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## Hooked on fish

### **Seafood demand puts too much pressure on tastiest species**

*By Karen Herzog of the Journal Sentinel*

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Once upon a time, lake perch ruled Milwaukee's beloved fish fry.

Then perch fisheries collapsed.

Ocean cod was plentiful and cheap. So it replaced perch as king.

Perch is still on many fish fry menus. But it usually costs more because it's primarily farm-raised, instead of fished from lakes and rivers.

Cod doesn't exactly have a lock on the throne.

A majority of cod tossed into local restaurant fryers comes from the Atlantic, and cod is among fish species considered in danger of being "overfished."

If cod's numbers continue to dwindle, its price likely will go up and another fish will take its place - perhaps wild-caught haddock or pollock, which are similar in flavor and more plentiful, or the upstart New Zealand hoki.

The fish fry tale is Milwaukee's most visible example of sustainable seafood issues at play, Craig S. Berg, aquarium and reptile curator for the Milwaukee County Zoo, said recently during a sustainable seafood seminar at the Zoofari Conference Center.

Sustainable seafood concerns go well beyond the Friday night fish fry.

"There are only so many fish in the sea," notes the Summer 2006 issue of The Ocean Conservancy's "Blue Planet" journal. "Unfortunately, we seem to be taking them out of the ocean as fast as possible."

The sustainable seafood movement seeks to reverse what experts consider to be a troubling trend.

Ocean health is declining, while more consumers are getting hooked on seafood, thanks to the well-publicized health benefits of fish.

Bon Appetit magazine proclaimed sustainable seafood the 2007 "topic of the year" in its January issue, encouraging consumers to make educated decisions about which fish they buy.

### **Consumers have power**

If seafood lovers become better informed, experts believe the world's seafood supply will be strengthened to meet demand, rather than be depleted by demand.

Avoiding fish that are in danger of being "overfished" and fish that are farmed or caught in ways that harm the environment or other animals are keys to a sustainable seafood supply, experts say.

"History has shown that when consumers consolidate their purchasing power, they can, quite rapidly, effect real change," the Blue Planet article concluded, noting that in the 1980s, consumer pressure led to a "dolphin-safe" tuna label program to help shoppers locate and buy tuna caught by methods that did not harm dolphins.

"A lot of diners are very interested and concerned, and ask good questions," said John Cosnotti, executive chef at Devon Seafood Grill in Bayshore Town Center, which features on average 10 species of seafood daily.

"We have a corporate stance that if there are problems with the supply of a certain fish, we take it off the menu," Cosnotti said. "We have to know exactly where it came from, and we go the extra mile to find that out."

### **No Chilean sea bass**

Plenty of other good fish in the sea are not widely known yet, Cosnotti said. "So we like to bring in new fish and expose people to them. That's the chef's job - to try to do nice specials with good fish not everyone knows about."

Australian barramundi, "baby barra," is an up-and-coming delicate and sweet-mild substitute for Chilean sea bass, which is considered overfished.

Shoppers can find barramundi at the St. Paul Fish Co. in the Milwaukee Public Market, company chef Brian Moran said, but not Chilean sea bass.

"Twelve or 13 years ago, Chilean sea bass became hot, and the price went up, up, up as the supply went down, down, down," Moran said. "We decided to make a statement and not carry it because the supply is depleted."

The Monterey Bay Aquarium and Shedd Aquarium have conservation programs aimed at educating consumers about smart seafood choices.

Both aquariums post extensive information on their Web sites and offer downloadable wallet cards for shoppers and diners to keep handy. (Visit [www.mbayaq.org/cr/seafoodwatch.asp](http://www.mbayaq.org/cr/seafoodwatch.asp) and [www.sheddaquarium.org/rightbite.html](http://www.sheddaquarium.org/rightbite.html). Also see [www.oceansalive.org](http://www.oceansalive.org), for info and recipes.)

A recent report in the journal Science says 29% of fish and shellfish populations have "collapsed."

If the declines continue, the report warns, there could be little sustainable seafood available by 2048.

"The study wasn't based on hard data but on trends," said Michelle Jost, manager of conservation programs at Shedd Aquarium. "I happen to agree if we continue with trends, all the lines are pointing down on the graph," Jost told the recent gathering in Milwaukee.

"But," Jost said, "I think the trends are reversible. The oceans are biodiverse enough."

Cosnotti, the chef, agreed. "As the number of people who eat fish on a regular basis increases the demand, certain fish will probably be gone by 2048. But other fish will likely replace them."

### **RECIPES**

This recipe, from "Rachael Ray 30-Minute Meals 2" (Lake Isle Press, 2003, \$16.95), gives wild salmon a spritz of citrus with refreshing, vibrant green beans on the side.

#### **Pan-Seared Salmon with Citrus Vinegar Glaze and Green Beans**

##### **Makes 4 servings**

4 wild salmon fillets (6 ounces each, skin removed)

Extra-virgin olive oil for brushing fish

Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

½ cup dry white wine  
½ cup balsamic vinegar  
2 teaspoons lemon juice  
2 tablespoons orange juice (a splash)  
2 tablespoons packed brown sugar  
½ teaspoon coarsely ground black pepper  
1 pound green beans, trimmed  
Orange and/or lemon rind slices

Preheat cast-iron pan or heavy-bottomed skillet over medium-high heat.

Brush salmon fillets with oil. Season with salt and pepper. Cook salmon until just cooked through, about 3 minutes on each side.

While salmon cooks, bring wine, vinegar, citrus juices and brown sugar to a boil in saucepan over high heat. Reduce glaze 4 to 5 minutes, until thickened. Remove from heat. Stir in the ½ teaspoon coarse pepper.

To a second skillet, add green beans, pieces of orange and/or lemon rind and ½ inch of water.

Bring to a boil, cover and cook 3 to 4 minutes. Drain beans, toss with a drizzle of oil, if desired, and season with salt and pepper.

Drizzle glaze over salmon fillets and serve with citrus green beans.

This recipe, from "Better Homes and Gardens Big Book of Healthy Family Dinners" (Meredith Books, 1999, \$24.95), sets a colorful salsa over trout.

### **Lake Trout with Corn Salsa**

#### **Makes 4 servings**

1 pound fresh or frozen lake trout or walleye fillets, ½ inch thick

1 cup frozen or fresh whole-kernel corn

¼ cup water

½ cup small cherry tomatoes (quartered)

½ cup finely chopped, peeled jicama

¼ cup snipped fresh cilantro or parsley

2 tablespoons lime juice

1 small fresh jalapeno pepper, seeded and finely chopped

Dash of salt

3 tablespoons fat-free Italian salad dressing

1 teaspoon chili powder

Preheat oven to 450 degrees.

Thaw fish, if frozen. Rinse fish; pat dry with paper towels. Cut into 4-serving size pieces.

In small saucepan, combine corn and water. Bring to a boil; reduce heat.

Simmer, covered, 5 minutes. Drain well.

For corn salsa, in medium serving bowl combine cooked corn, tomatoes, jicama, cilantro or parsley, lime juice, jalapeno pepper and salt.

Toss to combine. Set aside.

Coat 2-quart rectangular baking dish with vegetable oil spray. Stir together Italian salad dressing and chili powder; brush over fish.

Place fish in prepared baking dish. Tuck under any thin edges.

Bake fish, uncovered, in preheated oven 8 to 12 minutes or just until fish begins to flake easily with a fork. Serve fish with corn salsa.

This recipe, adapted from Marc Corgione of BLT Prime in New York City, is from Gourmet magazine and [www.epicurious.com](http://www.epicurious.com). The best choice is bay scallops that are farmed, rather than wild-caught, though wild-caught bay scallops are considered a "good alternative" if farmed scallops aren't available.

### **Bay Scallops and Applewood Bacon with Port Reduction**

Makes 6 hors d'oeuvre or first-course servings  
2 cups ruby Port wine

½ cup superfine granulated sugar

1½ teaspoons whole black peppercorns

2 fresh mint leaves, torn into bits

6 thin crosswise slices Applewood-smoked bacon (¼ pound), cut into thirds

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

1 tablespoon unsalted butter

18 farmed bay scallops ( 1/3 pound), tough muscle from side of each discarded if attached

Bring Port, superfine sugar, peppercorns and mint to a simmer in 2-quart saucepan over medium-low heat, stirring until sugar is dissolved.

Remove from heat, then carefully ignite Port with kitchen match, letting flames die down (this will take a few minutes).

Simmer over medium-low heat until sauce is thickened and reduced to about ½ cup, about 15 minutes. Transfer to a bowl and cool to warm.

Heat 12-inch heavy skillet over medium heat, then cook bacon until some fat has rendered and edges of bacon start to brown, about 1½ minutes per side. Transfer bacon to paper towels to drain.

Pat scallops dry and season with salt and pepper.

When bacon is cool enough to handle, wrap a piece of bacon around each scallop and pierce scallop with wooden pick to secure.

Heat oil and butter in cleaned skillet over medium-high heat until hot but not smoking, then sauté scallops, turning over once, until bacon is browned and scallops are opaque, about 5 minutes total.

Transfer to plate and serve with Port reduction for dipping.

**Note:** Scallops may be wrapped in bacon, but not sautéed, 4 hours ahead and chilled, covered. Sauté just before serving. Port reduction may be made 1 day ahead and chilled, covered. Reheat before serving.

Here's a recipe showcasing Dungeness crab, from The Plitt Co. Premium Seafood. The recipe is printed on a "Right Bite" informational card from the Shedd Aquarium's conservation program.

### **Dungeness Crab and Corn Pancakes**

#### **Makes 24 pancakes**

¾ cup flour

2 tablespoons baking powder

1 cup cornmeal

1 cup boiling water

2 tablespoons honey

2 eggs

1 cup milk

2 tablespoons melted butter

1 tablespoon chopped fresh chives

½ pound Dungeness crabmeat

1 cup creamed corn

Salt and pepper to taste

In medium mixing bowl, sift flour and baking powder together and set aside.

In separate bowl, combine cornmeal, boiling water and honey. Mix well and let cool.

In third bowl, lightly beat eggs, then add milk and melted butter. Combine with cornmeal mixture and then the flour. Stir just enough to combine; don't overmix. Fold in chives, crabmeat, corn, salt and pepper.

Preheat griddle to 400 degrees and pour on about 3 ounces of pancake batter.

When bubbles appear on top, flip pancakes and cook until done, 2 to 3 minutes per side.

This recipe, from Executive Chef John Cosnotti of Devon Seafood Grill in Bayshore Town Center, is an elegant dish showcasing mild tilapia. Serve it with wild rice or mashed potatoes.

### **Almond Encrusted Costa Rican Tilapia with Amaretto Butter Sauce**

#### **Makes 3 to 4 servings**

3 fillets (6 to 8 ounces each) tilapia

1 cup seasoned flour (see recipe)

1 cup buttermilk

2 cups almond crust (equal parts chopped almonds, Japanese bread crumbs and flour)

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

1 cup amaretto

1 tablespoon minced shallots

¼ cup white wine vinegar

1 cup whipping cream

2 cups (4 sticks) salted butter, cubed

Fresh berries for garnish (such as diced strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, blackberries)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Dredge tilapia in seasoned flour, then buttermilk, then almond crust. Place skillet with oil over medium heat. Place fillets in warm skillet and lightly brown each side. Place in preheated oven about 10 minutes, until crust is golden and fish flakes with a fork. Prepare almond butter sauce: Place amaretto, minced shallots and vinegar in saucepan over medium heat and bring to a boil. Reduce liquid almost all the way, about 3 to 4 minutes, add cream and reduce by half. Turn off burner and with a wire whip, add cubed butter, a couple of pieces at a time, until all butter is incorporated.

Place on bed of hot cooked wild rice or any starch you prefer, pouring about ¼ cup of the amaretto butter sauce on the bottom of each plate. Top fish with fresh berries.

**Seasoned flour:**

1 cup flour

1/8 teaspoon white pepper

1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper

1/8 teaspoon kosher salt

1/8 teaspoon garlic powder

1/8 teaspoon Old Bay seasoning

Place in small bowl and combine.