

Why Local Seafood? The Environmental and Socio-economic Benefits of Eating Florida Seafood



photo credit: Bryan Fluech

Catching, cooking and eating fresh local seafood are ingrained traditions for many Floridians. In fact, Floridians, on average, consume more than twice the amount of seafood than the national average. During the past several years, however, the influx of lower-cost, imported seafood has displaced local seafood in many commercial markets along with the rich traditions associated with it. For example, in 2009 imports made up 84% of the seafood Americans consumed.

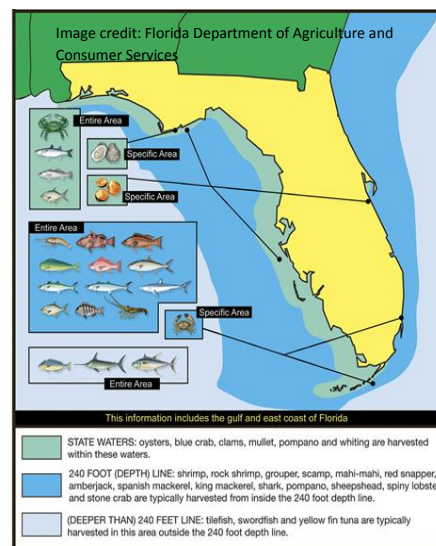
Concerns about product safety and growing local food movements, however, are compelling people to buy more locally-harvested seafood these days. Consumers increasingly want to know where their food comes from, how it was produced, and how it got to them. They also want fresh, high-quality affordable products that are tasty and nutritious. Floridians are rediscovering that there are many environmental and socio-economic benefits associated with purchasing and eating locally harvested seafood.

Variety

With over 80 different varieties, Florida ranks number one in the nation for commercially viable seafood products. It is one of the most competitive and active seafood markets in the world. Florida seafood is harvested (both *wild caught and aquaculture*) throughout the state on both coasts and in state and federal waters, and its commercial fishermen utilize a variety of gear/methods to cultivate their products.

Energy Conservation

A growing number of consumers are becoming more aware of their food's carbon footprint-how much energy is used to produce, process, and deliver the food they choose. Typically buying locally harvested seafood will significantly reduce one's carbon footprint as there are usually fewer steps involved in processing the product and it doesn't have to travel as far to reach the consumer. It is important to note though that even "locally" harvested seafood sometimes might be processed in other locations before reaching the consumer.



Sustainability

Florida fishermen are required to follow strict federal and state laws that help protect the long-term sustainability of domestic fisheries. The majority of fish and shellfish caught in U.S. federal waters are harvested under fishery management plans (FMPs) that must meet 10 National Standards to ensure healthy fish stocks are maintained, overfishing is eliminated, bycatch is minimized, and the long-term social-economic benefits to the nation are achieved. In addition, state and local regulations add further protection to ensure local fisheries remain sustainable for future generations.



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Nutrition and Safety

Seafood is an important part of a healthy, well-balanced diet. According to health experts, consuming fish just two times a week can significantly help to reduce the risk of heart-related death. Florida seafood, like all U.S. seafood (*both domestic and imported*) must follow protocols to ensure the safety and quality of the product. In addition, Florida-harvested products must adhere to local food safety regulations as well. Buying fresh seafood directly from reputable dealers makes the process from "sea to the table" more transparent, which has become a major concern for a lot of imported products. Florida seafood is not only safe and good for you, but delicious too!

Economic Impacts

Florida is a dynamic seafood producer. Commercial landings in 2009 equaled over 88 million pounds of seafood products with a dockside value of over \$145 million (FWRI 2009 Commercial Landings Data). Florida aquaculture producers, in 2007, sold an estimated \$3.5 million worth of catfish, hybrid striped bass, sturgeon and tilapia to local, state, national and international markets. Approximately 300 Florida-based businesses process seafood and another 1,100 businesses buy and sell seafood as dockside fish buyers, wholesalers, brokers and importers/exporters. Florida is also a huge market for seafood that is sold through a \$27 billion restaurant industry and 4,380 seafood retailers (independent and grocery chain stores) that satisfy 80 million visitors and 18 million residents. Florida's seafood industry has an economic impact of nearly \$1 billion annually and employs more than 30,000 people throughout the state.

Support of Local Fishing Communities



Commercial fishing is one of America's first industries, dating back hundreds of years. Florida's history is deep in an unmistakable connection to the coastal waterways and resources that surround it. Florida fishermen often come from multi-generational fishing families and carry on the tradition of providing high-quality fresh products to consumers. Despite dramatic changes to many of Florida's coastal communities in recent decades, several communities have maintained their traditional working waterfronts and continue to harvest, process and sell seafood. By investing in local fishermen, consumers help to strengthen their local community and region. They help create a stable marketplace for the fishermen, and help them feel more comfortable in making adjustments to improve the long-term sustainability of the fishery instead of focusing on short-term survival.

Tips For Purchasing Local Seafood

- **Buy from Reputable Vendors:** Just because someone is selling seafood out of a cooler at a road side stand, doesn't mean they are local or legitimate. Purchasing seafood from reputable licensed vendors helps to ensure products are harvested, processed and sold according to federal, state, and local regulations. To find where you can purchase Florida seafood products visit: <http://www.fl-seafood.com/consumers/wheretobuy.htm>
- **Talk to your Fish Mongers:** If you have questions/concerns about the products you are purchasing, talk to the people who are selling them to you. Legitimate fish mongers should be able to provide you with the details you are seeking. Ask them for suitable alternatives if you cannot find the product you looking for.
- **Choose a Variety of Seafood:** Health experts recommend eating a variety of seafood to maximize its multiple health benefits and mitigate potential risks. By choosing different types of seafood, you also help reduce pressure on highly targeted species as well. To locate specific Florida seafood products visit: <http://app1.florida-agriculture.com/FACTS/Consumer/>
- **Know your Seasons:** Being an informed consumer means knowing when and where fresh seafood is available. Just as Florida produce has "peak" seasons of availability, so does Florida seafood. Fishing regulations, for instance may prohibit the harvest of a product during certain times of the year, making it more difficult to find it fresh during these time periods (*most Florida seafood, however, is available frozen year round.*) The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services provides consumers with a helpful resource in identifying what times of the year fresh Florida seafood products are available: <http://www.fl-seafood.com/availability.htm>
- **Choose Suitable Alternatives:** In some cases it might not be possible to buy Florida-harvested seafood. The product might be out of season or unavailable, it could be too expensive, or it simply is not harvested in the area (i.e. salmon or sea scallops). When possible consider purchasing seafood products that are harvested regionally or in the U.S. to further support the long-term health and sustainability of domestic fisheries. To learn more about U.S seafood visit: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/fishwatch/>.

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