

SA Chefs reveal their thoughts on local seafood

In a first for South Australia, the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute (University of SA) looked at what factors influenced South Australian eateries when purchasing seafood.

Funded by Marine Innovation South Australia (MISA), the project 'Barriers and Drivers of the South Australian Food Service Sector's Purchase of Seafood' highlights the opportunities for the SA food service sector to increase the purchase of local seafood products.

65 face-to-face interviews were conducted with chefs from SA eateries, ranging from fish and chip shops to 'silver service' restaurants in five star hotels.

In brief the following outcomes were reported:

Designing menus – where does seafood fit?



South Australian mussels

Chefs commented that their primary focus is seasonality when composing menus.

40% of chefs develop seasonal menus and will only include produce that is available throughout the entire season; to get local seafood on these menus the industry need to ensure a consistent supply.

Seafood presence on menus at the current figure of 33% of total mains is deemed ideal according to the survey; therefore the objective of the industry should be to encourage chefs to use more seasonal SA seafood rather than trying to get more seafood offered on menus. More than 75% of chefs regularly use a 'specials' menu which allows them to trial new recipes or ideas for a short period. This provides an ideal opportunity to introduce new, local seafood products to chefs that can be 'promoted' to the seasonal menu.

Chefs' perceptions of fish and shellfish

Chefs considered seafood, in comparison to beef, lamb and chicken, to be consistently top quality, healthy and versatile, with the greatest range of recipe options.

However, they also perceived seafood as hard to work with, with excessive waste, limited shelf-life, inconsistent portion sizes, unstable pricing and inconsistent availability.

Shellfish were also ranked poorly for perceived food safety risk.

Many chefs know little about the seafood industry, with a high percentage of chefs unsure as to whether certain species are wild caught or farmed, and a lack of understanding about local fishing and aquaculture principles and practices, such as: sustainable management, feed information and the environmental impacts of fishing and aquaculture.

Addressing these issues will increase the amount of local seafood included on menus.

The local seafood industry must be proactive in promoting their sustainability and environmental credentials to address the common misconceptions that can be barriers to purchase. Actions include:

- Better calibrating and grading product to provide more consistent portion sizes;
- Holding Master Class cooking workshops for chefs that; demonstrate how to cook local seafood, create profitable seafood dishes, generate less wastage, and highlight the versatility of local seafood;
- Managing price fluctuations and availability, by offering equivalent alternative SA products if a particular species is not available; and
- Addressing food safety concerns by promoting local seafood as healthy and safe and the 'cleanest and greenest' seafood in the world, may assist in breaking down some of these perceptions.

Seafood supply

Most chefs appeared satisfied with and loyal to their chosen suppliers, with one third using a single supplier.

However, chefs raised several issues they perceive as barriers in using more local seafood.

These included:

- Limited range or availability of seafood; and inconsistency in the supply and size of products;
- Improving the availability of local seafood including species that only get exported or sold interstate;
- Better handling and packaging of the seafood;
- Informing chefs about new products, including providing samples; and
- Working more closely with food service customers in delivering a range of products.

Full details of the project are provided in a report 'Barriers and Drivers of the South Australian Food Service Sector's Purchase of Seafood' available from the South Australian Food Centre.

Key Points

A recent survey of 65 chefs in SA revealed that:

The current proportion of seafood based dishes on menus, one third, so chefs must be encouraged to use more local seafood rather than trying to get more seafood offered on menus.

South Australian seafood is considered to be consistently top quality, healthy and incredibly versatile.

Seafood is perceived to be hard to work with, with excessive waste, limited shelf-life, inconsistent portion sizes, unstable pricing and inconsistent availability.

Shellfish were ranked poorly for perceived Food Safety risk.

The seafood industry must:

- work directly with and educate chefs about local product
- improve seafood availability
- provide consistent sized products
- manage price fluctuations; and
- promote the benefits of fresh local seafood grown in pristine waters.

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Acknowledgments

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