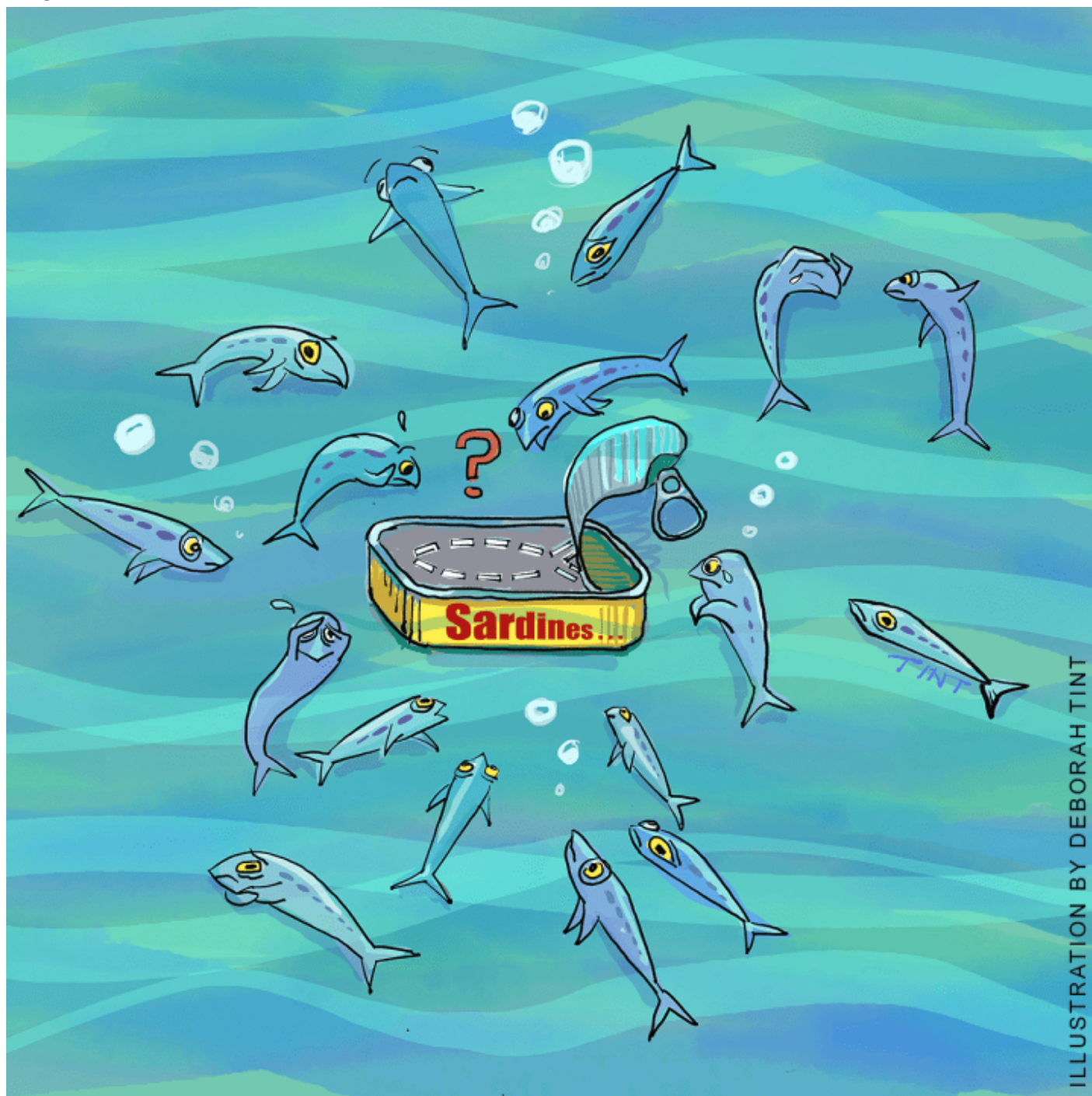


THE SARDINE SHORTAGE REACHES THE COOP

August 18, 2026



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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.

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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.

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WAR IN EUROPE DEEPENS SUPPLY CHAIN ISSUES

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By Hayley Gorenberg

Russia's attack on Ukraine has disrupted farming and exports of grain and sunflower oil around the planet, complicating already tenuous supply chain issues in ways the Coop may feel—even if Brooklyn is almost 5,000 miles away from the current armed conflict.



RENOWNED AS THE “BREADBASKET OF EUROPE,” UKRAINE IS AMONG THE TOP PRODUCERS OF GRAIN

PHOTO BY JOHN MIDGLEY

Renowned as the “breadbasket of Europe,” Ukraine is among the top producers of grain and is the top exporter of sunflower oil in the world, producing almost 46% of all sunflower oil. As farming—and indeed, farmers themselves—are endangered by the weeks-old war, and ports cease to operate normally, markets and then consumers feel the impact. Multiple news sources noted that in March the price for wheat per bushel had risen to the highest level in 14 years, surging nearly 80% over the previous year. Some days recorded consecutive days “at ‘limit up,’ meaning [wheat] reached the highest amount the price of a commodity is allowed to increase in a single day.” As one Coop supplier stated, “This is nearly \$400 or 40% higher than any pricing in the 21st century,” they emailed, anticipating that “all markets will see a price increase in the coming weeks.”



While the impact may be most severe on countries closer to the conflict—those countries that have depended directly upon Ukraine’s production—the entry of additional buyers looking for grain in a more global market will be felt in the United States. By some estimates, Ukraine and Russia “each provide about six percent of the globally traded supply of food energy in kilo calories.” David Beasley, Executive Director of the United Nation’s World Food Program, underscored the harm to this pivotal agricultural region, saying, “the food security impact of the conflict will likely be felt beyond Ukraine’s border, especially on the poorest of the poor.”

Wheat is notably affected, but U.S. production may provide a price buffer for American consumers. With regard to wheat specifically, even as Russia is the world’s largest wheat exporter (accounting for about one-quarter of all exports), the United States is also a net exporter of wheat, according to material received by the Coop’s purchasing department from a vendor—which aligns with information in news sources. The Coop vendor noted that nonetheless, “with nearly one-third of the

world's wheat exports offline or limited, there is severe constraint on the global market, causing prices to increase." Entering into the mix, many countries have sanctioned Russian wheat exports, and Ukraine, previously the fifth-largest wheat exporter (accounting for nine percent of all wheat exports), has halted all exports.

With food prices on the rise, some political analysts are tying the pressures to increased risk for civil unrest, particularly in areas dependent on wheat from Russia and Ukraine, such as swaths of the Middle East and North Africa. Price increases exacerbate pressures exerted by COVID, as well as climate disasters like floods and droughts. In an article in CNN Business on Egypt's recent cap on the price for bread, Nadeen Ebrahim wrote: "For Egypt and other Middle Eastern nations grappling with the ripple effects of the war, [prices are] a cause for concern. Just ten years ago, revolutions across the region toppled longtime dictators partly because of a rise in the price of commodities. 'Bread, freedom, social justice!' was among the most popular chants on the streets of Egypt during Arab Spring protests."

Meanwhile, a Coop vendor wrote that fuel costs are "contributing to everything," ticking off trucking delays, import delays, European logistics in turmoil due to the conflict and soaring oil prices "further increasing finished flour pricing."



General Coordinator Joe Szladek, who manages the Coop's buying departments, first cracked wise when asked about the war's impact, quipping, "We stopped carrying everything from Russia, and we can't get Ukrainian garlic!" but quickly got serious about a melange of pricing impacts. He pointed to the challenge of disaggregating war impacts from higher gas prices and transit issues. "It's a big stew," he said, remarking that prices for food and fuel may not have climbed as high if a "tenuous supply chain" had not already been a significant issue.

"Vendors tell us that the increases in fuel charges are really affecting them," said Szladek. Some of them are weighing overall increases to their product prices, or a fuel surcharge keyed to energy costs. "Distributors are trying to figure out how to make it most palatable," he said. He mentioned "some rumblings from vendors that things are a bit chaotic." Fuel costs also impact the cost of fertilizer, because natural gas is used to produce nitrogen fertilizers.

Szladek pointed out that the intersecting challenges have mounted over time. "These

things take a little while to reverberate through the system,” he said, noting that staffing issues in January and February meant that on occasion, “we weren’t getting entire trucks from distributors, because they couldn’t staff their warehouses.” The problems persist, he said. “We still have distributors occasionally canceling orders. It’s just across the board. It’s kind of whack-a-mole.”

Hayley Gorenberg is a journalist-turned-civil-rights-lawyer and Floridian-turned-Brooklynite.