EMBARGOED UNTIL WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2015 AT 4:01 A.M. EDT (12:01 A.M. AKDT)

Oceana Reveals Mislabeling of America's Favorite Fish: Salmon

OCEANA Protecting the World's Oceans

© iStock.com/wragg

EMBARGOED UNTIL WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2015 AT 4:01 A.M. EDT (12:01 A.M. AKDT)

Americans love *salmon*.

It's our favorite fish, surpassing tuna in per capita consumption in 2013. And yet, it's easy to dig into some grilled salmon or a lox-covered bagel without thinking too much about the path that fish took to reach the dinner (or breakfast) plate. It turns out, depending on when and where it is bought, there's a good chance that the fish on our plate is not the fish we expected.

Much of the salmon Americans eat travels much farther than one might guess. Though fishermen catch enough salmon to satisfy over 80 percent of our domestic demand, on average, 70 percent of that catch is exported instead of staying in the U.S. Some domestic wild-caught salmon likely makes its way back, but only after entering an opaque global seafood market. During this journey, information about the fish can get lost: which species it is, whether it was farmed or wild, and how and where it was caught. Failing to track this key information throughout the supply chain contributes to high rates of seafood fraud.

During the winter of 2013-2014, when wild salmon were out-of-season, Oceana collected 82 salmon samples from restaurants and grocery stories and found that 43 percent were mislabeled. Most of the mislabeling consisted of farmed Atlantic salmon being sold as wild-caught. This mislabeling differed greatly from Oceana's nationwide survey in 2013, which found low rates (7 percent of 384 samples) of mislabeled salmon. The difference between these two studies may be because the earlier study collected its samples at the peak of the 2012 commercial salmon fishing season, when wild salmon was plentiful in the market.

U.S. wild salmon fisheries are among the best managed in the world and yield high-quality, valuable products. Yet we export most of our fresh wild salmon and import mostly farmed salmon, which may be associated with negative environmental impacts due to inefficient feeding practices, fish waste, misuse of antibiotics and pesticides, and diseases that can spread to wild populations. In other words, we send away some of the best salmon in the world, and we import lower-value products of questionable origin. Imported salmon is far more likely to be associated with ecologically harmful practices, economic fraud and even illegal fishing.

Seafood fraud can have serious ecological and economic consequences. Environmentally conscious consumers can be deceived when opting for more ecologically friendly choices like wild-caught U.S. salmon. When a less valuable product like farmed Atlantic salmon is sold as the more valuable Chinook, consumers aren't getting what they think they are paying for. At the same time, responsible fishermen who sell wild Chinook salmon are competing with fraudulent products, usually farmed salmon, and receiving less cash than they should be for their hard-won catch.

Key Findings

Oceana found that ***43 percent*** of the salmon samples it tested were mislabeled.

The most common form of mislabeling was farmed Atlantic salmon being sold as "wild salmon." ***(69 percent)***

Diners were far more likely to be misled in restaurants than grocery stores. ***(67 percent vs. 20 percent)***

Overall, consumers are less likely to be misled in large grocery store chains that are required to give additional information about seafood.

U.S. fishermen catch enough salmon to satisfy ***80 percent*** of our domestic demand.

U.S. Salmon Demand

Yet ***70 percent*** of U.S. wild salmon catch is exported.

U.S. Wild Salmon Catch

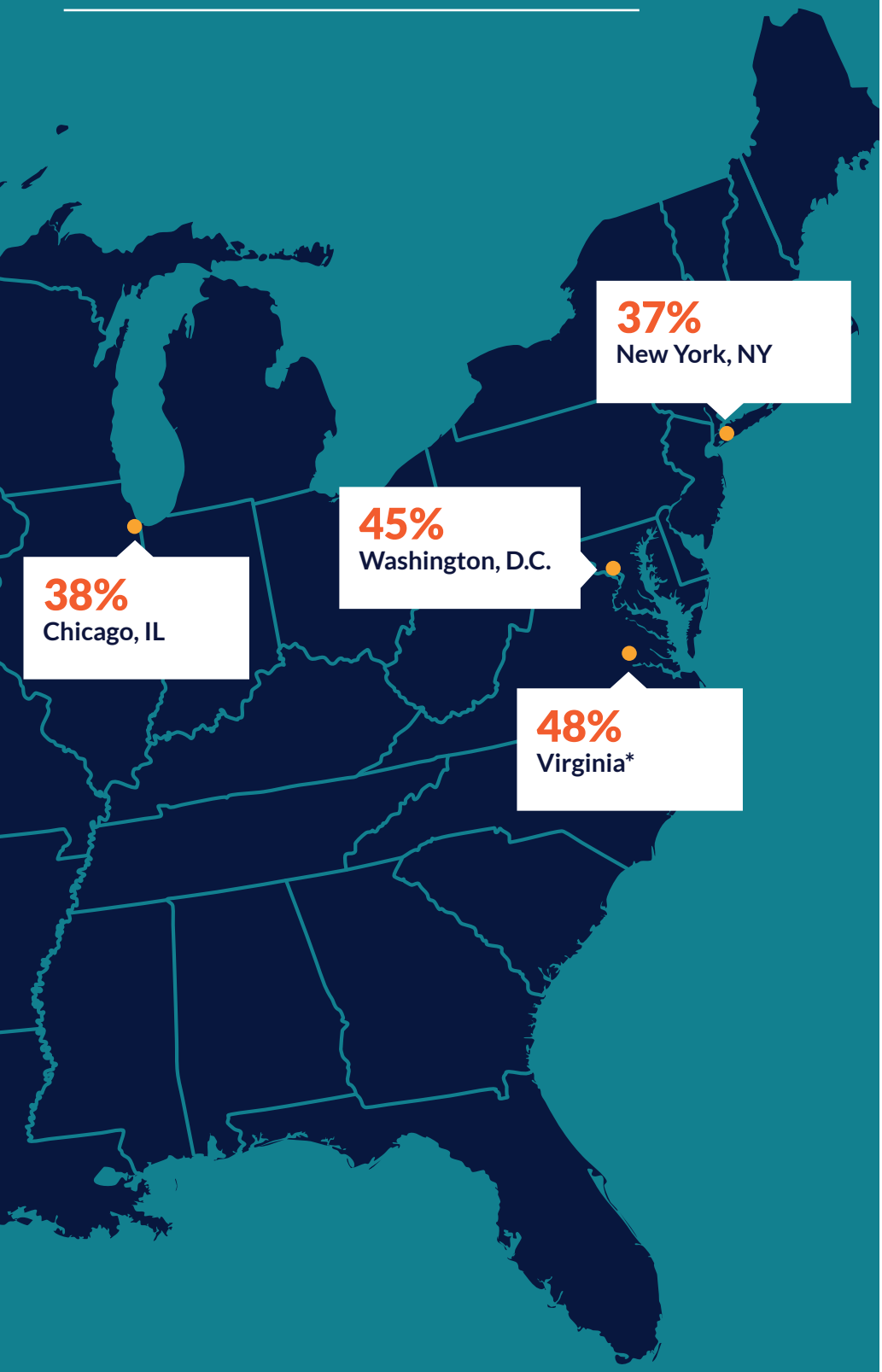
Two-thirds of what we consume in the U.S. is farmed salmon.

U.S. Salmon Consumption

We send away some of the best salmon in the world, and we import lower-value products of questionable origin.

EMBARGOED UNTIL WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2015 AT 4:01 A.M. EDT (12:01 A.M. AKDT)

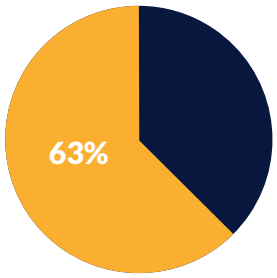
43 percent **of the salmon samples tested were mislabeled.**



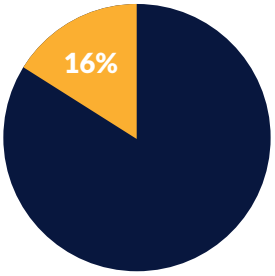
* Includes Virginia Beach, Norfolk, Newport News, Williamsburg, Richmond and Fredericksburg

Overall, diners were five times more likely to be misled in restaurants than grocery stores.

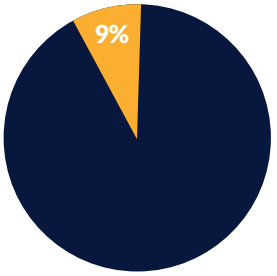
Correctly Labeled Mislabeled



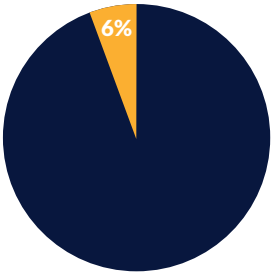
Out-of-Season Salmon from Restaurants



In-Season Salmon from Restaurants



Out-of-Season Salmon from Grocery Stores



In-Season Salmon from Grocery Stores

Oceana's combined salmon data (466 samples)

EMBARGOED UNTIL WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2015 AT 4:01 A.M. EDT (12:01 A.M. AKDT)

Recommendations

These problems have solutions. In 2014, the White House established the Presidential Task Force on Combating Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing and Seafood Fraud. The Task Force is set to implement measures to prevent illegal fishing and seafood fraud in the coming year, but as this report demonstrates, the new rules need to apply to all seafood entering the U.S. and throughout the entire seafood supply chain.

Oceana recommends that the federal government require all seafood sold in the U.S., including salmon, to have catch documentation to show it came from legal sources, and to require full chain traceability that passes this key information about where, when and how seafood was caught through the entire supply chain—from the fishing boat (or farm) to the dinner plate. Providing more information to consumers about their seafood will help them make more informed decisions, whether it is for health, economic or environmental reasons.

Until that happens, below are a number of ways consumers can reduce their chances of falling victim to a bait and switch when buying salmon.

© Copper River Salmon Marketing Association

What Consumers Can Do

- **Ask questions.** Seafood buyers should ask more questions, including what kind of fish it is, if it is wild-caught or farm-raised, and where and how it was caught.
- **Buy fresh seafood in season.** You are less likely to be duped if you are buying wild-caught salmon when it is in-season, particularly in restaurants.
- **Support traceable seafood.** If the seafood has a story, you are more likely to be getting what you paid for. Products that included additional information for consumers, like the type of salmon (Chinook, king, coho, etc.), were less likely to be mislabeled.
- **Check the price.** If the price is too good to be true, it probably is. You may be purchasing a different fish than what is on the menu or label.

© Jay Fleming

For Oceana's full salmon report, please visit oceana.org/salmonfraud.