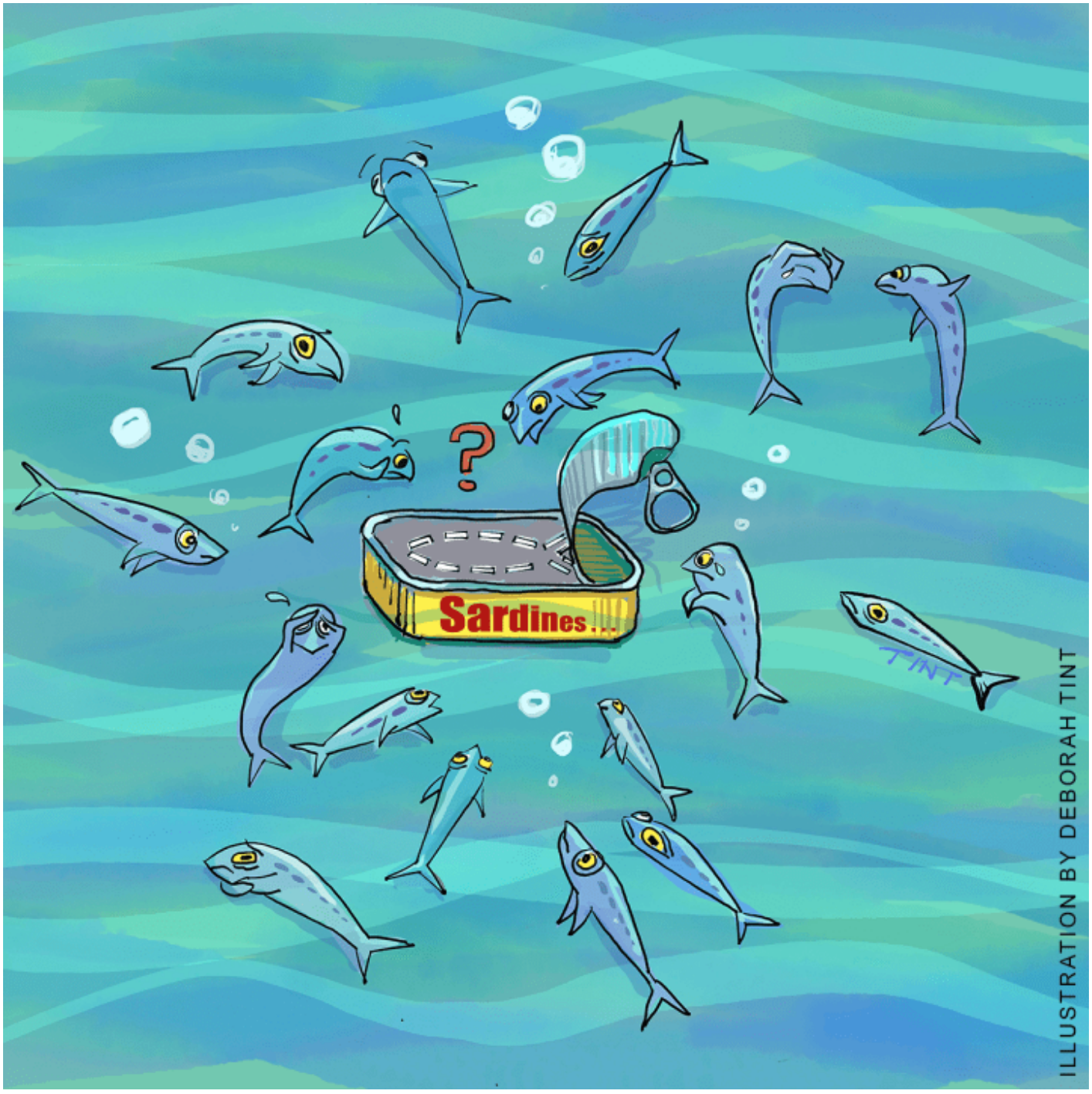
THE SARDINE SHORTAGE REACHES THE COOP

August 18, 2026



August 18, 2026

By Lora Kelley

Sardines are having a moment. All over TikTok, posters embrace “sardinemaxxing” and “sardine girl summer,” raving about the nutritional benefits of the tasty and relatively sustainable snack. In 2022, *Vogue* wrote of “the tinned fish mania that has gripped the world.” Earlier this year, Wirecutter suggested that “Sardine’s PR team has been working overtime recently.”

But Coop members hoping to enjoy a sardine-fueled summer may be disappointed: The sardine supply has been hit by a global shortage.

Gillian Chi, one of the Coop’s buying and receiving coordinators, has observed demand for sardines rising among members over the past few years. As she told the *Linewaiters’ Gazette*, however, she first started noticing the effects of the shortage around late May and early June. Her team acted quickly to keep sardines on shelves—including by placing a special order with a supplier the Coop rarely works with. They also stocked up on shopper favorites while they could. “I stockpiled one hundred cases of Matiz and 75 cases of FishSnax, and dozens of cases of others,” Chi wrote in an email.

Based on conversations with vendors and news reports, Chi believes that the shortage owes to surging demand, overfishing, climate change and Morocco’s restrictions on exports. In January of this year, Morocco, one of the world’s key suppliers of sardines, announced that it would halt exports of frozen sardines; it did not say how long the pause would continue. Zakia Driouich, Morocco’s Secretary of State at the Ministry of Agriculture and the cabinet member in charge of its fisheries, announced the change to members of Morocco’s parliament, citing a “noticeable drop in supply.” Citing official data, Reuters reported that landings of sardines in Morocco dropped 46% in 2024, to 525,000 metric tons.

“OUR STANDARD MARKUP DOES NOT FLUCTUATE BASED ON SUPPLY NOR DE-

MAND (NOR ANYTHING ELSE)."

RECEIVING COORDINATOR GILLIAN CHI

Coop suppliers have also explained the dearth of their product to shoppers. Fish Tales, for example, announced in June that its sardines were temporarily out of stock, noting that due to "changes in the ocean, such as rising water temperatures, the plankton in the sea also changes, and that is precisely the food sardines live on. If there is less food, sardines grow more slowly and simply fewer swim around." The post reminded readers that the "special thing about fish is that it still comes from nature. It is one of the last products we do not 'make' ourselves, but which we harvest from the sea. And that comes with a caveat: sometimes the ocean simply gives less. At Sea Tales, that means only one thing: We never catch more than is responsible. Not even if the demand for sardines grows."

As the sardine ban and the related shortage drag on, the Coop has seen some brands become unavailable, and has added some new brands. Bela, Bar Harbor, Crown Prince Brisling and King Oscar are not available, Chi said. Wild Planet has been in and out, and Mina, the most popular brand among Coop members, has slowly started to come back in stock. The new options added to shelves this summer include Matiz, Sea Tales, Season and FishSnax, the tinned fish line from José Andrés. Cento's sardines were briefly available, and Safe Catch was put on Coop shelves before its stock, too, was depleted, Chi added.

Chi emphasized that, in spite of the dip in supply, the Coop would not alter the way it prices sardines—or any other goods—for shoppers. "Our standard markup does not fluctuate based on supply nor demand (nor anything else)," she noted. "Whatever we pay for a product, the markup is 25 percent."

Indeed, part of the appeal of sardines is the range of price points: On a recent Wednesday, a single shelf of the Coop's fish section featured colorful cans of Fishwife sar-

dines for $6.49; tins of Crown Prince sardines in hot sauce for $1.52; and glass jars of Ortiz sardines for $11.03.

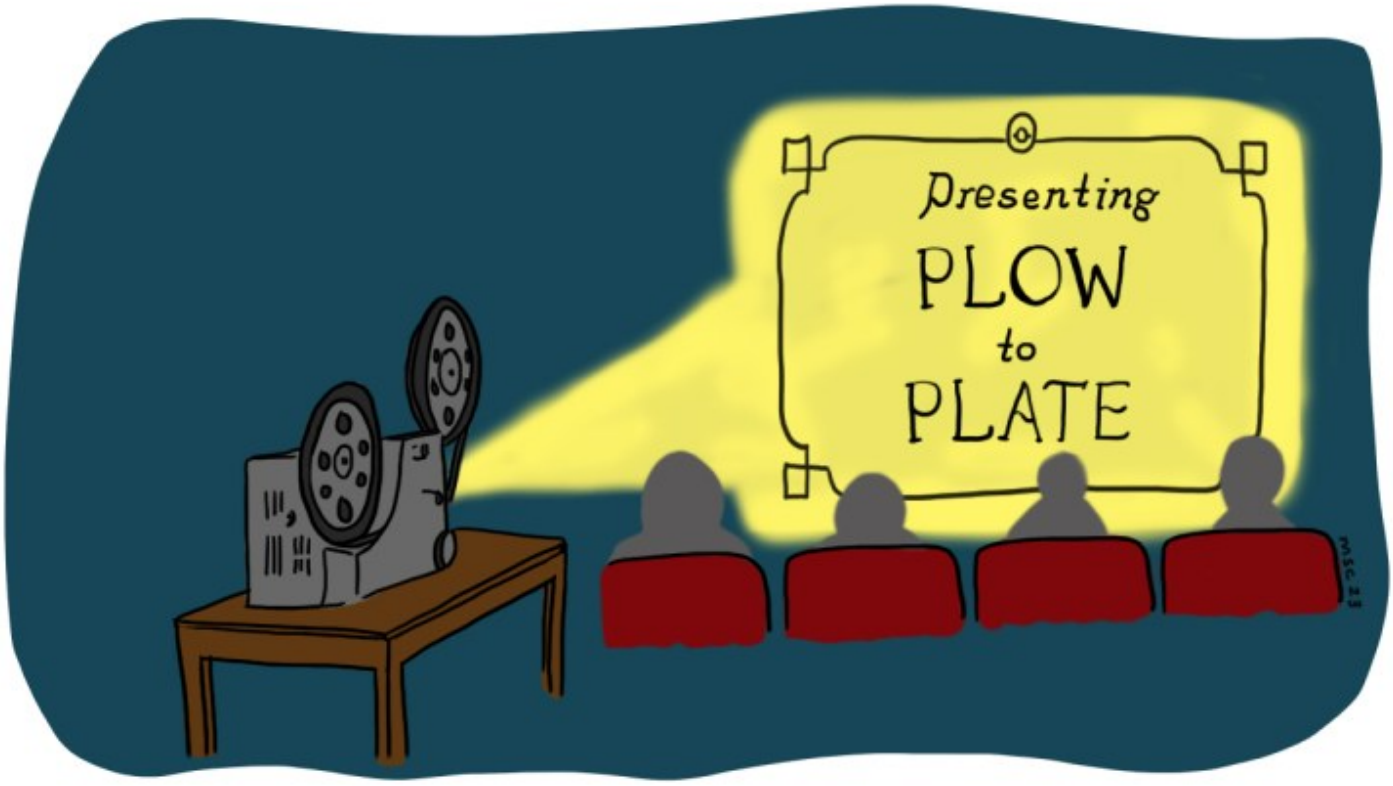
Though sardines have been hit especially hard lately, other popular types of fish have also seen challenges. Anchovies—which play a critical role in the global supply chain because they are a key ingredient in the fishmeal used in the $500 billion fish farming industry—are in short supply, too. The culprit for that shortage can reportedly be traced to warming waters in Peru due to El Niño. Bloomberg.com noted that, in the past year, prices for fishmeal have gone up by some 80% as production has decreased by as much as 40%. These fish food disruptions could trigger higher prices for other varieties of fish down the line.

For now, sardines are the most pressing tinned seafood concern for the Coop. But Chi said that her team is now keeping its eye on the global supply of another aqua creature: mackerel.

Lora Kelley is a freelance journalist in Brooklyn.

PLOW TO PLATE PRESENTS: LEVIATHAN

August 18, 2026



October 28, 2025

By Adam Rabiner

Any film that begins with a quote from the book of Job, (“He maketh the deep to boil like a pot: he maketh the sea like a pot of ointment,”) and is titled after the biblical sea monster Leviathan—a symbolic representation of chaos, evil and spiritual enemies—is likely to be a punishing experience. Sure enough, the first words I jotted down as I watched this documentary about a commercial fishing boat off the coast of New Bedford, Massachusetts were: groan, creak, seasickness, clanging chains, waves, unsteady, dizzying, factory clamor, dark, rust, night, unsteady, splash, shouts and murmurs and finally silence. You are beginning to get the picture.

The opening scene is pitch dark, the beginning of another working day (or night) aboard the boat. Burly men with beards and tattoos labor beside one another, not talking except for the occasional barked command or instruction. And when they speak, their voices are drowned out by the wind or mechanical, metallic banging. You can’t really make out what they are saying, or even what language they are speaking.

The primary sounds come from hydraulic motors, the unfurling of nets and ropes, the waves, the wind, the seagulls and the straining nuts and bolts of the boat. At the fifteen-minute mark, the camera literally plunges into the gurgling bubbly ocean, offering another similarly disorienting perspective.

The nets haul up the bounty of the sea, whatever it offers, a giant shark (itself a seeming leviathan) or smaller glistening fish that twist and flop around until the grim men in galoshes and raincoats, some smoking cigarettes in the rain, gather to cut their catch into pieces with sharp knives, spilling fish blood and guts onto the sloshing floor. The men know their jobs and routines, deftly slicing up stingrays with machetes or shucking shells.

Taken together, all these images and heavy industrial sounds evoked memories of the spaceship in Ridley Scott's Alien, a rusty vessel, out of this world, menacing and deadly and inhabited by tired men in a merciless yet strange (and sometimes beautiful) landscape. Other films that came to mind at various points were *Jaws* and Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*.

Grasshopper Film, a distribution company dedicated to the release of independent, foreign and documentary film, listed *Leviathan* under the category "Food Studies." The work tells a truth about our food that you will not find in the sanitized presentation in the aisles of our supermarkets, or even, for that matter, our local fishmonger. This truth involves the fateful moment that these massive bulging nets, fish poking through their holes, offer up their bounty. The fish make the ultimate sacrifice, their heads efficiently lopped off and discarded back into the sea through a portal where flocks of hungry seabirds fly in formation for scraps. Incessantly working, the men sacrifice too. In one extreme close-up, it captures a fisherman's weathered face in all its glorious wrinkles, scars, and visible pores.

In another excruciatingly long scene, the camera focuses on an overweight man sitting alone in the dining room, at 1:07, (a.m. or p.m., it hardly matters, as time does not seem to mean much on this boat) trying to listen to a news broadcast while fight-

ing off exhaustion, coughing occasionally, until he finally succumbs and nods off in front of the TV.

With its vertiginous cinematography and soundtrack of real noise, you are at times on the boat, in and under the water, flying with the scavenger birds. You are in the center of the storm, in the midst of all the dynamic, swirling, twirling, harsh and chaotic forces. You are hurled and tossed around, blown by the wind and swept up by the sea. Yours is every perspective. You are the enduring men, the vanquished, doomed fish, the ravenous birds. You are the hunted and the hunters, the predators and the prey. You are drowning, suffocating, suffering. You are the sky, the sea, the ship. You experience it all. Indeed, you are Job.

Leviathan – Tuesday, November 11, 2025 at 7:00 p.m. on Zoom

Screening link – https://plowtoplatefilms.weebly.com/upcoming-events.html

To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to plowtoplate@gmail.com.

Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife, Dina.

CATCHING UP WITH FISH SALES AT THE COOP: WHAT'S NEW AND WHY

August 18, 2026



By Jess Powers

July 23, 2024

If you've noticed more fish and seafood options at the Coop lately, you're not alone. Interestingly, seafood consumption rose across the U.S. during the pandemic, as people sought out healthy protein options to prepare at home; sales dipped in 2023 due to inflation but remained higher than before the pandemic. Fresh-fish, frozen-fish and canned-fish buyers at the Coop have responded to the consumer demand by expanding our vendor list and accommodating member requests for new products.

New Fresh Fish at the Coop

Masha Bezlepkina, who was born in Ukraine and grew up in Moscow, joined the meat, fresh and frozen-fish buying team at the Coop in September 2022; she became the sole buyer in the spring of 2024. As a vegetarian, she doesn't consume what she

sources for us, but her appreciation of the purchasing standards and of vendors who are passionate about their products is apparent.

> THERE ARE PRACTICAL LIMITATIONS TO THE INVENTORY THE COOP CAN CARRY… "IT'S NOT POSSIBLE TO CARRY LIVE CRAB," BEZLEPKINA NOTES.

Hudson Valley Fisheries is one of two main suppliers of fresh fish to the Coop. They raise steelhead trout in a Recirculating Aquaculture System (RAS) and the sashimi grade trout are delivered shortly after harvesting. This closed, controlled land-based system reuses 95% of its water and upcycles waste into fertilizer, according to Hudson Valley Fisheries' website. Notably, they are committed to environmental stewardship, humane harvesting, and research and education.

Bezlepkina recalls visiting the facility and being struck by how innovative its practices are. On her visit, the growers mentioned "sometimes [having] tiny fish and wondering what to do with them." They decided to make dog chews and introduced the new product line within a year—they are now also available at the Coop.

The other main supplier of fresh fish to the Coop is Pierless Fish Corporation, a long-time wholesaler to NYC restaurants that was acquired by Baldor Specialty Foods in 2020. Newer items at the Coop, such as sashimi and poke, feature three rotating types of fish that change based on season and freshness. Pierless delivers daily: fish arrives at the Brooklyn Army Terminal, is processed that night and delivered in the morning.

There are practical limitations to the inventory the Coop can carry due to the size of the refrigerated case and how much space we have in general. "It's not possible to carry live crab," Bezlepkina notes.

That said, Bezlepkina closely follows developments within the industry, recently intro-

ducing King Scottish salmon with good farming practices. She also listens to member input and requests. Recently, a member asked for tuna and swordfish steaks to be cut thicker so they work better on the grill. The request was accommodated and has received positive feedback (and sales) from other members.

Canned Fish and Supply-Chain Issues



There are many tinned-fish varieties from suppliers available at the Coop.

Canned (or tinned) fish is a staple in many households, offering quick protein options that are shelf stable. Depending on the harvest method and location, small fish like anchovies, sardines and other forage fish can be sustainable choices. (Check Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch for specific recommendations.)

Britt Henriksson and Gillian Chi are responsible for canned-fish buying at the Coop. Chi explains that the Coop sells an impressive 3,000 units of canned fish per week. This figure doesn't include the gourmet items located at the end cap. The everyday brands in Aisle 6 are mostly sourced from United Natural Foods (UNFI), and include Field Day, Henry & Lisa, Safe Catch, Scout, Ortiz, Season's, Tonnino, Matiz, Patagonia, Wild Planet, Natural Sea and Fishwife. Not surprisingly, tuna is the biggest seller; sardines, anchovies and mackerel are the next-most-popular canned-fish proteins of choice.



Whether you enjoy sardines with preserved lemon on toast or use wild cockles in sea salt brine to make a quick spaghetti and clams, there is certainly something for everyone. The gourmet brands such as Fishwife, Minnow, Porto Muinos, La Brujula, Jose Gourmet, Siesta, Rizzoli and Iasa are sourced from Faire or A Priori. Minnow products are connected to the local restaurants Hart's, Cervo's and The Fly.

HENRIKSSON SAYS PRODUCTS FROM NEW BRANDS LIKE MINNOW AND FISHWIFE "FLY OFF THE SHELF."

In all, Henriksson and co-buyer Yuri Weber manage vendor relationships for about 45 different companies, with multiple deliveries a week from some of them, and all of the paperwork involved. Here, too, space and popularity are considerations that affect what to stock.

Henriksson recounts that during the pandemic, there were crop shortages and supply-chain issues that impacted the ability to source rolled oats. This led the team to pursue new distributor relationships, as we now do with fish suppliers. She says products from new brands like Minnow and Fishwife "fly off the shelf." Minnow's stark, retro-reminiscent, jewel-tone-and-black labels are striking, as are Fishwife's psychedelic, colorful graphics. Fishwife, founded in 2020 by two women who aim to produce ethically sourced and delicious tinned seafood, sells smoked salmon with Fly by Jing chili crisp, slow-smoked mackerel with chili flakes, and smoked rainbow trout.



Henriksson doesn't eat canned fish herself. "I OD'd on tuna in college," she jokes. "I'm not into the smell." But she is dedicated to satisfying members' demand for it. Recently the Coop received samples from a French sardine company. "People thought they were yummy," she shares. "Now we have to see if it's at a good price point."

New products, meanwhile, often emerge from member requests. A member recently requested that the Coop carry cod liver. Henriksson found it available from an online

ordering platform, Faire, that the Coop uses. (Another Coop member works at the company.) Minnow describes this product, sustainably sourced from wild cod originating in Iceland's Westfjord region, as "butter of the sea," much like uni.



Jess Powers enjoys good food and works in emergency management.

SOMETHING'S FISHY

August 18, 2026

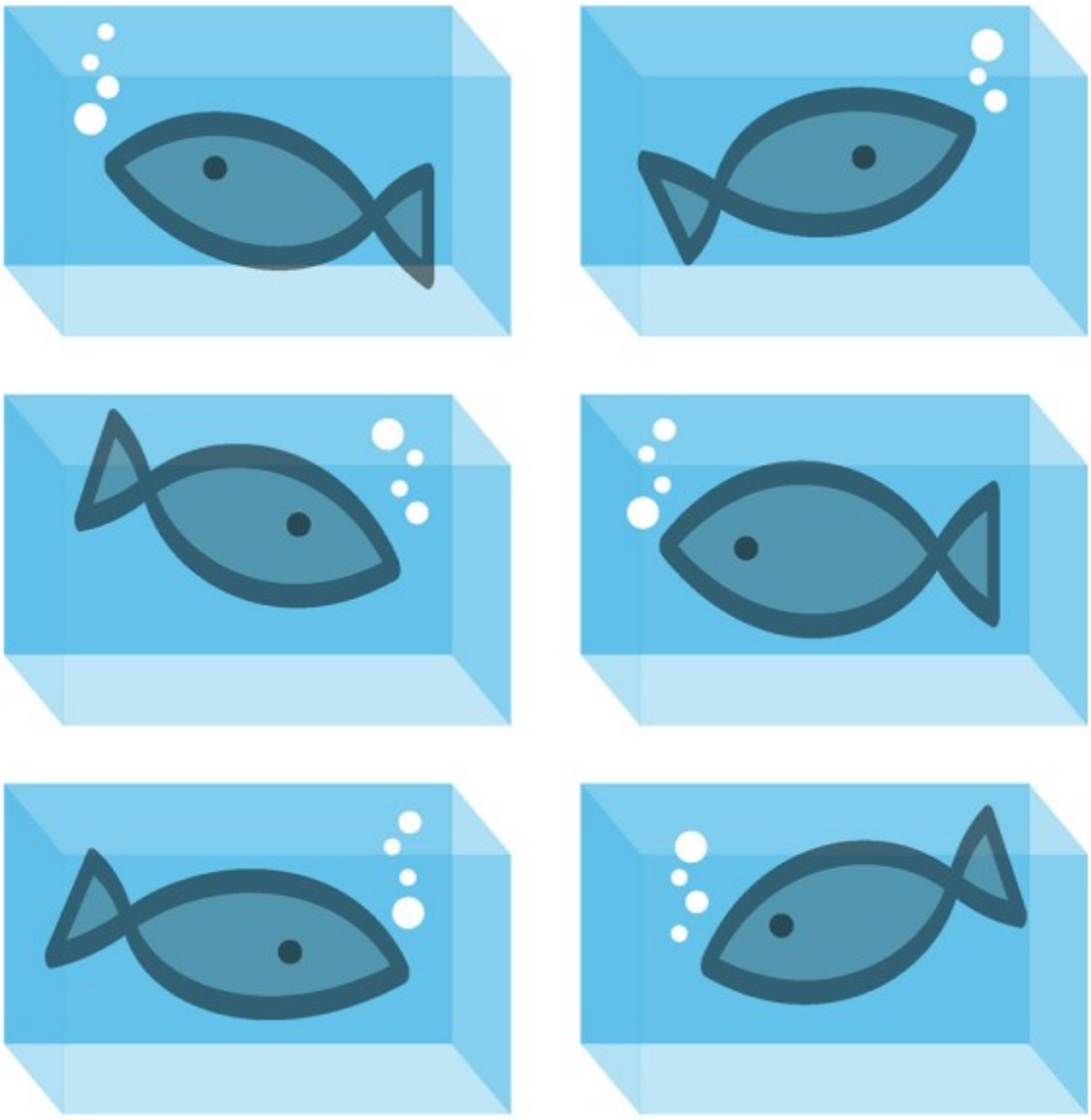


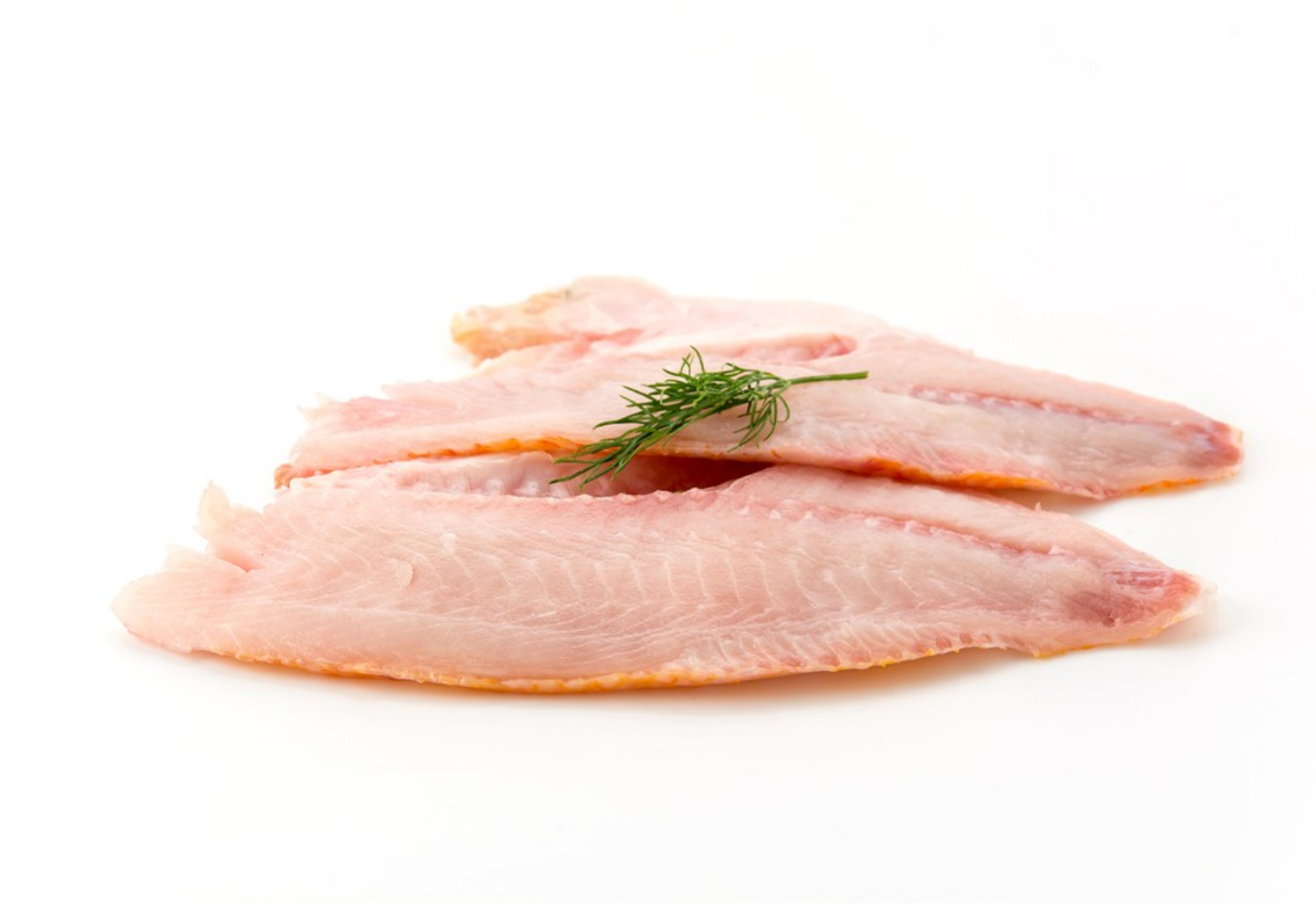
ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

by Liora Fishman

AN OVERVIEW OF THE FISH AT THE COOP

I've never given much thought to where my fish comes from. As you might guess, much of my relationship to fish was established through the comments people would make about my last name when I was growing up—but that's basically where it ended. As I child, I would choke down salmon when my mom would serve it, though I

eventually grew to love in the form of sushi. But, unlike the thought and care I put into understanding where the meat I purchase comes from (buying organic poultry and so on), the origin of my fish was always an afterthought.



FISH VERSUS MEAT

Perhaps I thought more about meat because the story around its consumption has always been more dire. With documentaries in the mid to late-2000s, like *Food, Inc.*, investigating where most grocery store meat came from, and *Super Size Me* tearing off our rose-colored glasses about McDonald's, the meat industry's shortcomings have long been highly publicized. You don't have to be a vegetarian (I am not, though not without a bit of guilt) to understand that eating meat is harmful to the environment, and sometimes also to our health.

Yet, in my laziness and impatience when it comes to cooking meat and poultry, I've often found myself turning to quickly-cooked fish like tilapia or flounder for protein. Which has prompted me to ask: Where does my fish come from? And what impact does eating fish have on the environment?

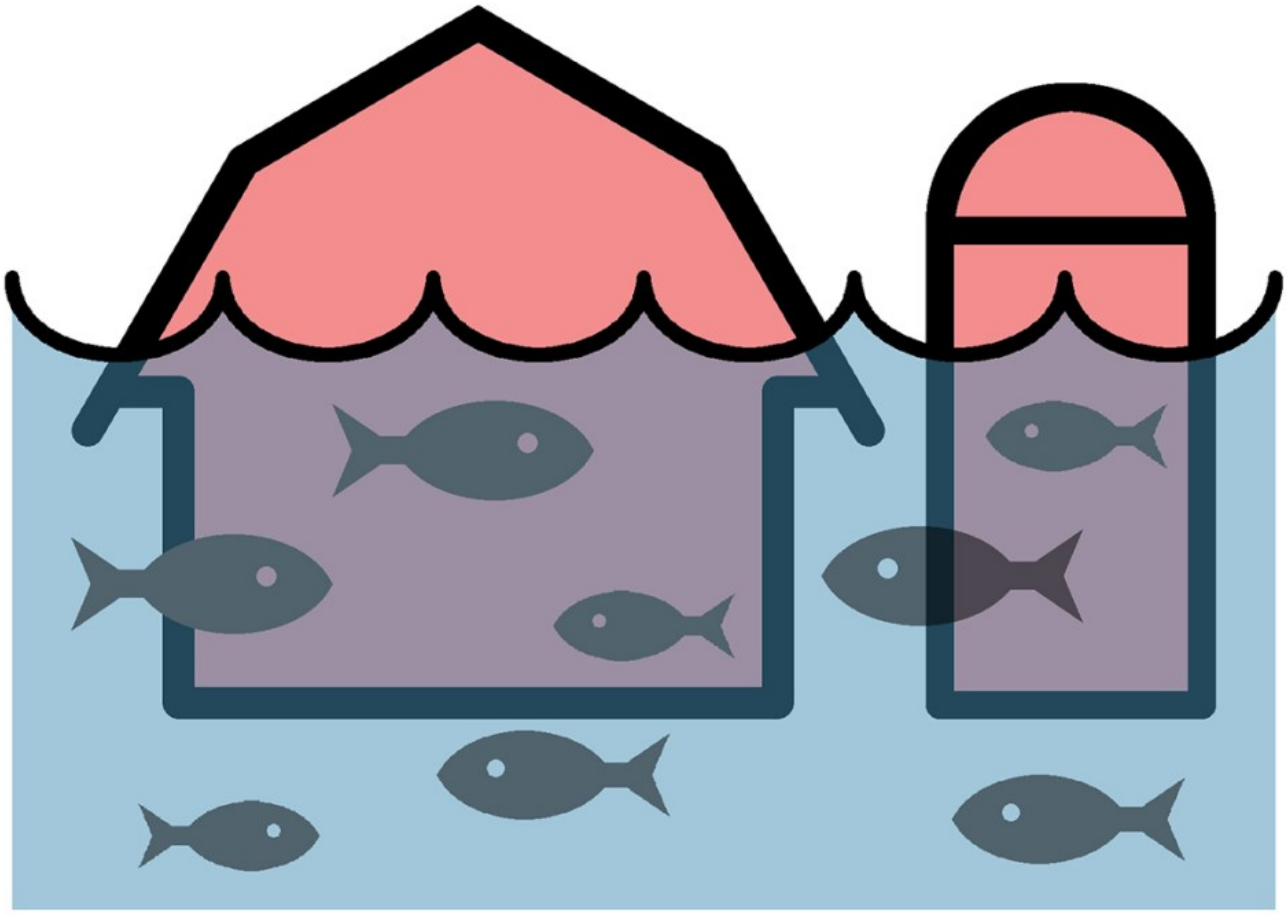


ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

WHERE DOES MY FISH COME FROM? AND WHAT IMPACT DOES EATING FISH HAVE ON THE ENVIRONMENT?

In the last half-century, the global impact of overfishing has tripled. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, “one-third of the world’s assessed fisheries are currently pushed beyond their biological limits.” One of the largest problems of overfishing is “bycatch,” the “unwanted sea life” captured “while fishing for a different species.” According to the World Wildlife Organization, “this, too, is a serious marine threat that causes the needless loss of billions of fish, along with hundreds of thousands of sea turtles and cetaceans.”

The fish we eat is typically caught in the ocean (wild-caught) or raised on a fish farm (farm-raised). Fish farms are often harmful to the marine life they reside among, and are some of the main contributors to bycatch and overfishing in general.

Mariculture, or the cultivation of fish farms within an enclosed section of an ocean, usually employs open-net pens and cages to capture large amounts of fish. This poses threats to the native environment, can lead to outbreaks of disease and can threaten the health of the larger ocean if the managers of the fish farm are not cautious about waste removal. According to the Ocean Futures Society, disease, in particular, poses a threat not just to the cultured animals within the farm but also to the greater, native landscape of the habitat, by introducing “non-native diseases into the environment or facilitating disease through unsanitary conditions in densely packed farmed fish.” There is also the issue of non-native or genetically modified fish possibly escaping and outcompeting native species.



LOOKING AHEAD

Of course, this bleak outlook on marine life puts a damper on the salmon you were looking forward to ordering at your favorite restaurant. As someone who prefers fish to meat and finds little excitement in other forms of protein (sorry tofu), I find the dire situation of the commercial fishing industry particularly alarming. Luckily, there are sustainable alternatives to your Big Fish woes, such as sustainable fish farming or aquaculture.

CLOSED SYSTEMS

Many forward-thinking, sustainably-minded fish farms have turned to walled, closed--container tanks that operate entirely on land. “By separating farmed species from native populations, both systems protect the environment from accidental fish escapes,

limit the spread and transfer of disease and parasites between local and farmed fish and decrease the amount of fish feed and waste excreted into the local ecosystem," the Ocean Futures Society explains.



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

SUSTAINABILITY

These closed-container systems also conserve water by not harming perfectly good,

clean ocean water and the habitats living within it. Sustainable fish farms should strive to use as little water space as possible (as many do) and continually monitor the quality of the water to ensure that no harmful pollution is leaking into the ocean as a result of their practices.

Many sustainable fish farms have partnered with scientists to go a step further and develop recirculation systems. These systems are a way for on-land fish farms to—yup, you guessed it—recycle the water they use to further reduce their environmental impact. Columbia University's Climate School reported that "recirculation systems use 100 times less water per kilo of fish than traditional land-based systems. In addition, the water quality can be monitored continuously, which lessens the risk of disease and the need for antibiotics."

The demand for fish is simply outpacing the supply we have in our oceans. But with sustainable fish farming, on-land production and water recirculation, there is a hopeful and healthy option in the not-so-distant future for pescatarian and pescatarian-inclined friends alike. Commercial fish farms are beginning to acknowledge the dire state of the situation and adopt more sustainable practices. The remaining question is one we often ask our corporations in the face of the climate crisis: Is it enough? And will it happen quickly enough?

QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK

In the meantime, we can do our research on our own fish choices at the Coop, spend a few more seconds reading the packaging, or quickly search Google before checking out. If your fish says "farm-raised," check if that farm is on-land and closed-container or if it resides in the ocean. Individual actions cannot and will never be enough to correct the systemic wrongs committed at a grand, corporate scale, but supporting local, sustainable organizations does give momentum to the growing call for action around ethical, eco-conscious fishing practices.

OUR COOP EXPERT

Charles Parham, one of the Coop staff members who oversees fish buying, says that the Coop uses Monterey Bay Aquarium, in California, as a general guide. “Typically we only consider fish that are in their ‘Good’ or higher categories,” Parham says. “We also prioritize MSC or BAP certification,” meaning that the Coop seeks out fish distributors who fit the the Marine Stewardship Council or Best Aquaculture Practices certification, both of which provide rubrics and standards for fish distributors.

“In general, as with the Coop’s other buying principles, we prioritize sustainable practices,” Parham explains. “We do not require fish to be local or wild, but when a good option comes up, such as Hudson Valley Fisheries, we are excited about it.”

Liora Fishman lives in Prospect Heights. She’s been a Coop member since 2021.