Your Wild Salmon May Actually Be Farmed…Or Trout

Salmon season isn't coming to a close on a high note, as August saw a massive farmed salmon escape, and the Chinese government decided it is acceptable to sell rainbow trout as salmon. Both incidents point to a breakdown in the quality and health of the salmon available to the consumer. Escaped farmed salmon mean more diseases affecting wild salmon, and China has basically sanctioned mislabeled fish. Eating fish is more fraught with issues than ever before.

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Farmed Salmon Escape

Between 2,000 and 3,000 farmed salmon escaped from their enclosures off the coast of Newfoundland in Eastern Canada when a rope came undone. Cooke Aquacultures didn't notify local authorities of the breach, which was only noticed when fishermen noticed farmed salmon in their catches. The company has pledged to work the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to recapture the escapees. The lack of transparency has others expressing concerns as to how many breaches have actually occurred. According to Atlantic Salmon Federation coordinator, Steve Sutton on CBC Radio's *The Broadcast,*

> *It raises the question of how many times have other escapes happened where nobody has seen the fish and nobody knows the difference…This is a public resource, public waters. They should be required to report these things to the public as soon as they have the information."*

This isn't the first time Cooke Aquacultures has experienced a significant breach. The company is responsible for a 2017

spill that resulted in more than 100,000 Atlantic salmon escaping into the Salish Sea near Washington state. It’s hard to know exactly how many salmon have escaped since the inception of open aquaculture pens, though aquaculture firms are required to report any losses. Still, this doesn’t always happen, and Cooke Aquacultures doesn’t seem to have a procedure in place for notifying the authorities quickly and effectively. Will we start seeing stricter enforcement of policies now that GM salmon is on the market?

Trout or Salmon…Who Cares!

In other salmon news, the Chinese government has given the ok for rainbow trout to be labeled and sold as salmon. This makes sense from a biological standpoint, as both fish are part of the salmonid family (this family includes over 200 different species of fish). The similarities don’t extend to other key issues identified by scientists and consumers – salmon is a saltwater fish, and rainbow trout is a freshwater fish. Freshwater fish have a higher likelihood of parasites, especially when served in raw applications like sushi.

This dicate also leaves the door open for more instances of incorrectly labeled fish, a serious issue faced by seafood regulators worldwide. According to the advocacy group Oceana, one in five fish is labeled incorrectly. Often times a cheaper fish is substituted for a more expensive one, although there have been cases of people distributing endangered or protected species for consumption.

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Is It Too Late?

None of this bodes well for the continuing quality of the seafood we consume, especially salmon. Salmon used to be one

of the simple fish. Good quality, wild-caught Pacific salmon was a safe, healthy option that came with fewer ethical or environmental concerns than other popular seafood choices. But it’s no longer simple.

Salmon doesn’t need to actually be salmon. Salmonids can be substituted for one another. We also can’t be sure it’s the species we think we’re getting as thousands of farmed Atlantic salmon escape yearly, crowding out and endangering wild salmon. Salmon escapes are likely to become even more serious issues now that genetically modified salmon is on the shelves.

So here’s a question. Why are we still eating seafood?

Sources:

- *In China, Salmon is Salmon, Even if It’s Trout* – NY Times
- *Thousands of Farmed Salmon Escape Into the Wild* – Modern Farmer
- *Deceptive Dishes: Seafood Swaps Found Worldwide* – Oceana
- *Something Fishy: The Trouble with Atlantic Salmon in the Pacific Northwest* – NRDC
- *Over 300,000 salmon escaped fish farms in 2016* – BBC News