



Finfish, Shellfish, Crustaceans & Cephalopods FAQ

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What is sustainable seafood?

Sustainable seafood generally refers to finfish or shellfish harvested in a manner that minimizes harm to people, the environment, and is economically viable. This means seafood is responsibly caught in ways that ensure healthy and resilient aquatic ecosystems. Each ecosystem is unique, but practices that can achieve this goal often focus on minimizing bycatch (capture of unintended species), avoiding overfishing, preserving habitat, establishing strong management standards, and considering climate change impacts. It also means supporting fishing operations that don't engage in illegal fishing or human rights abuses and support strong traceability of products and supply chain transparency. PCC Community Markets is a Pacific Northwest retailer, where seafood is a point of pride, so sustainability also means sourcing locally as much as possible to support our local economy.

How does PCC ensure its seafood is sustainable?

PCC is an official partner of the Monterey Bay Aquarium [Seafood Watch](#)® program. This means that our fresh and frozen whole seafood is responsibly sourced and rated a Green Best Choice or Yellow Good Alternative by Seafood Watch, eco-certified to a standard recognized by Seafood Watch (like Marine Stewardship Council), or independently evaluated to ensure it meets Seafood Watch sustainability goals. We work with our partners at Seafood Watch to evaluate sourcing annually and ensure compliance with this commitment.

Beyond this partnership and commitment, PCC also established its own independent [seafood standards](#) to address additional areas of concern, such as toxic contamination and local marine ecosystem conservation. Example of our independent sustainability efforts include a prohibition of the use of pesticides on farmed finfish and shellfish, a ban on selling carnivorous species or fish raised in net pens, and the creation of our very own [PCC Chinook Sourcing Standard](#).

What is Seafood Watch?

Seafood Watch is a program developed by the Monterey Bay Aquarium, located in Monterey, California. It began in 1999 to help guide consumers and businesses towards the most sustainable wild caught and farmed seafood options available. The Seafood Watch program educates consumers, creates partnerships with groups along supply chains, and advocates for policies to improve seafood traceability, end illegal fishing, and protect at-risk marine species. It has become one of the most well respected and recognized recommendation programs for sustainable seafood.

What is the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)?

The [Marine Stewardship Council](#) (MSC) is an international organization with a mission to end overfishing and protect the world's oceans for future generations. MSC works with retailers, fisheries, restaurants, and other companies to address fishing practices, fraud, and traceability of seafood through a standard and voluntary certification of whole fisheries. It is open to all fisheries of marine or freshwater species in the wild; this includes most types of finfish and shellfish. They are one of the most widely recognized sustainable seafood certifications and MSC-certified products bear their logo on the shelf. While PCC is not an MSC-certified retailer, Seafood Watch (SFW) recognizes most MSC-certified sources as equivalent to at least their Yellow Good Alternative rating and considers them to be part of a strong commitment to responsible seafood. As part of our policy, PCC sources both seafood that is Green or Yellow-rated by Seafood Watch and from eco-certified sources, such as MSC.

Is sustainable seafood healthier than unsustainably caught options?

Choosing sustainable seafood is important for the health of the planet and our marine ecosystems, however, it does not guarantee any additional benefits in terms of human nutrition. The one exception would be seafood caught illegally from a location that was off-limits for fishing due to extreme levels of contamination. However, if you are purchasing fish from a reputable retailer, like PCC, this should not be a risk.

That said, PCC does care about setting standards that reduce consumer exposure to heavy metals and other toxic substances, such as pesticides. This is why we established our own independent standard that prohibits the sale of species known to be high in mercury or other contaminants and we will not accept seafood processed with any toxic chemicals used to prevent thaw drip or preserve color. We also prohibit the use of pesticides on farmed finfish and shellfish that we sell.

How does PCC manage seafood fraud?

Seafood fraud can include mislabeled seafood and seafood caught illegally. PCC mitigates these risks in multiple ways. First, we work with Seafood Watch to ensure sufficient documentation is provided by our suppliers to verify that our sourcing standards are being met. This could include the confirmation of Chain of Custody numbers when available or performing additional due diligence to confirm the source of our seafood. Second, our merchandisers develop long-term partnerships with trusted distributors and direct suppliers who are transparent about the source of their seafood. We will not sell seafood that comes from an unreliable source or supplier. Finally, PCC tries to source primarily from the United States, and ideally from our own bountiful seafood industry in the Pacific Northwest; this mitigates risk of fraud because supply chains are likely to be shorter, more transparent, and easier to verify.

What are the benefits of wild-caught seafood over farmed seafood?

While some aquaculture operations have developed sustainable systems, the majority of farmed seafood has negative health and environmental concerns. Studies show that farmed seafood contains higher levels of PCBs, a toxic chemical that can accumulate in fish, when compared to their wild-caught counterparts.¹ Farmed fish is also less nutritious than wild-caught fish, containing lower levels of protein, a lower ratio of omega-3 to omega-6 fatty acids, and higher levels of fat, which is where many toxic

chemicals frequently accumulate.ⁱⁱ Because many aquaculture facilities are often net pen operations (meaning that the fish are raised in the open water with only a net to separate them), there can be significant impacts on their surrounding ecosystems similar to the impacts of other industrial livestock operations – waste, pesticides runoff, and disease.

Atlantic salmon raised in net pens in the Pacific Northwest and Canada have posed a threat to native species in the region for many years, not only because the operations are sources of disease and pollution, but also because even under the strictest conditions, accidental escapements are inevitable. [PCC has advocated](#) against raising these invasive species in the region and in 2018, Washington State passed legislation that would prohibit net pens in Puget Sound starting in 2022.ⁱⁱⁱ To learn more, see PCC's *Sound Consumer* articles, [Saving Wild Salmon](#) and [Aquaculture Awash in Controversy](#). For closed-loop aquaculture systems (those not raised in open water) there can still be concerns over waste-water quality, energy consumption to run and feed the facilities, and use of pesticides. Because of these concerns, we evaluate closed-loop operations on a case-by-case basis.

Why doesn't PCC have organic seafood?

Whether seafood, wild-caught or farmed, can be certified organic has been a subject of debate since the inception of the USDA organic program. In the marketplace, the seafood you see marked “organic” is certified through European organic schemes and allowed to be sold as organic through international organic equivalency agreements. However, neither wild-caught fish from US waters nor US-farmed fish can be certified organic as there are no USDA organic regulations for these products.

Should these regulations be developed, PCC does not support organic certification of farmed fish that are raised in open water net pens because of the potential ecological impacts. There are land-based aquaculture operations that are considered closed-loop for which organic certification could be viable, however, there are a number of factors that should be considered in terms of how the inputs and operation would fit within the organic standards outlined in the federal law for organic certification, known as the Organic Foods Production Act (OFPA). For example, farmed fish would be required (like all other livestock) to consume organic feed and yet most in the organic community, including PCC, oppose the use of wild-caught fish as feeding stock because of the strain this could place on already stressed stocks and ecosystems. To learn more about this complex topic, see our *Sound Consumer* article, [Can Farmed Fish be Organic?](#) Also, see the Cornucopia Institute's article, [Why Don't you see Organically Labelled Fish?](#)

On the topic of wild-caught seafood being certified organic, there are also numerous complexities to consider whether to support the development of an organic certification program. PCC does believe that the organic program needs to develop stronger regulations to address the harvesting impacts of many of the products already used in certified organic production or products, such as seaweed, fish oils, and other aquatic-based crop inputs and this requires taking a look at the broader aquatic ecosystem. We also see the potential, if done with a protective and conservationist approach, for organic certification to elevate sustainability certification and health monitoring for wild-caught seafood. However, PCC also sees the potential for serious and detrimental abuses and impacts if organic certification of wild-caught fish does not achieve the necessary level of protective standards and framework. For these reasons, we continue to monitor emerging discussions and development of organic regulations for wild-caught seafood and engage in opportunities to advocate for the highest level of protection and conservation standards possible.

Given the threats to fisheries and aquatic ecosystems, shouldn't we just avoid seafood completely?

There are occasions where it is necessary to pause harvesting in a fishery to allow for population recovery, and some environmental advocates assert that the only way to guarantee stock recovery is to end commercial fishing. There are also those who do not advocate for this approach because there is concern that by removing seafood from people's plates, they will not have a vested interest to protect the resource and fishing communities will suffer. The theory is that people will be more motivated to protect a resource if they benefit from doing so. Additionally, while [overfishing is a major concern](#), especially for open-ocean fisheries, it is not always the root cause for a struggling fishery—climate change, habitat destruction, plastic pollution, and chemical pollution are also critical [threats to aquatic ecosystems](#).

PCC supports continuing to harvest from sustainable sources where overfishing is not a key threat and avoiding fishing when over-harvesting is the primary threat to a fishery. As a retailer, PCC is dedicated to offering the best options for seafood that do not contribute to overfishing and advocates for policies and actions that protect our oceans, lakes, and rivers.

Why don't you carry some items year-round, like Dungeness crab?

PCC is able to stock some items, like salmon, all year-round because we can source from different locations. A lot of seafood actually has seasons, similar to fresh produce. Because of PCC's high standards and careful sourcing, we can only offer some items when they are in season and the fisheries are operating. Dungeness crab is a good example of a local item we sell when it is fresh and in season. While PCC tries to offer fresh and in-season species the majority of the time, there are many fish species that freeze well and by selling previously frozen fish, we're able to stock our seafood case with some species even when they are not in season.

ⁱ Physicians for Social Responsibility, "Healthy Fish, Healthy Families," Fact Sheet, May 2018, <https://www.psr.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/healthy-fish-healthy-families.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ Center for Food Safety, "Aquaculture: Human Health Risks," Center for Food Safety, accessed March 8, 2021, <https://www.centerforfoodsafety.org/issues/312/aquaculture/human-health-risks>.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Ecology Boosts Water Quality Protections at Existing Atlantic Salmon Net Pens," Washington State Department of Ecology, December 27, 2018, <https://ecology.wa.gov/About-us/Get-to-know-us/News/2018/Atlantic-Salmon-net-pen-permits>.