



DRAFT PROPOSED

Sustainable Seafood Commonly Asked Questions and Answers

For Retail and Wholesale Seafood Buyers and Merchandisers

The attached document is provided as a “preview” of what will be a free resource developed by **FMI’s Sustainable Seafood Working Group**, a member committee including 22 retail/wholesale companies whose role is to: *Engage individuals and companies with expertise to help our industry address sustainable seafood issues in a proactive and positive way. The group works to accomplish things for the industry that individual companies struggle to do alone.*

The final tool will be FREE and available on the FMI website. This resource was identified as something that could be beneficial to retail and wholesale seafood buyers as companies increasingly become interested in understanding more about sustainable seafood choices and opportunities.

We are making this preliminary draft available at the various sustainable seafood workshops at FMI’s Sustainability Summit so participants can have some background to help with dialogue and understanding as well as provide feedback to our working group.

A final FMI Seafood 101 Toolkit will be available to the industry this fall, which will also include a *Sustainable Seafood Commonly Asked Questions and Answers for Customers and Store Level Employees*. We have attached a sample of that project also in a preliminary draft to this paper – it only includes two questions at this point but will give you an idea of what we are developing which will be a much more comprehensive resource.

You may use information from this document if you wish, but until we have a final, approved FMI document posted, you may not refer to it as an FMI publication.

Special thanks to our sub-committee on Education who is currently completing development of this tool:

- Jeanne Colleluori, Communications and Media Specialist, Wegmans Food Markets Inc.
- Guy Pizzuti, Category Manager, Seafood, Publix Super Markets, Inc.
- Shawn McMurter, Director, Meat and Seafood, National Procurement, Sobeys, Inc.
- Sherry Casey, Senior Director, Nutrition and Regulatory Affairs, Loblaw Brands Limited
- Tracy Taylor, Senior Buyer, Ahold USA

This tool was also developed with outside expertise of consultants and other industry experts.

Buyer/Supplier FAQ's

The Concept of Sustainability

How can “Sustainable Seafood” be defined?

Sustainable seafood can be defined as seafood that is raised/harvested/caught in a manner that protects the population of the target species and its environment for future generations.

What makes something sustainable?

- As we take fish out of the ocean to feed ourselves, we need to make sure we leave enough behind for the fish to reproduce and for ocean ecosystems to flourish. We also need to ensure that the gear used to catch fish isn't negatively impacting ocean habitat or other marine wildlife and that fish farms aren't polluting surrounding areas or negatively impacting wild fish. This means the seafood can be produced without harming ocean ecosystems.
- Credible certification programs assess how well a fishery or a fish farm meets a set of sustainability criteria and can identify fisheries or farms that are sustainable or are moving toward sustainability. Some fisheries or farms are not certified but have been evaluated by a science-based conservation organization to determine their level of environmental sustainability. Others may be following sustainable practices but they have not been evaluated by an external group, or there may be too little information known about the impacts of the fishery or farm to determine the level of sustainability with confidence.
- There are three principles used to gauge the sustainability of wild fisheries: Health of the fishery population; quality of the management of that fishery and impact on the environment. The sustainability of farmed seafood production includes issues relating to site location, resource usage (feed, chemicals, etc.) and the effect of outputs such as waste on water quality.

Is all the seafood in your store sustainable?

- The short answer is no.
- *Company can then address how they plan to address the situation.*

Why can't I get certain kinds of seafood in your store?

- We work to understand what kinds of seafood our customers want and then work to ensure our suppliers can provide that seafood. The amount of available display space will also impact the variety offered by a location. Larger departments can offer more variety. Also keep in mind that seafood is like fruit, though; sometimes it is in season and sometimes it is out of season. *(Please insert any decisions made to not carry product or steps taken to source more sustainable options for a certain species)*

How do I know which choices are sustainable?

- There are many resources available to consumers to help them to determine if their seafood choices are sustainable.

- *Call out what your company is doing here, are you using eco-labels, information on country of origin, farmed or wild, catch method, species, etc.*
- *Can also call out relationships with NGO's to assist in navigating the waters.*

Why is seafood sustainability important?

- Ensuring the long term sustainability of our seafood resources is important to fishermen, fishing communities, seafood businesses, and consumers who want to continue to enjoy their favorite varieties of seafood over time. In addition, we have a responsibility to our future generations so that they may not only enjoy eating seafood but can also have continued access to the health benefits provided by seafood.
- Aquaculture is critical to the future supply of seafood. If it is not practiced sustainably, production levels can drop drastically if the consequences of poor management result in pollution, disease outbreaks or decreases in quality. In addition, if the farming environment is negatively impacted (poor water quality, loss of mangroves, etc.) production will ultimately suffer.

Do most consumers know much about seafood sustainability?

- Some consumers know the issue exists but very few have any detailed knowledge about seafood sustainability, however interest is growing. Research to date has shown that consumers are looking for more information on the health and sustainability of various food sources. Customers rely on retailers to do the right thing regarding sustainability. As we continue to work on our sustainability efforts, we will provide our consumers with the information they need to make informed decisions.
- Some elements of sustainability are important to shoppers. A 2008 consumer survey by The Hartman Group asked the importance of various phrases or labels when selecting food and beverages; the percentage of respondents stating sustainability was very important was 21 %.. Fresh was the highest rated response at 76 % followed by pesticide-free (48%), hormone-free (35%) and natural (32%). European consumers generally have greater understanding of seafood sustainability.

Resources

Where can I learn more?

See attached resource document.

How as a retailer can I sort through, or assist my customers in sorting through all the information?

- As a retailer or a consumer, it may prove difficult to sort through the information. Some FMI members have partnered with leading NGO's (non-governmental organizations) to assist them in this process. Many NGOs have programs that focus entirely on sustainable seafood. Some of these groups have come together to form the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions and those groups share information and meet regularly to discuss seafood sustainability. Some NGO's also attend regular state, regional, federal and international fishery management meetings to monitor stock assessments, fishing regulations, IUU

(Illegal, Unregulated, Unreported) status, fish farming, etc. By partnering with an NGO that works on seafood sustainability, a retailer can be provided with information from all of these sources relevant to their questions, their procurement needs, and their commitment to sustainability. FMI encourages retailers to request their customers to contact the retailer directly or ask questions of the retailers seafood associates since the retailer knows their products best, another resource are the websites listed on the attached resource document which will provide good general information for a consumer.

- If your company has a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program you should start with whoever leads that initiative. Many NGO's make representatives available for discussion of how to develop a sustainable seafood procurement program and will assist your company in sorting through the information.

Sustainability Issues

What are some of the key issues to be considered with aquaculture?

- There are a number of major impacts to be considered when evaluating aquaculture facilities and production. Some environmental impacts are feed usage, the amount of fish located in an individual farm, site location, chemical use and waste that affects water quality. These issues require further research to understand the impact and the corrective actions necessary to improve the situation.
- Demand for seafood continues to increase and it is unlikely that wild-caught seafood populations will be enough to meet that demand. Close to half of the world seafood supply comes from aquaculture and it is one important way to meet future demand for seafood. There are advancements in aquaculture technology that can reduce the impact on the ecosystem. Supporting producers that are using more environmentally responsible technologies is an important consideration when choosing farm-raised products.

Is sustainable seafood healthier?

- This is a complicated question. Although some of the more sustainable farm-raised species or fish lower in the food chain may be healthier, sustainable seafood as a whole cannot be linked to healthier seafood. There are several sustainable fisheries that are still impacted by health/safety concerns, i.e. mercury. And food safety issues can occur at any point along the processing and distribution chains.
- Some sustainability practices, particularly with aquaculture can lead to healthier cultured seafood. These include reduced use of antibiotics and chemicals in farmed seafood.
- In addition, sustainable seafood producers often emphasize high quality and reliability as well as sustainability. While we cannot guarantee that sustainable seafood is healthier, it is often some of the higher quality seafood available.
- The health benefits of seafood are not in dispute. In fact a newly released [FDA draft report](#) points to a conclusion that suggests the real health-related danger to Americans is not eating enough seafood. You can learn more about fish to avoid or minimize consumption of if you are an expecting mother, nursing mother or have children at <http://epa.gov/waterscience/fish/advice/index.html>, <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/securit/chem-chim/envIRON/mercur/cons-adv-etud-eng.php>

What are some of the key issues to be considered with wild fisheries?

- Scientists measure the health of wild fish stocks by determining if there are enough fish left to reproduce and keep the population sustainable. In the US, those stock assessments are used to develop fishery management plans that can include catch limits, fishing seasons, spawning closures, and gear restrictions. In the international arena, some fisheries are tightly regulated while others are not. Additional sustainability considerations include the impact of fishing gear on other species (including juveniles or other non-targeted fish species as well as turtles and marine mammals) and on the surrounding ecosystem (including important marine habitats).

What role do retailers play in seafood sustainability?

- Although retailers do not set fishery management policy, we do have the responsibility to educate ourselves about the issues.

Certification Standards and Ecolabels

What's the difference between a standard, a certification and an ecolabel?

- Standards are established rules; certification (usually 3rd party) is a judgment that those rules are being followed; and an ecolabel is a consumer-facing logo that a fishery is certified.

Should I consider certifications?

- Certifications can offer reassurance regarding product sustainability because certified fisheries and farms have passed a specific set of standards and criteria and meet the requirements for traceability.
- In some cases certifications are not available for important species and that doesn't necessarily mean that they are not sustainable. It simply means the fishery or fish farm has not been evaluated by an independent, third-party certifier. Credible certification can add value to a product because it provides traceability and independent assurance that the product meets specific sustainability criteria. In some cases, certified products may cost more to purchase.
- Many U.S. fisheries have been declared sustainable by the National Marine Fisheries Service (<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/fishwatch/>), but are yet to be certified. Some NGOs' conservation efforts, eco-label certifications, and international organic standards are more rigorous than NMFS.
- Many certified fisheries or fish farms are also subject to conditions that require further management improvements that must be met over time. It is, therefore, important to track certifications to ensure that products are maintaining their required conditions.

How many different certification programs are there for seafood?

- There are a growing number of certifications for both farmed and wild seafood. While the GAA and MSC standards are perhaps the best known, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) is coordinating the Aquaculture Dialogues which are developing standards for aquaculture, a European aquaculture standard called GlobalGap has also been developed. Friends of the Sea is certification program for wild and farmed seafood with a focus on small fisheries developed in Italy.
- While no U.S. standard has been finalized for organic seafood, the U.S. Department of Agriculture will soon be announcing standards for some farmed species such as trout, tilapia and shrimp. Other certifications for organic seafood are widely used in the international arena (including Naturland and BioSuisse). It should be noted that not all certification schemes look at the same things and may set different priorities or goals depending on the position of the standard setting body or species certified.
- ISEAL membership and FAO compliance are two important tools for identifying credible eco-certification programs. Retailers can use these tools as a screen for credible certification programs to help identify the best ecolabels.

Are the seafood cards a form of certification?

- The short answer is no. The seafood rating wallet cards usually classify species as red (avoid/unsustainable), yellow (good alternative/some concerns) and green (best choice) and are intended to help consumers make choices about the seafood they purchase. They are not certifications because they do not include auditing or traceability measures – instead they include information appropriate for consumer needs.
- The aquariums and NGOs that produce these lists or cards conduct detailed, scientific assessments to create these ratings. By utilizing the full scientific reports behind the card rankings, it is possible to differentiate the best actors within fisheries and, in many cases, account for particular product.
- While these lists can be useful for general guidance they are not detailed enough to differentiate between good fishing methods versus bad fishing methods within the same fishery nor do they account for the particular product sold by the retailer.

What is the most important certification for my store?

- No single certification will be available to meet the needs of a large grocery store. Retailers need to rely on a variety of sources of information – NGO partners, suppliers, governments, and their own internal policies and knowledge – to assess the health and sustainability of their products. Developing an internal sustainable seafood sourcing policy is an important first step for your company. It will establish guidelines for the products you source. Then

you can work with NGO partners, your suppliers, etc. to identify products that are evaluated or certified to meet your guidelines.

The NGO Landscape

Why do some NGOs differ on what is sustainable?

- Like retailers, NGOs have different priorities and different approaches on how to achieve them. Although NGO views on sustainability reflect those differences, there is consensus that sustainability is important. Many NGOs recognize that different viewpoints can create confusion for retailers. To address this challenge, 15 leading NGOs create the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions. These organizations are committed to a common goal and have strong consensus about the key impacts of fishing and aquaculture on the environment. They offer a range of approaches for addressing those impacts and are working together to provide clear and consistent guidance so that companies can move forward with sustainable seafood policies.
- The majority of NGO's have fostered positive relationships through their work with fisheries, industry and/or retailers; however, there are a small number of NGO's who's tactics and requests may appear unreasonable. Although, the ultimate goal of this small number of NGO's is sustainability, their requests and tactics may not suit the needs of the industry at large.

What do I look for in an NGO partnership?

- Staying up to date on all aspects of sustainable seafood could easily be a full time job for a retailer. Choosing a partner who understands your business demands and is willing to provide timely and relevant updates, information, education and guidance is the key. Similarly, it is important that an NGO understand the retailer's internal business goals and approach to seafood and is willing to work with them to develop sourcing strategies that balance business needs. If you are considering an NGO partnership, look for reliable, responsible, respected partners, with a proven track record, who understand business needs and share your conservation and sustainability goals.

How do I negotiate a partnership with an NGO?

- Look for reliable, responsible, respected partners, with a proven track record, who understand business needs and share your conservation and sustainability goals. Have an in-depth meeting with potential partners to discuss your needs and goals. Small projects can be a good way to test the waters and evaluate compatibility. As you identify a good candidate for a closer partnership, request a proposal from that organization that addresses the specific needs of the retailer. The proposal should spell out the terms of reference, the time frame and the associated costs. Once agreement has been reached a memorandum of understanding (MOU) can be a useful tool to remind both parties of what is expected of them in the partnership.

What does it cost?

- While most NGOs are not-for-profit organizations, some have established mechanisms for charging for their services to partly or fully defray their costs. Other NGOs can use funding through grants and can provide specific services at no cost.
- Credible certification can add value to a product because it provides traceability and independent assurance that the product meets specific sustainability criteria. In some cases, certified products may cost more to purchase.

How do I know the NGO won't change the rules later on?

- NGOs and others' definitions and criteria for sustainability are likely to evolve over time as new science emerges and business innovation occurs. Continuous progress – on the part of the conservation community and companies that buy and sell seafood – is what's needed to protect the long-term viability of the seafood supply. Sustainability is a journey and not a destination – a strong retailer-NGO partnership will incorporate evolution over time to keep pace with science and meet the retailer's needs.

Sustainable Seafood Sourcing/Procurement

Should a company have a sustainable seafood purchasing policy?

- Yes, because it will demonstrate your commitment to sourcing sustainable seafood to associates, consumers, and suppliers in a clear and consistent manner. It frames how the company will buy seafood into the future, can be a way to reduce risks to seafood companies, and provides opportunities to increase the value of the company. Flexibility should be built in to any sourcing policy to accommodate changes over time.
- There are compelling business reasons for the development of a sustainable seafood purchasing policy. First and foremost, retailers need to know where their seafood is coming from and that it was produced in a legal manner. By definition, a sustainable seafood purchasing policy contributes to a continuity of supply by helping make sure that the resource does not become depleted due to overfishing or unsustainable aquaculture practices. Through sourcing policies, retailers can also leverage their buying power to improve unsustainable fisheries and increase the future supply of sustainable seafood. A sustainable seafood purchasing policy will also require increased traceability which offers another level of assurance to retailer buyers and their customers.

How do I talk to my associates at the seafood counter about seafood sustainability?

- Associates at the seafood counter should have a clear understanding of the company's commitment and definition of sustainability so that they can explain it to consumers. They are on the front line in responding to customers. Their knowledge and ability to answer questions is a direct reflection on our commitment to sustainability and help to promote strong seafood sales.

- Incorporating the issues involved in seafood sustainability (positive message points that reflect actions you have taken to improve the sustainability of your seafood) into existing training programs is also important. A basic understanding of key elements (positive message points that reflect actions you have taken to improve the sustainability of your seafood) like the impacts of fishing gear types, farming methods, and stock assessments will help them answer most concerns. Several NGOs offer training programs with supporting materials for staff and customers.

How do I talk to my suppliers about sustainable seafood?

- It is very important to have an ongoing dialogue with seafood suppliers about sustainability. Much like internal associates, they should (or should be encouraged to) fully understand and share the retailer's commitment to sustainability. Their engagement and expertise will be vitally important as retailers work to assess the sustainability of all seafood products and so they should be involved in the process from the very beginning as partners on the journey to sustainability. No business review meetings should be conducted without sustainability on the agenda. Our suppliers will play a key role in keeping us informed and working to drive change and improvements to the various wild fisheries and aquaculture operations. Because of this, retailers should encourage or even require suppliers to make their own credible commitments to sustainable seafood (procurement, transparency of information about products, traceability, etc.)

What does sustainable seafood mean to me?

- Sustainable seafood can be defined as seafood that is raised/harvested/caught in a manner that protects the population of the target species and its environment for future generations.

I've heard that I shouldn't buy <insert item such as sea bass here> because there's not enough of it in the oceans. Why do you carry it in your stores? (below are some possible ways to answer this question depending on what your company is doing)

- As retailers, we are in the business of meeting consumer demand. We offer those products to meet the demand of consumers.
- We have identified a source for this product that is responsibly harvested/produced (example: MSC-certified Chilean Sea Bass)
- We are continuing to sell PRODUCT because we are actively engaged with the fishery to improve its environmental performance.
- Our sustainability policy does not allow us to offer such products because we have committed to XXXXX. You might try PRODUCT as a substitute that has similar flavor and is sustainable.
- *What is your company doing to address the issues on these hot button species.? How does that help improve things..*

All wild caught seafood is sustainable, right?

- Not necessarily. Decades of overfishing have left many wild fish populations struggling. In 2007, the US Congress updated our nation's fishery laws and mandated that regional fishery management councils have science based regulations in place by 2011 to end

overfishing in all US fisheries. Worldwide, fisheries management differs greatly country by country and some fish populations span the seas and must be managed by international coalitions that have also struggled to manage fisheries. In recent years, there have been an increasing number of partnerships between NGOs, industry groups, and governments to address the long term sustainability of wild fish stocks.

- Avoiding unsustainable seafood is not always the right solution, especially if good progress towards sustainability is occurring. While many U.S. fishery stocks are generally in good shape or recovering, the same cannot be said for fishing in many other countries where stock status may be unknown, regulatory oversight is lacking and fishing practices are often illegal and/or destructive to the environment. If the target fishery stock is depleted, the fishing effort must be reduced to a level that allows for rebuilding. Engaging in some of those fisheries to help improve performance can be a positive step. However, by seeking out the most sustainable sources, retailers can make a huge impact by doing business with fishermen and suppliers who are committed to sustainable fishing practices.

I've heard bad things about farm-raised seafood. Can that really be sustainable?

- Aquaculture can and is sustainable if proper controls are put in place. If we are to continue to meet the growing demand for healthy, nutritious seafood we will need a viable aquaculture industry. The development of standards for aquaculture practices by organizations such as the World Wildlife Fund and the Global Aquaculture Alliance are helping to insure that sustainability considerations are fundamental to fish farming operations.
- In March 2009 the United Nations reported that aquaculture accounted for 47 percent of the world's fish food supply in 2006. Aquaculture is an essential part of the sustainability equation. What's more, fish raised on farms can provide the same health benefits as wild capture fish and in some cases more. We recognize that aquaculture is critical to the future supply of seafood. One way to address this is by working with your suppliers to improve their processes so that aquaculture for all species becomes sustainable. We must note that this is a young industry (35 years) that has made tremendous strides towards improvement. With groups such as the Aquaculture Dialogues and the GAA, this commitment to sustainability will be achieved.
- Some aquaculture practices can put a great deal of stress on the local environment due to elements like pollution and escapes of farm raised species into local waters. The type of species raised in the farm also impacts sustainability; seafood that requires little or no wild fish in their feed is often a more sustainable choice. There are several ENGOs (environmental non-government organizations, these groups work on conservation efforts) that are working with the aquaculture industries to help address those concerns. These efforts will strengthen the aquaculture industry in hopes that it can co-exist with the fishing industry to help supply the world demand for seafood.

Is sustainable seafood more expensive?

- The market sets the price of commodities such as seafood and is driven by supply and demand. With seafood a great number of variables go into the price equation including quotas, seasonality, fuel prices, weather, etc.
- Studies have shown that better fish farming practices may lower production costs as less feed is wasted, use of antibiotics is restricted and water quality is improved. In other cases, sustainability can save money as environmental degradation may add to operational costs and lower production
- There is a cost involved with certifying fisheries and aquaculture operations. This cost is spread through the supply chain. Credible certification can add value to a product because it provides traceability and independent assurance that the product meets specific sustainability criteria. In some cases, certified products may cost more to purchase.

DRAFT PROPOSED SAMPLE FOR ILLUSTRATION USE

SAMPLE Questions for Customer/Employee Sustainable Seafood 101

(this document is in development and will be much more comprehensive when released in fall of 2010)

Why is seafood sustainability important?

- Catching and raising seafood responsibly helps protect our food supply for future generations and helps to maintain healthy oceans and fresh waterways. It also protects jobs and the livelihood of fishermen, fish farmers, fishing communities, and seafood businesses.

How are farm-raised sustainable fish produced and harvested?

- The methods are determined by the type of operation and the species of fish. The most common forms are with man-made ponds on land and nets in the ocean. For any fish farm to be sustainable, there needs to be a balance between the amount of fish in the confined area (based on site location), methods to minimize the risk of escapes, appropriate use of feed (with sustainable ingredients) and medicines, among other criteria to minimize impacts on the surrounding environment.