

# A Consumer's Guide for Wisconsin Farm-Raised Fish



**Developed and compiled by:**

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**And the**

**Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and  
Consumer Protection**

**Something Special  
from  
Wisconsin**

## How to Purchase [Farm-Raised] Fish for Food?

- Finding Wisconsin Farm-raised fish.
- Purchasing and Handling Wisconsin Farm-raised fish.
- Aquaculture Systems

Probably the best way to find locally grown fish and fish products is to identify local growers. If you find the source, you can find the fish.

# How to Purchase [Farm-raised] Fish for Food

“Aquaculture provides half of the world’s seafood, with about 50 million tons grown worldwide in 2006. Further half the seafood consumed in the United States comes from aquaculture, and yet about 85 percent of that amount is imported.”<sup>(1)</sup>

How do you know if the fish you are about to enjoy is from Wisconsin? Unless a fish product specifically indicates that it is farm-raised, it can also be assumed it is wild harvested. How do you know if it farm-raised? Below we offer several tips of what to look for and how to tell where your fish is from.

## A. How to find (identify) Wisconsin Farm-raised Food Fish:

In Wisconsin, most of the farm-raised food fish grown will be commonly known native or naturalized species, or in other words, fish that are commonly found in Wisconsin lakes, rivers or streams either because of natural wild populations or having been introduced under Wisconsin DNR programs to enhance fishing opportunities. Some popular food-fish species raised in Wisconsin include rainbow trout, salmon, perch, bluegill, bullhead, catfish, and walleye. With the increase of recirculation and aquaponics systems, you may also find Wisconsin farm-raised tilapia.

Many of these fish are not grown in great quantities, so their availability for purchase is never guaranteed.

### 1. Direct from the farm

Probably the best way to find locally grown fish and fish products is to identify local growers. If you find the source, you can find the fish. Some Wisconsin fish farmers sell fish directly from the farm, at farmer’s markets or through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) groups. Some resources to find Wisconsin Farm-raised Food Fish include:

WAA:

<http://www.wisconsinaquaculture.com/>

NADF/WAA Local Food Resources List:

[https://campus.uwsp.edu/sites/cols-ap/nadf/Extension\\_Results/Local%20Food%20Resources.pdf](https://campus.uwsp.edu/sites/cols-ap/nadf/Extension_Results/Local%20Food%20Resources.pdf)

Savor Wisconsin Website

<http://www.savorwisconsin.com>

Something Special from Wisconsin program:

<http://www.somethingspecialwi.com/>

# How to Purchase [Farm-raised] Fish for Food

## 2. Supermarkets

In supermarkets, fish must be labeled as to the country of origin, and state of origin is also usually labeled. Ask the butcher if you are not sure. Look for the Something Special from Wisconsin label.

## 3. Restaurants

In restaurants, ask the server for the country/state of origin.

## 4. Questions to ask the producer or retailer

If you are purchasing fish from the farm, you may have an opportunity to gain information directly from the producer. If tours are provided, you may be able to observe how the farm operates while asking questions of the producer. Some questions you might ask include:

- How are the fish raised?
- How is water used on the farm?
- Are any chemical treatments used on the farm?
- What are the fish fed?
- How are the fish harvested?
- How (or where) are the fish processed?
- When were the fish processed?
- Do you have any recommendations on how to prepare the fish? Recipes?

If you are purchasing a fish or fish product from a retailer, the retailer may not know all the details relating to the products. However, if the retailer is selling local products, you should be able to obtain information regarding who the local farmer is and be able to backtrack to the farm of origin. Fish farmers are proud of their product and want their products labeled.

## B. How to purchase and handle Wisconsin Farm-raised Food Fish:

Wisconsin fish farmers are proud of their products. As with any farmed product, the whole purpose of raising fish is to provide a product of good quality. To help ensure the enjoyment of the fish product, it is important that the consumer selects and handles the fish appropriately. Below are some tips summarized from the FDA Fresh and Frozen Seafood guide.<sup>(2)</sup>

Ask yourself: What is my general impression of this facility? Does it look and smell clean? Do I think the seller is practicing proper food handling techniques?

# How to Purchase [Farm-raised] Fish for Food

## 1. Choosing Fresh Fish

Fresh fish is often purchased whole (“in the round”) or filleted with or without head, fins or skin. Only buy fish that is refrigerated or properly iced. If you are going to see fish or go to the farm market and intend to purchase fresh fish, it is best to carry along a small cooler with ice so that anything you purchase for home use does not lose quality prior to you preparing the product at home.

Some fresh products can be purchased as fresh at the farm market will likely have no labeling; however the vendor should be able to tell you exactly where the product was grown.

1. The fish should smell fresh and mild, not fishy or foul.
2. The eyes of the fish should be clear.
3. The flesh of the fish should be firm and shiny. (Note: dull flesh could mean the fish is old or that the fillet had been previously frozen.)
4. If the gills are still attached they should be bright red and free of slime.
5. Fish fillets should not have any darkening, discoloration or drying around the edges.

## 2. Choosing Frozen Fish:

Frozen fish is often packaged. Seafood can spoil if the fish thaws during transport or if it is left at warm temperatures for too long.

1. Make sure the package has not been opened or damaged.
2. Look for signs of frost or ice crystals. This could mean the fish has been stored a long time or has been thawed and refrozen.

## 3. Choosing Cured (Smoked, Salted, or Dried) Fish:

Prior to refrigeration, many people used traditional fish preservation techniques including salting, smoking or drying fish. Consumers often seek these products out for the flavor and use in selected recipes. Depending on the method of curing, the fish product can have a varying shelf-life. Check with the vendor to determine the appropriate length of storage. Also check the packaging for damage or if it has been opened.

Smoked fish is often eaten fresh. Fresh, smoked fish can be stored in a refrigerator for several days but will dry out in self defrosting refrigerators. Smoked fish can be frozen but lose their delicate fresh flavor rapidly when frozen.

## 4. Choosing Canned or Pickled Fish:

Canned or Pickled fish are often very shelf-stable if processed correctly. Check the can or jar for any damage or degradation.

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## 5. Storing Fish/Preservation:

In general, refrigerated fish and fish products should be kept below 38 degrees F (this includes fish products such as spreads and smoked fish). Keep the fish on ice or in the refrigerator if it will be eaten within two days. If it won't be used within two days, wrap it tightly in moisture-proof freezer paper or foil and store it in the freezer.

Frozen fish need to be stored below 32 degrees F. Some fish may be purchased as frozen fillets in water, packaged frozen without water, or individually quick frozen (IQF). IQF fish are packaged in bags and have an individual water seal on each fillet. These fillets have a very good shelf life however, in self defrosting refrigerators and freezers, the water seal may evaporate over time which would reduce their shelf life.

## 6. Preparation:

- (a) Thaw it safely: For frozen fish thaw it gradually, overnight in the refrigerator or immersed in a plastic bag in cold water.
- (b) Prevent cross-contamination while preparing the fish:
  - Wash your hands thoroughly before and after handling the fish.
  - Wash the cutting board with soap and hot water and sanitize.
- (c) Cook it properly.
  - Most fish should be cooked to internal temperature of 145°F.
  - Check the fish flesh. The internal flesh should be opaque and separate easily.

## C. Recipes:

Ask your local fish farmer or fisherman for recipe recommendations. Or you can check the “cook's corner” on the Wisconsin Aquaculture Association webpage.

<http://www.wisconsinaquaculture.com/Recipes.cfm>

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## **Resources**

Wisconsin Aquaculture Association (WAA):  
<http://www.wisconsinaquaculture.com/>

University of Wisconsin- Stevens Point – Northern Aquaculture Demonstration Facility (NADF):  
<http://aquaculture.uwsp.edu>

National Aquaculture Association (NAA)  
<http://www.thenaa.net/>

## **Superscript References**

<sup>(1)</sup> Agricultural Research Magazine. Jeff Silverstein. “Forum: Supporting U.S. Aquaculture.” October, 2010 Vol. 58, No.9. [Online] Available. (2010).  
<http://www.ars.usda.gov/is/AR/archive/oct10/>

<sup>(2)</sup> U.S. Food and Drug Administration. “Fresh and Frozen Seafood – Selecting and Serving it Safely.” [Online] Available. (2011).  
<http://www.fda.gov/downloads/Food/ResourcesForYou/Consumers/UCM239497.pdf>