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# Yellow Seafood Watch rating opens doors for Maine farmed salmon

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By James Wright

**'Good alternative' designation a boost for region's primary producer Cooke Aquaculture**



Maine-produced product is now an option for retailers and restaurant buyers who follow the Monterey Bay Aquarium's influential recommendations.

The Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch program, a strong influence on hundreds of professional seafood buyers and thousands of app-tapping consumers, now sees ocean-raised farmed salmon from Maine in a new light.

The yellow, or “good alternative,” **rating issued in early February** (<http://www.seafoodwatch.org/seafood-recommendations/groups/salmon?o=564677163>), was a “huge milestone” for New Brunswick-based Cooke Aquaculture, says a spokesperson for the company. Cooke is the largest salmon producer in Atlantic Canada and the only major commercial producer operating in Maine. This is first time Seafood Watch has awarded such a designation to salmon raised in ocean net pens in North America.

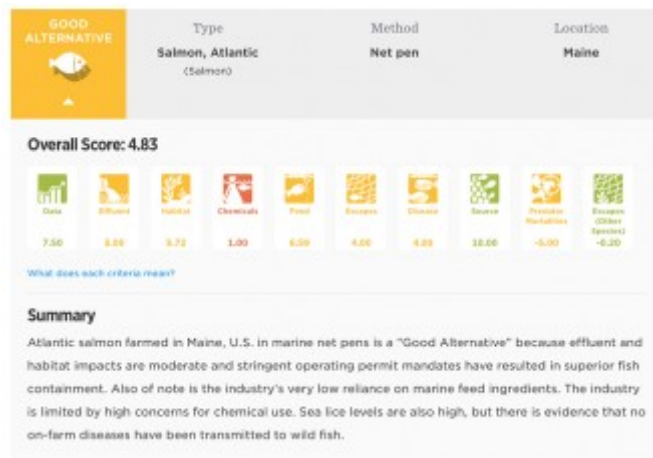
Nell Halse, VP-communications, told the *Advocate* that the company initiated the process with Monterey Bay Aquarium staff back in the fall of 2013.

“We are very excited about this, and have been working hard as well to get Monterey Bay to revise their [salmon] assessment. We have had enjoyed a good reputation in the United States and Canada for our four-star [Best Aquaculture Practices]-certified salmon. This is an additional boost, one that opens the door to customers that follow Seafood Watch,” Halse said. According to the aquarium’s website, the guidelines have more than 900 business partners, companies that use the recommendations as a de facto procurement policy.

The salmon farmer began sharing data with Seafood Watch in 2008. Since then, aquarium staff have toured the farms, met with company officials and its technical team, and also with government officials in Maine within its Department of Marine Resources. “This is an endorsement for what they do as well,” said Andrew Lively, director of marketing for True North Salmon, the brand under which Cooke’s Maine salmon is sold and distributed.

“The state has identified aquaculture as having major growth potential. If Seafood Watch says what they’re doing is positive, it bodes well for future development in Maine and more broadly in eastern North America,” Lively added.

The yellow rating – the middle tier of the aquarium’s “stoplight” advisory system where green is “best choice,” yellow is “good alternative” and red is “avoid” – applies only to salmon raised in the state of Maine. Seafood



Farmed salmon raised in Maine now have a “good alternative” rating from Seafood Watch.

Watch noted that farms there have only moderate effluent and habitat impacts and are subject to “stringent operating permit mandates that have resulted in superior fish containment.” Another positive, the aquarium noted, was the industry’s “very low reliance on marine feed ingredients.” Halse said that Cooke adheres to the same bay-management practices in Canada and Maine, where farm sites law fallow for a year after harvest to ensure proper effluent flushing.

Seafood Watch did express “high concerns” for chemical use on Maine farms. However, Halse said that less than 2 percent of Cooke’s fish feed is medicated with antibiotics, which, when compared to other animal proteins, “is no comparison.” Additionally, antibiotics are never used as a growth promoter and are administered only under the direction of a veterinarian.

“It’s part of the way we do business,” Halse said. “This conversation with Monterey Bay is not over. We’re going to continue working with them,” she added, to get Canada the same rating as Maine. “The red rating [for Canada] is not new; it’s been there for years, for the whole industry. Only recently has there been some slight movement.”

Finally, Seafood Watch reported that sea lice are present, but there is no evidence that on-farm diseases have been transmitted to wild fish. Halse said that Seafood Watch acknowledged that the company is actively investing in non-chemical means in managing sea lice and that farmers have successfully prevented farmed salmon from escaping their pens.

Seafood Watch has also given the “good alternative” rating to salmon from the Kvarøy and Selsøyvik farms in northern Norway and Verlasso Atlantic salmon, which is farmed in Chile. Chinook salmon farmed in New Zealand in marine net pens are the only farmed salmon to be designated as a “best choice,” because the small scale of the industry results in no pathogen or parasite outbreaks or associated antibiotic or pesticide treatments, according to Seafood Watch.

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