



Issue 30: April, 2019: This e-bulletin is aimed at personnel in fisheries and aquaculture, at fish packers, processors, distributors, retailers and finally, consumers.

Europeans love fish

The Eurobarometer survey on EU consumer choices regarding fishery and aquaculture products is clear: Europeans love fish and other seafood. The survey was published in December 2018 and involved 27,734 face-to-face interviews with 1,011 of these with Irish consumers. More than four out of ten Europeans eat seafood at least once a week at home. Price and availability are the main barriers to increased consumption. Regional, national and EU products enjoy a very strong consumer preference. The study also explains how EU policy helps build trust with consumers, mainly by reliable and useful consumer information.

EU Commissioner

European Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Karmenu Vella reacts to the study: *“European consumers tell us they want to have fish on their menu. It is our responsibility, as policy makers, to secure that our citizens can enjoy these tasty products in the long term. This means ensuring the sustainability of our fisheries, and we have progressed a lot on that over the last years. But also aquaculture plays an important role: farmed fish from the EU is a sustainable source of protein and other nutrients. In a low-carbon society, its role will only increase.”*

EU fish market

The EU is the world’s largest market for fishery and aquaculture products. We spend twice the amount of money on fish per capita as US consumers. What are the most important reasons:- consumers think it is healthy (74%) and tasty (59%). The supermarket or grocery store is where most consumers get their seafood, although many (40%) also prefer the local fishmonger. The products consumers buy are fresh or frozen; nearly 60% of shoppers avoid breaded fish products or ready-meals. That said, consumers do need some help in the kitchen: only 27% are brave enough to buy the whole fish, not cleaned or filleted.

Everywhere in the EU, consumers show a strong preference for regional, national or EU products. Preference for products from the European Union has increased in almost every country compared to the previous study in 2016 with the greatest increases in Hungary and Slovakia.

Aquaculture

The study also explored, whether consumers make a distinction between wild and farmed fish i.e. those caught at sea or in rivers versus those produced by aquaculture. While more than a third of European fish consumers prefer wild products (35%), nearly one-third (32%) make no distinction. Only 9% indicated a strong preference for aquaculture products.

Most consumers (61%) like to try new products and species. However, the limited offer/availability (53%) and, especially, too high prices (70%) remain as barriers for consumers who would like to eat more seafood. This shows the importance of helping consumers discover less well-known species, which can be much cheaper than the most common ones. This in turn can help to reduce pressure on the most exploited stocks, as it creates an outlet for 'less traditional' fish brought ashore because of fish [landing obligations](#).

The study confirms the high level of trust (83%) that consumers have in the information they receive as a result of EU regulations. Over 75% of consumers find the product information clear and easy to understand. Use-by-date was considered very important by 94% of the consumers interviewed as it puts a safety time limit on fish product consumption. However, tests in Ireland suggest that some use-by-dates are too long and should be shortened by 1-2 days for certain fish species (*SeaHealth-ucd* Issue 21). Outcomes of the full survey are given at: [Eurobarometer special survey 475: EU consumer habits regarding fishery and aquaculture products](#)

Irish seafood survey 2013

A study on consumer knowledge of the health properties of fish conducted in Ireland in 2013 showed many similar outcomes to the European study. Nineteen percent of the 371 consumers interviewed did not purchase or eat fish while 74% of the 300 consumers who did buy fish did so at least once per week. Fish from the ice counter was by far the most popular form purchased and cod and salmon were by far the most popular species. Overall, fish was considered expensive (*SeaHealth-ucd* Issue 8, 2013).

The previous 29 issues of Seahealth-ucd can be viewed at:
<http://www.ucd.ie/foodandhealth/newsandevents/seahealth/>

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