

HOW TO TELL THE SOURCING STORY

Sustainability concerns with seafood are not new—operators have been increasingly offering sustainable seafood on their menus for the past several years. Previously, the most sustainable seafood was thought to be wild-caught, but a growing number of operators are turning to aquaculture, or farmed fish, to expand their earth-friendly menu offerings. As consumer interest in sustainable foods as well as environmentally friendly practices increases, operators may be looking for ways to more effectively call out and market their involvement in these practices.

According to Technomic's *2017 Center of the Plate: Seafood & Vegetarian* report, 67% of consumers say they'd be more likely to buy seafood that is sustainable (with 57% of them willing to pay more for it)—which means that the opportunity for operators is big.

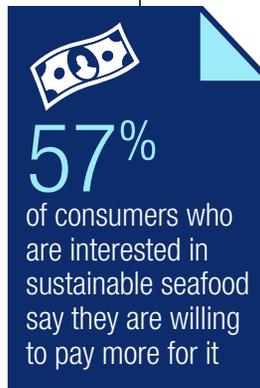
A look at what's preventing operators from offering sustainable food, as well as investigating effective ways to market it, can be illuminating when making decisions on how to grow and expand menus, including whether to start offering sustainable foods.

Challenges of offering sustainable seafood

Right now, about half of restaurant operators (47%) menu sustainable seafood, according to data from a proprietary Technomic study conducted for High Liner Foods. For those who offer sustainable seafood, their number one challenge in

doing so is the higher cost of the product. To make up for that cost, some operators have had to raise prices on their menus. However, 57% of consumers who are interested in sustainable seafood say they are willing to pay more for it, so operators shouldn't be intimidated by having to raise prices.

Other challenges that operators noted about menuing sustainable seafood include product availability and limitations in supplier selection, but as aquaculture becomes more common, suppliers are likely to expand their sustainable seafood offerings.



Appealing to consumers with aquaculture

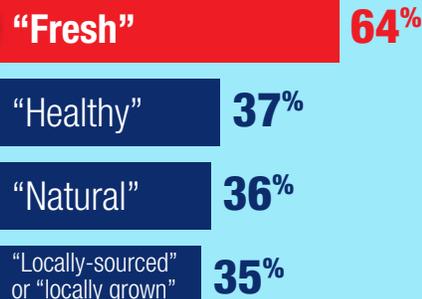
Diners who are looking for sustainable foods aren't necessarily looking only for sustainable seafood. Local produce and hormone-free/grass-fed beef are two other areas where operators can boost their sustainable offerings. But when it comes to seafood, it's important that consumers (and operators) are in the know as far as sustainability best practices. For instance, while it used to be thought that wild caught seafood was the more sustainable option, overfishing concerns have led to farming being a viable substitute for some species of fish and shellfish.

Fifty-six percent of operators say they think progress is being made in seafood sustainability, and part of that could have something to



of operators believe that aquaculture fish can be a sustainable solution for overfishing

BUZZWORDS ON MENUS:



do with aquaculture. What's more, according to Technomic's data, 61% of operators believe that aquaculture fish can be a sustainable solution for overfishing.

Educating diners about aquaculture is crucial, though—getting the word out that farmed fish is a sustainable option is key to increasing interest.

Marketing strategies for sustainable seafood

Marketing that a restaurant or other foodservice location serves sustainable seafood is important to the menu items' success. Communicating to consumers that the food a restaurant offers is sustainable can be done in several ways—and currently is. The most popular way is noting it on the menu (45% of operators who offer sustainable seafood do this). Other ways that operators currently market sustainable seafood are largely only effective if the diner is already at the restaurant—35% say they instruct their staff to subscribe and explain sustainable options to customers, while 22% say they communicate sustainability efforts in public areas of operation. About a fifth of operators go further, calling out sustainability either on their restaurant's website or on social media.

With only one in five operators marketing sustainable seafood outside of the actual restaurant, it's easy to see where some work can be done—print or digital advertisements should all include a note of

MARKETING SUSTAINABLE SEAFOOD



of operators mention "sustainable" on the menu



say they instruct their staff to explain sustainable options to customers



say they display sustainability efforts in public areas of operation

the sustainable options. Brands can also leverage push notifications when available through applicable apps. And while a brand's social media accounts can announce the news of environmentally friendly seafood options, influencers can expand the message's reach. For instance, a sponsored ad posted by a popular Instagram influencer may have more reach than the restaurant's profile.

Other ways to market sustainable seafood can include launching an LTO (limited-time offer) featuring that fish and noting on all promotional materials that the fish is indeed sustainable. Particularly during Lent, when more diners might be compelled to order fish instead of meat, this can be a successful way to spread the word. Operators can also


Only **1 in 5** operators call out sustainability either on their restaurant's website or on social media

choose to swap out a current menu item's protein with fish or seafood—in fact, 30% do just this, according to data from Technomic's study for High Liner Foods.

How to promote and make sustainability exciting

Calling out sustainability is just the tip of the iceberg. Of course, spelling it out that a product is sustainable is the most important thing when marketing this earth-friendly option, but there are other words that operators can use in conjunction to increase the overall appeal.

For instance, according to data from the Technomic study, 64% of operators use the word "fresh" on their menus, followed by "healthy" (37%), "natural" (36%) and "locally-sourced/locally grown" (35%). Calling out buzzwords that consumers look for when scanning menus can entice trial.

Some species of sustainable seafood may not be as familiar to consumers as others, but that's no problem—offering it as a daily special, educating staff, listing the name and origin and providing literature about the species on the table and highlighting the fish's sustainability on the menu or specials board are all great ways to increase awareness over new or unfamiliar fish and seafood options.

Sixty percent of operators say they incorporate sustainability practices because it is the right thing to do. For operators who aren't yet offering sustainable foods for one reason or another, it's time to consider doing so. Higher prices for premium ingredients like sustainable seafood can increase a restaurant's overall bottom line, but perhaps more important is the boost in brand reputation that a restaurant can enjoy when making the decision to add sustainability to its practices. As consumer interest in sustainable foods continues to grow, it will only become more important for operators to keep up with this trend.