaurants or exclusively at home.

Reflecting a significant association with respondents' incomes, 1,122 of the respondents consumed seafood outside their homes in 2006 and 1,070 in 2007, which accounted for 44.7 and 45.3% of the samples, respectively.

The questionnaires included variables related to knowledge and consumption of aquaculture species. Both topics were measured by asking the respondents about the species they knew were farmed and which they consumed. Respondents were coded as connoisseurs and/or consumers if they were able to answer regarding at least one species without committing errors. The number of species identified by each respondent provided an indicator of the level of that knowledge, assuming that a larger number indicated better information about fish farming and its products.

Consumer beliefs about aquaculture were measured in five areas, including the safety and sustainability of aquaculture methods, and potential benefits for health and environment resulting from consumption of farmed species. The last area was a wider assessment of aquaculture measured by the predisposition to recommend consumption of farmed species to third persons. Responses were reduced into a single factor index to score attitudes toward aquaculture.

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Table 1. Knowledge and consumption of farmed species.

	Knows Farmed Species (%)		Eats Farmed Species (%)	
	2006	2007	2006	2007
Home only	54.9	54.5	30.0	36.9
Restaurants	73.1	71.1	50.6	50.9

Table 2. Marginal expected means in the relationships between beliefs about aquaculture and place of consumption.

	95% Confidence Interval		
	Mean	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
2006			
Home only	-0.118	-0.173	-0.063
Home and Restaurant	0.146	0.087	0.204
Grand mean	0.014	-0.026	0.054
2007			
Home only	-0.120	-0.179	-0.061
Home and Restaurant	0.204	0.139	0.270
Grand mean	0.042	-0.002	0.086

Results

For respondents who were able to enumerate on at least one farmed species, results were the same for both groups surveyed. Knowledge of which farmed species were available in the marketplace was greater in those who ate seafood at restaurants rather than at home (Table 1). The eat-out respondents also knew about more species, indicating they retained better infor-

mation about aquaculture. Trout was the most popular species among those who ate seafood at home, while sea bream was the most frequent answer in the out-of-home group.

The differences related to consumption location affected not only the rates of knowledge, but also the consumption of farmed species. As expected, due to the advantages in price, freshness and consistent quality, consumption of aquaculture products was larger in restaurants than at home.

A significant relationship between the place of consumption and beliefs about aquaculture was also found when comparing both groups (Table 2). Consumers at restaurants had better scores when asked about the food safety of farmed species and sustainability of aquaculture methods. However, on attributes such as price, quality and safety for sea bream, seabass and turbot, consumers in both groups had similar scores.

Perspectives

Despite the fact that aquaculture is the only fishing technique that ensures full traceability, it is not the traditional way to produce seafood. The use of new technology in aquaculture can cause aversion to its products and concerns regarding health risks. Such factors can affect farmed seafood meal experiences more than convenience and related elements of lifestyle.

Restaurateurs include farmed species on their menus because they provide a non-seasonal supply of fresh fish under controlled quality and at a convenient price. That inclusion also increases the knowledge and consumption of aquaculture products by their customers. Thus, the hospitality business is a useful channel to spread positive messages about aquaculture to consumers.

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