

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon's
Interfaith Network for Earth Concerns
ECO-JUSTICE MARKETPLACE PROJECT

Sustainable and Fair Trade Salmon

The following facts and information were gathered by the Interfaith Network for Earth Concerns' Eco-Justice Marketplace project to use in educating your congregation about the ethics of eating salmon. Feel free to cut and past pieces of this resource to use for articles for your congregation's newsletter, or for brief "Did you know?" blurbs for your bulletin

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- Wendell Berry

A Brief History of Salmon Farming

Excerpts from an issue of *Mother Jones, Aquaculture's Troubled Harvest*, November/December 2001, and *A Bridge Too Far?* Heard on "Living On Earth," Sept 26, 2003.

Modern fish farming traces its roots to Norway in the 1960's, when that nation's wild salmon stocks crashed due to over fishing, over damming, acid rain, and development. Inspired by the success of Danish trout farmers, salmon cultivators found Norway's sheltered fjords ideal for farming salmon in ocean net pens.

In the 1980's Europe's salmon-farming corporations sought to continue their westward expansion. They eyed two promising areas: Alaska and British Columbia.

Spurred by a politically powerful commercial fishing industry, Alaska outlawed salmon farming outright. British Columbia, on the other hand, welcomed the industry with open arms...

"In the 80's and early 90's, Norway strengthened its environmental regulations in response to the problems they were having with fish farms," says Lynn Hunter, a former Canadian member of parliament who now works on fisheries issues for the David Suzuki Foundation, a leading Canadian environmental group. "So a number of Norwegian farmers moved to Canada, where they wouldn't face such a strict environmental regime. We got their bad apples."

Today, Alaska's wild salmon fishery ranks among the healthiest, best managed in the world. But British Columbia's commercial fishing industry barely survives; in 1999, the wild salmon harvest was the lowest in 50 years. The Canadian government is trying to keep the industry afloat by buying out commercial fishing licenses and decreasing the number of boats in the water. Canada's farmed-salmon industry, meanwhile, now ranks fourth in worldwide production. (In the U.S., so far, salmon aquiculture has been limited to a few sites in Maine and Washington State.)

During the 1990's salmon farming exploded around the globe. Stymied by environmentalists from further expansion in Canada, the industry headed to Chile, where farming corporations found cheaper labor and few environmental restrictions.

At the northern end of the Archipelago that stretches a thousand miles down Chile toward Cape Horn is an island the size of Puerto Rico, called Chiloé. Chiloé has developed its own mythology

and culture, thanks to its isolation. Its folklore, quaint towns, succulent seafood and the picturesque ferry crossing have made it a tourism treasure.

But some fear the island's mystique may soon be lost. For its 2010 bicentennial, Chile wants to build the longest bridge in Latin America, to join Chiloé with the rest of the nation. The government promises faster access to hospitals and easier access for tourists. Yet many islanders claim this bridge isn't really for them, but for a fish – and a foreign fish at that. As part of “Worlds of Difference,” a series by Homelands Productions, Alan Weisman reports.

In Chile, fishing is fishing, but salmon is an industry. Today, half the salmon U.S. consumers eat comes from here. But 25 years back, there were no salmon in this country. Renato Cardenas says, “we are in Curaco de Vélez, an historic place, this is where salmon farming began, not just in Chiloé, but in all Chile.”

A lot of us are grateful for farmed salmon. In an age of collapsing sea harvests, groceries and sushi bars everywhere abound with thick orange salmon filets. Maybe you’ve heard that Chile is the world’s second biggest salmon exporter, after Norway. But in these globalized times, that’s a little confusing because half the Chilean companies are owned by Norwegians themselves or their European neighbors. In the 1970s, tests showed that isolated Chiloé had some of the clearest water left on the planet. Soon, European salmon growers were floating giant cages of Atlantic salmon transplanted from Norway in lakes and inlets all around this Pacific island.

Renato Cárdenas talks to a fisheries technician at a new installation on a bay near Castro, the city where he teaches. The technician says, “We have 280,000 fish, around 40,000 fish per cage. In two months, we’ll double.” All those fish, yet only two men are working here. Automated feeders deliver pellets made of ground-up sardines, anchovies and jack mackerel. To keep the salmon coming, Chile has become the world’s second biggest producer of fishmeal. He continues, “a motor pushes food to the cages, so fewer workers are needed and the salmon grow more uniformly. We monitor by camera to make sure they eat everything, so less food is lost.”

Yet many pellets pass right through the cages. Combined with salmon feces on lake bottoms and sea floors, they create enormous algae blooms in Chiloé’s once crystalline waters. The same thing happened in Norway - one reason why the Norwegians came here. Chiloé fishermen claim this pollution, and aggressive escaped salmon, are ruining natural fishing grounds.

Rodrigo Infante says that, “the total sales for the year 2002 were \$973 million worth of exports.” Rodrigo Infante, general manager of the National Salmon Growers’ Trade Association, says Chile is on its way to becoming the world’s number one salmon producer. “We feel the bridge itself will be a positive thing for the island and its people.” The bridge, he explains, is actually key to a grand plan that goes far beyond Chiloé. He explains, “Well, Chile has 55,000 kilometers of coastline and 95 percent of that to the south – plenty, plenty, plenty of areas to develop.” That southern coastline is a pristine puzzle of islands, fjords, and volcanoes. No road can traverse it. But a bridge to Chiloé would extend the Pan American highway 100 miles farther, creating a gateway to those untapped regions. Chile’s grand vision is fish farms clear down to Tierra del Fuego, to triple salmon production.

Farmed Verses Wild: A Comparison

- Salmon farming has increased from just 3% of global salmon production in 1980 to 65% in 2002. *-Globefish Research Programme - Volume 73: Salmon – A Study of Global Supply and Demand. By Trond Byørndal, Gunnar A. Knapp, Audun Lem, July 2003.*
- 860,000 metric tons of Atlantic salmon—more than one metric ton for every wild salmon caught in the North Atlantic. *-Mother Jones, November/December 2001*
- Most Atlantic salmon sold in the U.S. is farmed. *-<http://www.seafoodchoices.com>*

- From January to July 2003, 80% of fresh Atlantic fillets of farmed salmon and 82% of frozen fillets of Atlantic salmon imported directly into U.S. consumption channels came from Chile. *-Personal communications from the National Marine Fisheries Service, Fisheries Statistics and Economics Division, Silver Spring, MD.*
- Chile's largest salmon producer is Dutch owned. The second and third largest salmon farms in Chile are owned by companies in Norway[.] *Alaska Seafood Marketing Alliance - September 24, 2001.*
- While Alaska produces over 90% of the wild salmon in the U.S., industrial salmon farms have steadily overcome wild harvests around the world. *-Alaska Seafood Marketing Alliance, September 24, 2001*

Consequences of Imported Farmed Atlantic Salmon

Chilean-raised Atlantics are dumped so cheaply in the United States that they're making it hard for Alaska fisherman to make a living. "When you've got Chilean filets hitting the Port of Miami at \$2 a pound, raised by workers making \$1.50 a day, that's when the WTO hits home," says John van Amerongen, editor of the *Alaska Fisherman's Journal*. *-Mother Jones, November/December 2001*

As these [Chilean] imports soar, worldwide salmon prices - including those sought by Alaska fisherman - decline. This is evident in Japan, where Alaska has traditionally supplied 90 percent of the salmon consumed. Chile has now increased its market share in Japan to 70 percent. Hardest hit by this shift: Bristol Bay fisherman, whose sockeye salmon harvest makes up the largest share of Alaska's seafood exports to Japan. With so much Chilean salmon available, the Bristol Bay sockeye price hit a 20-year low of 40 cents per pound to the fisherman in the 2001 season. *-Alaska Seafood Marketing Alliance - September 24, 2001*

A Call for Consumer Choice

In an effort to combat a government that critics claim is deaf to their concerns, fishing, tribal, and environmental groups in both Canada and in the U.S. are trying a new tactic: They're targeting the group driving industry expansion - American consumers. Eighty-five percent of British Columbia farm fish end up on dinner plates in the states. Until consumers in America and Canada are willing to vote with their pocket books, activists are dubious that government or industry will be inspired to reform.

Starting in 2004, the Food and Drug Administration will require companies to label salmon as wild or farmed, and identify their country of origin. But if people want to see even more detailed labels that acknowledge the use of antibiotics or colorants, they need to speak up, says Charles Brown, district director for the FDA, based in Seattle, WA. "Labeling responds to public pressure," he says. "At one time, labels didn't list fat or sodium content. That changed due to a demand from the public. This is a democracy, and the public votes for what they want." *-High Country News, March 17, 2003, Vol 35, No 5.*

"The fish-farming industry has fed us a line about eating farmed salmon to protect wild stock," says the Suzuki Foundation's Hunter. "Actually the reverse is true. If you purchase farmed salmon, you're contributing to the risk to the wild fish." It's a counterintuitive proposition: Eat the wild to save the wild. But if enough consumers vote with their purchases, fish farmers may start cleaning up their act.

-Mother Jones, Aquaculture's Troubled Harvest, November/December 2001

Alaska Salmon Fishery Facts: Is Alaska different?

- All Alaska salmon are wild. In 1990 Alaska outlawed the farming of salmon. *-Alaska Seafood Marketing Alliance - fact sheet.*
- In Alaska more than 136 million wild salmon were commercially caught in 2000, even after sufficient numbers were allowed to swim upstream to spawn. *-Alaska Seafood Marketing Alliance - March 15, 2001*
- More than 120 coastal communities - over 30% of Alaskan towns - stake their livelihoods on the salmon industry. *-Alaska Seafood Marketing Alliance - September 24, 2001*

- In September 2000, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certified Alaska's salmon fisheries as "sustainable." Alaska's salmon fishery is the largest fishery to date certified by the MSC, and the first United States fishery. It is also the only Salmon fishery in the world that has been MSC certified.
-Alaska Seafood Marketing Alliance - fact sheet
- The National Audubon Society, Environmental Defense, and the Sierra Club not only caution against eating farmed salmon; they in fact recommend eating wild Alaskan Chinook and Coho and other salmon that are sustainably fished. -*High Country News, March 17, 2003, Vol 35, No 5*

General Salmon Facts

- There are five species of salmon that are commercially fished in Alaska: King or Chinook, Coho or Silver, Sockeye or Red, Chum or Keta, and Pink.
- Alaska salmon are anadromous, that is, they hatch in fresh water and migrate to the sea. At maturity, they return to their original freshwater stream to spawn.
- Salmon stop eating once they return to fresh water. They live off their own oils and fats.

Philosophy, Spirituality and Ethics

- Interdependence is a central mark of healthy community. *Sustaining the Common Good: A Christian Perspective on the Global Economy*, by John B. Cobb, Jr., page 15.
- The economies of our communities and households are wrong. The answers to the human problems of ecology are to be found in economy. The answers to the problems of economy are to be found in culture and in character. To fail to see this is to go on dividing the world falsely between guilty producers and innocent consumers. - Wendell Berry.
- Eating with the fullest pleasure - pleasure, that is, that does not depend on ignorance - is perhaps the profoundest enactment of our connection with the world. In this pleasure we experience and celebrate our dependence and our gratitude, for we are living from mystery, from creatures we did not make and powers we cannot comprehend. - Wendell Berry.
- Before you finish eating breakfast this morning, you've depended on more than half the world. This is the way our universe is structured...we aren't going to have peace on earth until we recognize this basic fact of the interrelated structure of reality. - Martin Luther King Jr.
- Speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee, the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Job 12:8
- I remember the first time we went up to the Wrangell Narrows in Southeast Alaska in our fishing vessel, the Blue Mist. Salmon were leaping everywhere. We could not avoid seeing them except by closing our eyes. I know then that it was a mistake to think that there was only one Eden. The God who created such abundance, not scarcity, is a sign of God's manifestation. Manna, flocks of quail, and water gushing from a rock announce God's presence in the Exodus. Many baskets left over remain after feeding the five thousand. The millions of mussels we crunched over to view the petroglyphs on the beach near Petersburg, the acres of huckleberries near St. John, the richness of the seafood we caught daily, The Northern lights, and sea fire, all attest to this God. The northern voyage to Alaska shows us annually what abundance is, and it shocks us into the knowledge that it was once like that on the Columbia. And I suspect it was something very like a collapse of fish stocks and with it a collapse of the small communities' way of life that occurred on the Sea of Galilee. -The Rev. Irene Martin, Columbia River fisher.