

SUSTAINABLE SEAFOOD

Your guide to eco-labels, certifications, and the benefits of eating NY Seafood



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What is sustainable seafood?

Sustainable seafood is fish, shellfish and seaweeds that are grown and/or harvested in such a way that protects the organisms, the health of the oceans, the livelihoods of fisheries-dependent communities and ensures that these resources are available for future generations of fishermen, farmers and consumers.

What's a sustainable seafood label?

Determining whether or not a fishery or farm is operating in a sustainable manner can be very complex, requiring a close look at each individual operation. This makes it difficult for consumers to tell what seafood is produced sustainably. Some organizations have developed programs to do just that for you! Organizations like the Marine Stewardship Council and Seafood Watch have developed programs that measure how sustainable a particular fishery, fisherman or farm is. Once a fisherman or farm is approved sustainable by that organization's standards, their products can be labeled with that organization's specific label. Some certifiers, like Seafood Watch, won't attach a label, or you may be at a restaurant where no label is present. You can reference the Seafood Watch website or app to provide you with Seafood Watch's assessment of a certain fishery or gear type using their own standards. Each organization has different criteria for how they rate the sustainability of the seafood they look at. Some of the things they can cover are overfishing, type of fishing gear, and the treatment of fishermen and workers who catch and process the fish.

This resource will introduce you to some of the most commonly seen labels in NY and provide a general idea of what the certifiers look for when rating if a product is sustainable or not. You can use this guide to help identify the programs and standards that best fit your needs, or if 3rd party certification is even necessary for your fishery or farm.



What is a 3rd Party Certifier?

The organizations, other than the fishery/farm itself and the government that evaluate sustainability are known as 3rd party certifiers. They are independent organizations that rate a fishery, farm or fisherman against its own guidelines or sustainability standards. These standards vary among certifiers and can include the entire seafood supply chain from ocean to plate, or just the fishery itself. Some organizations only look at aquaculture (seafood farming) or wild harvest, and some look at both.

How do 3rd Party Certifications differ from state/federal regulations?

Most fishermen want to know what they have to do, above and beyond state and federal regulations, to attain sustainability certifications. The answer is complex, as each organization has its own set of standards and some, like Seafood Watch, choose the fisheries they will assess; a fisherman can't ask to be assessed by them. Seafood Watch decides based on what partner foodservice organizations and retailers purchase- trying to get your product to large national or west-coast retailers could help bring attention to your fishery and create demand for a Seafood Watch assessment. That being said, the U.S. has the strictest fisheries regulations in the world and is often considered the "gold standard" of fisheries management. These government regulations have to go through a long and in-depth evaluation process before they are made into law, so 3rd party certifiers have an advantage in that they can create and set standards based on what criteria they find most important. 3rd party certifiers can make their standards as strict or lenient as they want, so in this way they can differ from the government regulations.



I don't see a label!

Does no label mean a product isn't sustainable? Not at all! As we mentioned on the previous page, the United States has some of the strictest federal fisheries regulations and even more rigorous state regulations, which focus on maintaining sustainable wild populations. Federal and state organizations also strictly regulate farming operations to ensure they operate in a safe and sustainable manner. Many small-scale fisheries and farmers are unable to pay for 3rd party certifications, even if they are following all the criteria and are running a sustainable operation. If you live in New York State and buy New York-caught fish, that's a great choice. The product is fresher, easy to trace, and supports New York's fishing communities. In addition, when purchasing NY seafood you can interact with the fishermen and farmers to better understand what they do to ensure they produce sustainable products.

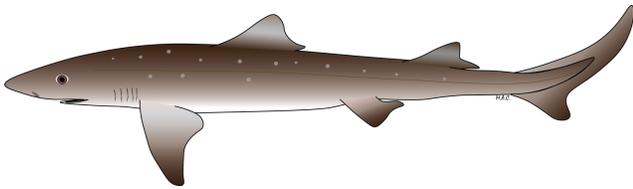


Be on the lookout for
NY State certified
products and labels-
visit ny.certified.gov
for more details

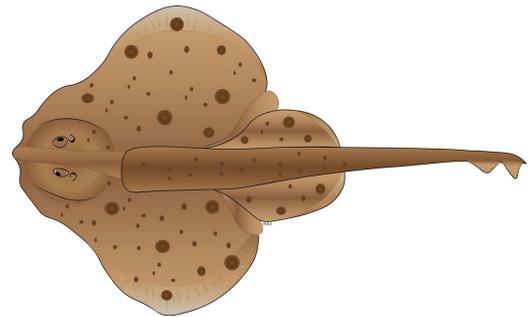


NY's Most Delicious Secrets

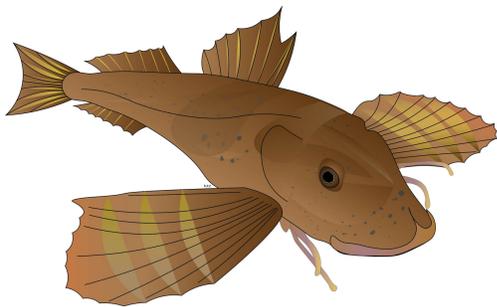
Been eating the same foreign farm-raised tilapia for years? Or mysterious and heavily battered "white fish"? Here are some tasty and sustainable alternatives to consider!



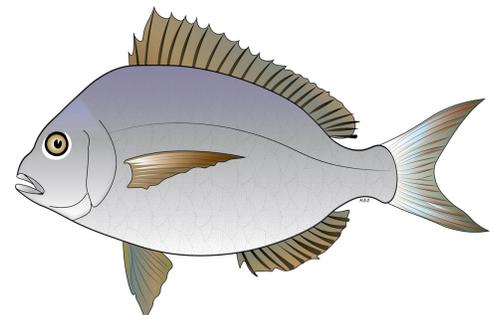
Spiny dogfish, or *Squalus acanthus*, have bodies similar to sharks and are brown or slate colored. It is plentiful, mild-tasting, and the perfect replacement to go in fish sticks! It's also firm enough to grill on kebabs or add to chowder and stew.



Skates like this thorny skate (*Raja radiata*) provide a sweet and mild shellfish-like taste. Their wings are edible, and are especially delicious when combined with slightly acidic accompaniments like salsa or poached in butter and wine.



The northern sea robin (*Prionotus carolinus*) has a flaky, firm meat with a rich shellfish-like taste. It's usually used in seafood stews or soups but can simply be sautéed too!



Scup, a.k.a. porgy (*Stenotomas chrysops*), is a mild-tasting fish that is the perfect base for your next taco Tuesday. Fry or sauté it and enjoy the delicate white flesh.

Index of Certifications

On the following pages you'll find tables which lay out the certification requirements for aquaculture and wild capture fisheries. These do not go through every single standard, but are here to provide a fairly comprehensive overview of the economic, biological and social considerations that go into the criteria. The tables also include federal and New York State regulations and how they address each criteria. These are included to help show more clearly where regulations and certifier's standards align and differ.

Wild Capture Fisheries Certification and Regulations: Overview

Components Included In Criteria:	Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)	Monterey Bay Aquarium: Seafood Watch/Safina Center	NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Regulations	Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) 10 National Standards
Scope/Mission Statement:	"Unit of Assessment" as of the most recent 2014 criteria include "fishery activity up to but not beyond the point at which fish are landed, marine and freshwater fisheries, and wild-capture fisheries." There is also an addendum for "enhanced fisheries" which is within the scope if it conforms to one or more of the following: linkages to and maintenance of a wild stock, feeding and husbandry, or habitat and ecosystem impacts. For example, "fish ranching" may be included if wild fish are caught, penned, and then grown.	Seafood Watch (SFW) recommendations apply to single stock/species caught in single fishery as defined by management body, gear type and region. The assessment does not cover the time beyond when a fish is landed.	Any fisheries in NYS waters, including freshwater, and marine out to 3 miles from shore. Regulate both commercial and recreational fisheries. Goal of the DEC is "To conserve, improve and protect New York's natural resources and environment and to prevent, abate and control water, land and air pollution, in order to enhance the health, safety and welfare of the people of the state and their overall economic and social well-being."	Any fishery within the Exclusive Economic Zone (200 miles from shore). Key goals: Prevent overfishing, rebuild overfished stocks, increase long-term economic and social benefits and ensure a safe and sustainable supply of seafood
Direct assessment or independent audit?	Audit. This is done by a 3rd party outside of MSC	Direct assessment by SFW	N/A	N/A
Time Frame of certification?	~1 year, expires after 5 years	About 1 year, depending on amount of information available	Depends on what type of permit you're applying for	N/A

Wild Capture Fisheries Certification and Regulations: Environmental

Components Included In Criteria:	Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)	Monterey Bay Aquarium: Seafood Watch/Safina Center	NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Regulations	Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) 10 National Standards
Is bycatch considered?	Yes	Yes- SFW also counts bait in bycatch mortality calculations	Does not have an over-arching recommendation for bycatch but on a species by species basis it can be looked at	Yes, makes it a goal to try to get better information on bycatch and reduce it
Is benthic impact by gear considered?	Yes	Yes, with automatic scoring of 5 (highest) for gear that does not touch the bottom	Yes, species-specific	Not specifically
Is shark finning considered?	Yes	Yes	No	No
Is impact on endangered/protected species considered?	Yes	Yes	Yes, species-specific	Yes, follows Endangered Species Act and Marine Mammal Protection Act laws
Are multi-trophic ecosystem impacts considered?	Yes, with special consideration for forage fish species	Yes	Moving toward more ecosystem-based management, but currently focus is still on single species	Yes, as part of National Standard 6 - Variations and Contingencies
Is discard mortality considered?	Included as a part of their bycatch revisions but not heavily emphasized	Assumes 100% discard mortality unless strong scientific evidence proves otherwise	Not specifically, try to create regulations which help to minimize the amount of discards	Not specifically

Wild Capture Fisheries Certification and Regulation: Social

Components Included In Criteria:	Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)	Monterey Bay Aquarium: Seafood Watch/Safina Center	NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Regulations	Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) 10 National Standards
Is forced labor considered?	Not included	Not included, but does address that is it a problem through their website and has links to resources	No specific regulations through DEC but follows national and NYS specific labor laws	Follows national labor laws and assesses safety at sea in National Standard 10
Management Practices (do they actually work?)	Yes	Yes	N/A	Uses cost/benefit analysis of Fishery Management Plans (FMP's) Not specifically
Enforcement (is it effective?)	Yes	Yes	DEC Police Force	Not specifically
Is traceability or the entire supply chain part of certification?	Can be MSC certified along the supply chain, but not specifically part of the assessment	Yes	Species-specific permitting system	Not specifically
Required or Voluntary (fisheries pay to receive the certification)?	Voluntary	Fisheries are chosen by SFW at their discretion to examine and rate	Required	Required
Are stakeholders included in the rule-making process?	Yes, they have sessions for stakeholder input	Yes, they consider public and stakeholder feedback	Go through a public input process for regulations, hear from many parts of industry	Yes, National Standard 8 looks at impact on fishing communities and the importance of trying to sustain them

Wild Capture Fisheries Certification and Regulation: Economic

Components Included In Criteria:	Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)	Monterey Bay Aquarium: Seafood Watch/Safina Center	NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Regulations	Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) 10 National Standards
Is carbon footprint/energy consumption considered?	Not included	Not included	Not specifically	Provision to use the fishery "efficiently" but lacks specific ruling
Are there different ratings for different gear types?	Yes	Yes	Species specific	Not specifically
What's the cost of certification?	Specific to the 3rd party certifier that audits the fishery, but there are yearly fees involved with using the MSC label and potential royalty fees that need to be paid. Grants are available and the MSC emphasizes the need to budget for each step of the certification process	N/A	Species specific permits cost different amounts	N/A
What is the rating system?	One label as certified	"stoplight" system for levels of sustainability	N/A	N/A

Aquaculture Certification and Regulation: Overview

Components Included In Criteria:	Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC)	Best Aquaculture Practices (BAP)	Monterey Bay Aquarium: Seafood Watch/Safina Center	Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act (Federal) Aquaculture Standards	NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Aquaculture Regulations
Scope/Mission Statement:	<p>Created by the Global Aquaculture Alliance (GAA) dedicated to promoting responsible aquaculture practices through advocacy, education and demonstration. BAP standards encompass the entire production chain including farms, processing plants, hatcheries, and feed mills.</p> <p>Focus of standard is on production, so typically a single farm or other production units but can encompass a group of operations; ultimately up to the certification body</p>	<p>Created by the Global Aquaculture Alliance (GAA) dedicated to promoting responsible aquaculture practices through advocacy, education and demonstration. BAP standards encompass the entire production chain including farms, processing plants, hatcheries, and feed mills.</p> <p>Focus of standard is on production, so typically a single farm or other production units but can encompass a group of operations; ultimately up to the certification body</p>	<p>Seafood Watch (SFW) recommendations apply to single stock/species farmed as defined by management body, farming method and region</p>	<p>"The purpose of this policy is to enable the development of sustainable marine aquaculture within the context of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) multiple stewardship missions and broader social and economic goals."</p>	<p>Permitting process covers everything from water use, feed, discharge to the ability to sell and move product. Covers both marine and freshwater aquaculture.</p>
Direct assessment or independent audit?	<p>Audit. This is done by a 3rd party outside of MSC</p>	<p>Independent audit</p>	<p>Direct assessment by SFW</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>Subject to (usually) unscheduled inspections</p>
What is the time frame for certification?	<p>Depends on chosen auditor, but anywhere from 6 months to 1 year, expires after 3 years</p>	<p>Auditing process takes about 60 days, with total from application to certification taking between 4-6 months</p>	<p>About 1 year, depending on amount of information available</p>	<p>Depends on the type of permit</p>	<p>Depends on the type of permit</p>

Aquaculture Certification and Regulation: Environmental

Components Included In Criteria:	Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC)	Best Aquaculture Practices (BAP)	Monterey Bay Aquarium: Seafood Watch/Safina Center	Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act (Federal) Aquaculture Standards	NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Aquaculture Regulations
Is the impact of the system on the benthos considered?	Yes, but acknowledges the difficulty of accurate monitoring	Yes	Yes, depending on the site there will be a different score assigned favoring the least invasive sites and farming methods	Yes, considers environment and ecology of proposed site	Handles water quality testing but has no specific regulation in place for benthic habitat
Are impacts on other species through escapes or other methods considered?	Yes, includes provisions to address likelihood of escapes and requirements to ensure that impacts from predator/pest control are "localized, temporary and reversible"	Yes	Yes	Yes, can deny permit if aquaculture interacts with threatened/endangered species or marine mammals	No, defers to federal ruling
Is water quality considered?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, under Clean Water Act if qualified as Concentrated Aquatic Animal Production (CAAP). If not, need a permit to discharge under National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System through the US EPA	Not specific to aquaculture but does regular water quality monitoring

Is feed type considered?	Yes, on a species by species basis	Yes	Yes, and looks at energy costs/efficiency of each type of food	Yes	No
Is site placement/type of site considered?	Yes, looking at critical habitat and type of effects different farming methods will have	Yes	Yes, determines impact on habitat "functionality"	Yes	Most likely need permits from the town/county or the US Army Corps of Engineers depending on type of aquaculture; not done through the DEC
Disease	Yes	Yes	Yes- how easily can disease spread and how is disease being prevented/combatd	Yes	No
Are pesticide/antibiotic use considered?	Yes, looks to ensure that any disease and pest management is undertaken in a way that has minimal environmental impact	Yes	Yes, determined specifically by the amount of chemicals used and their ability to get into the environment beyond the aquaculture facility	Yes	No
Is harvest of farm-raised eggs or brood stock considered?	Yes, depending on the species. Takes into consideration same issues as SFW	Yes	Yes. If the broodstock or eggs must be taken from the wild, are they taken in such a way as to not have a negative impact on wild populations and fecundity. Also considers removal of any wild stock to be farm-raised a net loss, as that fish becomes only for human consumption instead of for all the ecosystem to benefit	Yes	Yes, as it influences other fisheries

Aquaculture Certification and Regulations: Social

Components Included In Criteria:	Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC)	Best Aquaculture Practices (BAP)	Monterey Bay Aquarium: Seafood Watch/Safina Center	Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act (Federal) Aquaculture Standards	NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Aquaculture Regulations
Do they consider forced labor?	Yes, and includes child labor as well using the standard of the International Labour Organisation	Yes; must comply with local labor standards and international regulations are considered by auditors	Not included, but does address that it is a problem through their website and has links to resources	Operates under US labor laws regarding child labor and wages	Operates under US labor laws
Are Management practices successful?	Yes	Does not consider in standards	Yes	N/A	N/A
Is enforcement effective?	Not specifically	does not consider in standards	Yes	N/A	Has its own policing force
Does certification cover supply chain/traceability?	Opportunities to become ASC certified along the supply chain, but doesn't specifically factor it in during assessment of the facility	Yes, looks at the entire supply chain	Yes	N/A	Permitting process to handle and sell NYS aquaculture products.
Required or Voluntary (fisheries pay to receive the certification)?	Voluntary	Voluntary	Fisheries are chosen by SFW at their discretion to examine and rate	Required permits to operate in federal waters	Required permits to operate in state waters
Are stakeholders included?	Yes, takes into account community relations/interactions	Yes, looks at community relations	Yes	Some time for public feedback before any regulatory change	Window of public and stakeholder feedback/input
Record requirements?	Not specifically but aims to ensure that facilities are wholly within legal framework of wherever they're located	No, unless there is evidence that fishery being audited is hiding data or conducting illegal practices	Yes, better scores given to aquaculture facility which is data-rich and transparently operated	N/A	Yes, need documentation of entire business, farm or facility

Aquaculture Certification and Regulations: Economic

Components Included In Criteria:	Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC)	Best Aquaculture Practices (BAP)	Monterey Bay Aquarium: Seafood Watch/Safina Center	Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act (Federal) Aquaculture Standards	NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Aquaculture Regulations
Is carbon footprint/energy consumption considered?	Includes provisions to address efficient use of energy in the aquaculture system	No	No	No	No
Does the type of aquaculture or method influence the rating?	Yes, in reference to type of aquaculture (multi-species, etc.)	Yes, has different specific standards depending on type of aquaculture	Yes, the most environmentally friendly methods get the highest rating	Yes, as it relates to permit type	Yes, as it relates to permit type
What is the cost of certification?	Specific to the 3rd party certifier that audits the fishery, but there are yearly and royalty fees that must be paid to use the ASC label	Application and auditing fees	N/A	Depending on permit	Depending on permit
Rating System	One label as certified	Uses the star system, with 4 stars being highest	"stoplight" system for levels of sustainability	N/A	N/A

What's it all about?



The hope is that with this guide, you will not only be able to recognize the many labels you see on seafood but also understand what they mean for your food and empower you, as the consumer, to make more informed choices.



You may have noticed that many local grocery stores have their own standards for sustainable seafood. Whole Foods Market, Target and Stop N' Shop all guarantee certain products as sustainably harvested or farmed. We encourage consumers with more questions about store-specific labeling to explore the store's website for further details and information.



There are many sustainability or "eco-labels" for seafood and other products worldwide. This resource addresses some of the most commonly seen labels and certifiers in NY- it is not a comprehensive list of all that's available. We encourage you to use the following indexes as a starting point to get an idea of the requirements of each certification and how they create their standards, and then decide what would work best for your fishery or farm.

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