

Target audience & purpose

This fact sheet is designed to encourage and provide guidance for those involved in the fish supply chain (producers, processors, suppliers and caterers) interested in producing or sourcing a more sustainable fish supply. More specifically, those catering for the public or private sector will find this fact sheet useful for working towards the Soil Association's Food for Life Catering Mark (see box below).

BRONZE:

- No undesirable additives or hydrogenated fats
- 75% of dishes freshly prepared
- Meat is farm assured
- Eggs from cage free hens
- Menu is seasonal
- Training of catering staff
- No GM ingredients

SILVER - in addition to the Bronze criteria:

- Locally sourced items on the menu
- Certified organic **OR** Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) items on the menu
- Poultry, eggs and pork is Freedom Food assured **OR** 10% of ingredients certified organic or MSC
- No fish from Marine Conservation Society 'Fish to Avoid' list
- Information on display about provenance of foods
- At least one product is Fair Trade

GOLD - in addition to the Bronze and Silver criteria:

- 30% of ingredients certified organic **OR** MSC
- 50% of ingredients are locally sourced
- Meat, dairy products and eggs are certified organic
- Steps taken to increase up-take of non-meat dishes to promote a more sustainable diet

Context

In 2009 the Scottish Government launched a National Food and Drink Policy¹. The policy includes aims to create healthier more sustainable choices of food; to achieve sustainable food procurement in the public sector; and to have secure and resilient food systems. The Soil Association's Food for Life (FFL) project strives to balance the demands of nutrition and sustainability, as discussed in *Double dividend? Promoting good nutrition and sustainable consumption through healthy school meals*².

The Soil Association's Food for Life programme of work was launched in 2003 to improve the quality of school meals by introducing targets for food sourcing and food education. In Scotland the Food for Life programme of work is currently funded by the Scottish Government and includes catering services in the public and private sectors. The Food for Life Catering Mark has been developed to support caterers to achieve the Food for Life core targets of 75% fresh, 50% local and 30% organic. Sustainable fish is a specific criterion for the Silver and Gold Food for Life Catering Mark awards.

Nutritional benefits of fish

The nutritional benefits of fish are well documented and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) recommends people to eat more fish³. It is widely acknowledged that oily fish in particular contains significant quantities of Omega-3 fatty acids which have important health and development benefits. Specifically, there is now strong evidence documented by Food and Behaviour (FAB) that Omega-3 contributes to behaviour improvements in

children with ADHD and autism⁴. However, the health benefits of eating more fish need to be balanced with serious health concerns over environmental pollutants which are known to accumulate in the fatty tissue of fish such as dioxins, PCBs and methyl-mercury⁵.

Sustainability challenges

Fish is a significant component of diets all over the world and yet world fish stocks are in serious trouble⁶. Modern industrial fishing methods have contributed to the decline of fish stocks through the use of large trawlers, huge cheap nets, sophisticated fish-finding technology and mis-management. These methods also contribute to the destruction of marine ecosystems through killing non-target fish, plants, birds and marine mammals. Aquaculture accounts for a growing percentage of fish supply and has a number of adverse environmental impacts including use of wild caught fish for fishmeal, escapees, disease, parasites (especially sea lice), and pollution⁷.

Addressing the problem

Organic fish farming goes a long way to addressing some of the issues outlined above and is recommended by Sustain as the preferred method of fish farming⁸.



Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) is the gold standard in eco-certification for sustainable fisheries. The MSC mission is to use its ecolabel and fishery certification programme to contribute to the health of the world's oceans by recognising and rewarding

sustainable fishing practices, influencing the choices people make when buying seafood, and working with partners to transform the seafood market to a sustainable basis. The MSC has developed environmental standards for sustainable and well-managed fisheries and seafood traceability in the associated supply

chain, with a clear ecolabel to guide consumer choice.

In Scotland the work of the MSC is led by Claire Pescod and includes outreach to fisheries and the supply chain. To date there are 5 certified Scottish fisheries, with a further 12 fisheries in the programme. The list of MSC certified fish in Scotland includes North Sea haddock, langoustine from the Western Isles, North Sea herring and Western mackerel. Haddock is one of the most popular white fish used in both public and private catering services, with the majority of UK landings in the North East of Scotland. Scottish fisheries statistics show that Aberdeenshire lands the largest catch of haddock in Scotland⁹. Fisheries currently under MSC assessment include those catching mussels in Shetland and on the West coast; fisheries around the Highlands and Islands specialising in crab, lobster and scallops; North Sea and Clyde Estuary langoustine fisheries; queen scallop fisheries in Dumfries and Galloway; and a further herring fishery in the west of Scotland.

MSC certified restaurants include Ondine in Edinburgh, Anstruther Fish Bar, and the in-house restaurants of the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government offices which are run by Sodexo.

MSC is working to increase the understanding and availability of MSC certified products in the supply chain through the 'MSC on the menu' project. 'Fish n Kids' is an MSC educational programme for primary school children running in 3,500 schools in England with Scottish materials available to download from the Fish n Kids website¹⁰. The MSC website¹¹ and the Find a Supplier tool¹² provides an information service to the consumers, caterers and suppliers on sourcing and identifying MSC certified fish. 'The Good Catch Initiative' is a partnership between MSC, MCS, Seafood Choice Alliance and Sustain to provide information on sustainable sourcing to food service professionals.

The UK Marine Conservation Society (MCS) outlines the issues around fish stocks and marine environments all over the globe and

recommends MSC certified fish as the gold standard in sustainable fishing.

The MCS publishes a 'Fish to Avoid' list as well as a list of fish coming from well-managed sustainable stocks¹³. For example, the MCS lists the species and stocks of tuna most endangered. Blue fin tuna is especially at risk, but the more available stocks of skipjack and yellow fin tuna are now also being threatened by the use of purse seine nets. As a result of the information provided by the MCS, UK retailers are now working to source the most environmentally managed tuna stocks. For example, Marks and Spencer now sources line-caught yellow fin and skipjack tuna from the Maldives where only traditional fishing methods are used and there is a 200 mile ban on industrial fishing boats.

Tinned tuna is widely used in the catering trade. While fresh tuna is rich in Omega-3 fatty acids, the processing of tinned tuna removes the vital oil. Taking tinned tuna off the menu will require education and imagination to replace this popular and versatile product. The MCS suggests alternatives to tuna such as red mullet, black bream, red gurnard, pollock and Cornish sardines.

Brakes Brothers currently holds the contract for Scotland Excel to supply frozen and dry goods to local authority catering services in Scotland and is certified for MSC Chain of Custody, enabling them to provide a wide range of MSC certified products including frozen shaped fish products at an affordable price for public catering. Brakes Brothers has also worked with the MSC on the 'Fish n kids' project.

Local Authorities in Scotland have made some progress towards sustainable fish procurement. Highland Council currently sources most of its fish through this contract but would prefer to buy fresh (not frozen) MSC fish, which should be possible now that North Sea haddock is MSC certified. There has been some dialogue between Highland Council and Mey Selections (part of the North Highland Initiative) about supplying fresh MSC fish from

Scrabster for school meals as part of their Food for Life certification process. East Ayrshire Council has chosen to source fresh fish from a local fishmonger for use in school kitchens rather than source MSC certified products through Brakes Brothers. The decision was based on a policy to source fresh local ingredients and to cook from scratch. While this may be a sustainable choice in terms of supporting the local economy, there is no guarantee that fish sourced from a local fishmonger comes from sustainably managed fish stocks.

References

¹The Scottish Government (2009) *Recipe for Success – Scotland's National Food and Drink Policy*. The Scottish Government. Available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/277346/0083283.pdf>

²The Soil Association (2006) *Double dividend? Promoting good nutrition and sustainable consumption through healthy school meals*. Sustainable Consumption Roundtable. Available at: http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications/downloads/Dou-ble_Dividend.pdf

³<http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/healthydiet/nutritionessentials/fishandshellfish/>

⁴http://www.fabresearch.org/view_item.aspx?item_id=213&add_cat=ADHD

⁵ Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (2004) *Turning the Tide - Reducing the impact of fisheries on the marine environment*. The Stationary Office.

⁶Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (2004) *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture*. FAO Fisheries Department. Available at: <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/007/y5600e/y5600e00.pdf>

⁷ The Soil Association (2006) *Double dividend? Promoting good nutrition and sustainable consumption through healthy school meals*. Sustainable Consumption Roundtable. Available at: http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications/downloads/Double_Dividend.pdf

⁸Sustain (2005) *Like Shooting Fish in a Barrel: the collapse of world fisheries in the 21st century and what we can do to prevent it happening*. Sustain Web.

⁹ The Scottish Government (2009) *Public Sector Food Procurement in Scotland: An Overview of Current Evidence*. The Scottish Government. Available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/277249/0083244.pdf>

¹⁰ <http://www.fishandkids.org/>

¹¹ <http://www.msc.org/>

¹²<http://cert.msc.org/supplierdirectory/VControler.aspx?Path=be2ac378-2a36-484c-8016-383699e2e466&NoLayout=true>

¹³ <http://www.mcsuk.org/>