



Experts: US seafood consumption numbers could get worse

Bleak numbers are a wake-up call for the industry, says insider.

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Data released earlier this week by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) **shows American seafood consumption is at its lowest levels since the 1990s** -- and Seafood Nutrition Partnership's Linda Cornish doesn't think we've seen the bottom.

"Since 2010, you've seen a downward trend [in per capita seafood consumption]," the program's executive director told **IntraFish**. "I'm not surprised, I'm disappointed. I hate to see a number like that ... I would say that just looking at the different economic factors in the industry, we'll probably see flat or declining trends for 2013."

Cornish, whose group, formerly the Seafood Foundation, is working to raise American consumer awareness about the health and nutritional benefits of eating seafood, sees the bleak numbers as a wake-up call to the seafood industry.

"I hope this is a signal to everyone in the seafood industry that this is urgent," Cornish said. "We can't wait another day to get behind an effort to help Americans understand that seafood is healthy for them and they need to understand why."

For her part, Cornish is working to raise \$15 million (€11 million) to conduct a three-year educational campaign touting the benefits of eating seafood; she's raised \$5 million of commitments so far from the seafood industry and has \$2.5 million more to go. The other half of the \$15 million will be

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coming from outside organizations, such as health care groups, who also have a stake in addressing American health.

Besides the declining consumption numbers, another number on the NOAA report caught Cornish's eye -- the fact that just 5 percent of seafood consumed by Americans comes from domestic aquaculture.

What can be done?

The Seafood Nutrition Partnership head said there are "many factors" contributing to the declining trends, listing off "economic conditions, busy lifestyles, perception that seafood is hard to prepare, perception that seafood is expensive, confusing messages on what seafood to eat and a younger generation that is not accustomed to eating seafood."

The industry is already trying to fix the issue, launching more ready-to-heat and ready-to-eat seafood options, but Cornish believes that boosting the America's lagging aquaculture industry would help bring the bleak numbers up.

Steve Hart, executive director at Indiana-based Soy Aquaculture Alliance, agrees.

"I think the writing is on the wall," Hart told **IntraFish**. "I think we're going to see seafood consumption decline in the US unless we can grow it ourselves."

The reasons for the countries lack of fish farms are well known: a lack of cohesive regulatory environment, conflicting state and federal regulations and no structural framework for aquaculture within federal waters. But groups like NOAA and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) are showing interest in fish farming, which encourages Hart.

But how can the industry change American consumers' often poor impressions of farmed seafood? Hart said one US state is a particularly shining example of changing attitudes toward aquaculture.

"Just look at the state of Maine," he said. "There's a state where you've had a major commercial fishing history and they have a pretty decently growing aquaculture industry now."

In his opinion, the Maine industry did it correctly, engaging directly with the fishermen whose livelihoods would be affected by fish farming and getting them involved in the farming.

"Now you see a state that's been resistant to aquaculture be pro-aquaculture," Hart said. "That's something I find very encouraging."

Cornish hopes it can happen, for the sake of increasing consumption, too.

"You see China developing aquaculture around the world," she said. "If we don't develop our own supply, I think we're going to feel another pinch at some point in the future."
