



Seafood Health Facts: Making Smart choices

Balancing the Benefits and Risks of Seafood Consumption

Resources for Healthcare Providers and Consumers

Pangasius [1]

Pangasius is a term used for a special variety of imported freshwater fish that have become the tenth most popular seafood product eaten in the United States. Consumers are eating about 6 ounces of Pangasius per year and demand for this moderately priced selection is expected to continue to increase. It is a primary example of the increasing demand and dependence on aquaculture or farm raised seafood products.

Pangasius is the scientific family name for certain types of freshwater catfish primarily found in Vietnam, Cambodia and neighboring nations. Like the U.S. catfish industry, aquaculture production techniques have been applied to these species, and the number of fish being raised in cages and ponds in the Mekong River Delta region of Vietnam has increased rapidly. The demand for these fish is driving an expansion of farming operations in other nations including China, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand. All of the species being raised in these countries are Asian catfish.

Confusion about the variety of different catfish species produced in many different countries has created problems for buyers trying to distinguish product attributes and price. The nomenclature is complicated by similar names for different fish species and by the production of the same fish species in different locations. The current approved market name specified by the U. S. Food and Drug Administration for various catfish species from different parts of the world are provided in the Table below.

Market Names	Scientific Names	Current Sources
Catfish or Channel Catfish	<i>Ictalurus punctatus</i>	United States and China
Basa or Pangasius	<i>Pangasius bocourti</i>	Vietnam, China and neighboring Asian nations
Swai, Tra, Sutchi, Striped Pangasius or Pangasius	<i>Pangasius hypophthalmus</i>	Vietnam, China and neighboring Asian nations

All of these fish are produced by aquaculture. Wild harvest is possible but very limited, and the wild fish are subject to considerable variation in quality.

Product Forms and Buyer Advice

Pangasius is available in the same forms available for most fish. The most popular form is boneless, skinless fillets or portions in different sizes and shapes cut from fillets. Fillets can range in size up to 6-8 ounces. Most products are shipped to the U.S. frozen and are available as a frozen item or thawed and sold as a previously frozen refrigerated product.

Market demand and associated product prices for different Pangasius species reflect consumer preferences. Basa is the preferred imported variety of Pangasius due to a mild to sweet flavor, whiter meat color and somewhat flaky cooked texture. In contrast the Swai or Tra can appear more off-white to beige and the fillets are thinner with a more coarse texture. The characteristics of the traditional United States farm raised catfish seems to fall somewhere between the two Pangasius selections. Consumer preferences are usually influenced

by price or the intended recipes.

Market preference for Basa has boosted prices above that for similar portions of Swai or Tra. The hardier Swai or Tra grow rapidly and can yield market size products within less than 10 months which is another factor that makes this species more economical. Illegal substitution of Pangasius for more valuable fish like grouper has been documented in the U.S. Pangasius should be identified both by the correct market name and country of origin.

Nutrition Information

Pangasius species have a low to moderate fat content with high levels of protein. The amount and composition of the fat content will be influenced by the feed used in aquaculture operations. A nutrition label for a four ounce raw portion of Pangasius is provided. The actual nutrient content of products that are consumed will be affected by added ingredients and the cooking method that is used.

Sustainability and Management

Continuing world wide demand for seafood will require more aquaculture production. The rapid growth in the popularity of Pangasius in the United States is a prime example of this trend. Various organizations, regional and national authorities, and third parties have focused on measures to assure sustainability. Producers, buyers, international organizations, and national authorities are advancing and mandating the use of Best Aquaculture Practices (BAP'S) to minimize impacts on local environments and communities. It is likely that Pangasius production will continue to increase with numerous measures to assure responsible practices and sustainability.

Market attempts to distinguish product sources have resulted in publicity claims about food safety issues related to pollution or the use of antibiotics in these products. While some of these concerns may have been partially true in prior and limited situations, both growers and governments have responded to these claims by imposing additional food safety controls and specific product monitoring procedures.

References

National Marine Fisheries Service, 2011. [Fisheries of the United States 2010](#) [2]

[USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference](#) [3]

Sidebar Image:

