

LOCAL OR IMPORTED... WHY CARE?



EDUCATION

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Knowing your fish's country of origin can have a substantial impact on your health.

Today, a growing number of diners and food shoppers in the US are asking where their food comes from — particularly when it comes to meat. What were the animal's living conditions? What was it fed? Was it raised humanely? How was it packaged, and shipped?

This desire for more information has prompted meat suppliers to provide a host of labels and qualifiers meant to give consumers a more accurate answer to these questions. Unfortunately, parsing out the exact meaning of these labels can require some serious work, as they can be at best just plain confusing, and at worst deliberately misleading.

Fortunately, when it comes to buying fish **there's a simple way to cut through the clutter** and make sure you're buying safe, healthy, and fresh products.

FIRST STEP

Look for fish that was raised in the USA

This single qualifier comes with a wide range of benefits, with one quick caveat. Due to differences in costs of labor for packaging, a lot of companies have found it's cheaper to catch fish here in the US, then freeze them and send them to countries like China and India for packaging, then ship them back to sell to American consumers. So while you're buying a piece of fish with a label that says it was caught close to home, what you don't know is that **your fish may have already made several transoceanic voyages before reaching your plate**. This benefits the producer's bottom line, not the quality of the fish you're buying. That fact alone should make us all demand fish that was raised and packaged in the US, but the list of other reasons is quite a bit longer.

Why buy USA-raised fish?

Did you know that, even though the United States controls more ocean than any other country, **around 91% of the fish bought and sold here are imported?** Twenty years ago, that number was closer to 60%, but changes in shipping methods, safety regulations, and other costs associated with the business of selling fish to Americans has made it cheaper and easier to import.

As is often the case, simply seeking out the least expensive means of production and delivery greatly lowers the quality of the end product. As a consumer, this might not be as disconcerting when you're looking to buy a cheap coffee table, but when you want to find a Salmon fillet to feed your family, the imported label comes with a number of consequences ranging from unfortunate to dire.

REASON 1

Imported fish cannot be fresh

Freshness is measured in the distance the meat travels to get to you, and the time it takes to travel that distance. No matter how sophisticated freezing and shipping methods become, when it comes to freshness, there's no substitute for fish caught and processed close to where it's consumed.

REASON 2

Imported fish are generally less regulated

One of the most compelling reasons to seek out fish that was born and raised in the USA lies in the often vast **difference between food safety regulations here at home and abroad.** Unregulated foreign practices often lower the cost of raising/catching, processing, and shipping fish, which is advantageous if you're in the business of selling it. Less so if you're the consumer.

This lack of, or inconsistency in regulations can affect nearly everything about the fish...**from the health of the eggs, to the quality of the feed, to living conditions and harvesting methods.**

Perhaps most alarming of all is the **rampant use of preventative antibiotics** used in countries like China and India. Rather than adjusting their practices to prevent the arising and spread of disease, many companies have found it's cheaper to just douse the fish with massive amounts of antibiotics - the repercussions of which are far ranging and quite alarming.

REASON 3

Buying local fish is good for our economy and provides local jobs

In addition to the differences in quality and safety, another compelling reason to purchase fish raised in the USA is that it helps to **support your local economy.** The outsourcing of aquaculture to foreign countries means job loss here at home. So when you choose to buy locally, you're not only helping to feed yourself and your family fresher, healthier fish - your purchase is helping to keep jobs here in the US.

If you can believe it, we've only just scratched the surface here on why it's so important to make sure that you're fish was raised and processed in the USA. While it's not the ONLY rule to follow to keep you out of harm's way, it's a good first step. **Do your homework**, and get to know the USA-based farms, fishermen and retailers who sell you fish. And whether you're just looking for a delicious Steelhead fillet, or you're concerned about feeding yourself or your family the healthiest fish possible, or you want to help to support your local economy - you'll sleep better at night by looking for the label that indicates a 100% **product of the USA.**



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