Fish feeds are not healthy.

Fact: In the United States, fish feeds are regulated by the FDA as well as the respective State Departments of Agriculture and the American Association of Feed Control Officials (AFCO). Scientists and industry across the country are actively working to develop a variety of sustainable feeds to ensure that the fish can be nutritionally balanced to help promote health and growth, maintain great flavor and texture, and contain all of the important nutrients that consumers demand. Soybean farmers in America’s heartland play an important role in this effort.

Fiction: In the United States, very few drugs have been approved for use with aquatic organisms. Drugs and hormones are not used to promote growth. Before a drug is approved for use in the U.S., it must be shown that it will not harm the environment or public health. When a drug is used, strict withdrawal times are followed so that drug residues do not remain when the fish and shellfish reach the market.

Fact: Farm-raised fish contain hormones, antibiotics, and other drugs.

Fiction: Farm-raised fish and shellfish are all in important Omega-3 fatty acids.

Fact: The Omega-3 fatty acid content of all fish varies depending upon species and the diet. In wild fish stocks, other factors such as seasonality also affect the fatty acid content of the fish flesh. Farmed fish such as salmon, trout, barramundi, and coiba are naturally high in Omega-3. Studies indicate that, for some species, farmed fish actually have a higher Omega-3 content than their wild cousins. A few growers have been experimenting with the diet fed to farmed fish to increase the Omega-3 content.

In all cases, consuming more fish and shellfish just makes good nutritional sense. Because the USDA regards seafood as an incredibly nutrient dense food, the 2010 Dietary Recommendations for Americans suggest that Americans increase the amount and variety of seafood consumed by choosing seafood in place of some meat and poultry.

Fiction: Seafood contains high levels of mercury.

Fact: Mercury occurs naturally in the environment, and can also be released through human activities. Some large, long-lived, deepwater marine fish tend to accumulate more mercury than other species. For these reasons, the FDA recommends that pregnant women and children who may be pregnant, and small children avoid the consumption of shark, swordfish, king mackerel, and tilefish, and limit the consumption of albacore (white) tuna to 6 ounces per week. Many of the fish and shellfish considered low-mercury, including shrimp, channel catfish, tilapia, and salmon, are farmed raised.

Fiction: Pregnant women and children should avoid consumption of seafood.

Fact: A well-balanced diet that includes a variety of fish and shellfish can contribute substantially positive environmental impacts. These shrimp remove nutrients from the water by feeding on algae and particulate matter. This helps to maintain good water quality and minimizes the loss of oxygen, which is critical to the health of other organisms. While farmed shrimp are growing, they are offered feed that is based on shrimp byproducts. Because of their three-dimensional structure, shellfish form habitats and hiding places for other organisms, adding to the biodiversity of the marine environment. These impacts are so important that in some areas, community volunteers are restoring oyster and clam populations.

Fiction: Water leaving an aquaculture facility pollutes surrounding bodies of water.

Fact: Discharges from U.S. aquaculture facilities must meet the standards of the Environmental Protection Agency as well as stringent state and local regulations. The waters leaving the farm are of a lower quality than the water entering them.
Aquaculture, or fish-farming, defined as the raising of finfish and shellfish under controlled conditions, makes keeping great tasting fish and shellfish available to everyone. It also includes the production of baitfish for fishing, and live angling, of fish and shellfish selections on the menu easy and, better yet, cost-effective. Aquaculture, quality, price, and supply tend to be consistent, allowing you to plan pricing strategies in advance and ensuring that profit margins are predictable. Because of strict federal and state government oversight, you can meet your customers’ expectations that the U.S. farm-raised seafood you serve is sustainable, environmentally friendly, high quality, and wholesome.

Many people are confused about aquaculture, and this brochure can help answer your questions. Aquaculture includes the production of finfish and shellfish for human consumption, for stocking sport fishing ponds and streams, and to enhance wild populations. It also includes the production of tilapia for recreational fishing, and ornamental fish for fish tanks and backyard ponds. Other farms produce aquatic plants for food, garden ponds, aquaria, and even for fuel and medicine.

Types of aquaculture are practiced in the United States, both in bays, where products such as mussels, clams, oysters, salmon, flounder, and cobia are grown. Earthen ponds are the primary source of catfish, tilapia, bass, and crawfish. Trout, because they have high oxygen requirements, are often raised in raceways where water continuously flows through the system. In some areas, production takes place in high-tech recirculating systems that recirculate, or reuse, the water after it has been cleaned.

Fact: Aquaculture systems are unsanitary and the water is dirty.

Fiction: Aquaculture systems are sanitary and the water is clean.

Fact: For an aquaculture system to be profitable, it is essential that sanitary conditions and good water quality be maintained. If good environmental conditions are not maintained in the system, the fish can become stressed and die. That means the farmer has no crop to sell.

Fiction: Aquaculture degrades the environment.

Fact: Because of federal and state government oversight, you can meet your customers’ expectations that the U.S. farm-raised fish you serve is sustainable, environmentally friendly, high quality, and wholesome. Federal agencies including the Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) oversee the production of aquatic organisms in the United States.

States establish additional management practices that deal with water quality, wetlands protection, wastewater treatment, water supply, non-native species, and fish health programs. An important component of all of these programs is a requirement to prevent the escape of farmed fish into the wild. Farmed fish are routinely tested to help ensure that they are free of important diseases and aquatic nuisance species that might be harmful to the environment. All of these steps help to ensure that U.S. aquaculture products are safe and wholesome.

Fact: Aquaculture is not sustainable.

Fact: In the United States, growers are required, by law, to use farming methods that do not harm the environment, ensure the wise use of natural resources, and help protect wild stocks of finfish and shellfish.

Fiction: Aquaculture increases the potential risks for people who consume seafood that is likely to eat a variety of fish from many different locations. Both farm-raised and wild-harvest salmon are well below the U.S. Food and Drug Administration action level (point at which products are removed from the marketplace) for PCBs and provide a host of positive health benefits. Farm-raised salmon is one of the most available and well-accepted fish in the American market.

Many environmental organizations place U.S. farm-raised fish and shellfish on their Best Seafood Choices list. These lists consider environmental impact and sustainability.

Fiction: Farmed fish contain high levels of PCBs.

Fact: The main dietary sources of PCBs are fish (especially sport fish caught in contaminated lakes or rivers), meat, and dairy products. A factor that tends to minimize potential risks for people who consume seafood is that they are likely to eat a variety of fish from many different locations.

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