



LESSON 1

WHAT IS SEAFOOD?

INTRODUCTION

Seafood consumers do not think they have enough information available about seafood. Our seafood supply is changing. Supply will likely have a significant impact on seafood choices in the future. The amounts, types, sources, and cost of seafood will change due to increasing demand over the next several decades. Most Americans can obtain optimal health benefits from seafood by making choices that maximize the intake of desirable nutrients balanced against exposure to contaminants that may pose a health risk. Consumers require knowledge both of the variety of seafood available and of the associated benefits and risks to make wise choices.

Seafood is unique among animal foods in several respects. No other animal food group has such a large variety of species. Flavor and texture of seafood species vary considerably, and are enhanced by many different cooking methods. There are a variety of growing and harvesting methods for seafood. Wild harvest still accounts for a significant portion of seafood, which impacts availability and supply. However, aquaculture (fish farming) is supplying an increasingly larger portion of seafood and will continue to do so in the future. Aquaculture now accounts for about 48% of the world's seafood supply, ensuring a more consistent supply of certain seafood products. For example, prior to the tremendous growth of the salmon aquaculture industry, fresh, wild salmon was available on a seasonal basis at relatively high prices. Since the establishment of salmon aquaculture, fresh salmon now is available year round at reasonable cost. Changes in choices and costs of seafood will modify consumer preferences as supply depends more on aquaculture.

The safety and quality of imported products may affect consumer confidence, too. America imports approximately 90% of its seafood supply. A portion of those imports originate from countries that may not have safety and inspection requirements equivalent to those in the U.S.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires that imported products meet the same standards for safe processing as domestic product. Despite this regulation, FDA is understaffed and does not inspect the majority of imported product. However, measures are in place (e.g. HACCP) to help ensure seafood safety.