



Seafood Makes a Splash: Tilapia gains ground, fish-and-chips get trendy.

National Seafood Month is coming up in October—a good time to add new items to your menu. Indeed, seafood has never been more popular. According to data compiled by the NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service and released by the National Fisheries Institute (NFI), Mc Lean, Va., overall seafood consumption in America has been increasing by the year. It amounted to 16.5 lbs. per person last year, up from 16.2 lbs. in 2005. Moreover, total consumption has risen 11% in the past six years, from 14.8 lbs. in 2001.

Shrimp, pollock and tilapia consumption helped to drive the overall increase. Shrimp continued to lead: Consumption climbed 0.3 lb. per person to 4.4 lbs. for the year. Tilapia moved up to the number five spot in overall consumption, replacing catfish. (For NFI's "top 10" list of species in terms of consumption, as well as for recipe suggestions, see www.aboutseafood.com.)

"Seafood is more popular than ever. Everyone is watching red meat intake, even in Texas, where meat is big," comments Michael Hirsch, a sales rep for Ben E, Keith Foods in Ft. Worth, Texas, and a member of the Association for Foodservice Distributor Representatives (AFDR). Frozen seafood is a winner for many accounts, he notes. "The technology of freezing fish is better than ever, enabling many of my customers to add seafood where it may not have been feasible before. And where truth-in-labeling is concerned, you have the guarantee of the brand."

Species that are big in Hirsch's market include tilapia, halibut, sea bass, mahi mahi, and tuna. Patrizio, an Italian white-tablecloth operation with two Dallas locations, recently expanded its menu to include seafood specials. Among featured entrees are sautéed tilapia drizzled with tomato-basil sauce and topped with jumbo lump crabmeat; mahi mahi marinated in olive oil flavored with thyme and garlic or rosemary and garlic; sautéed tuna drizzled with balsamic vinegar and topped with mandarin oranges and olive relish; and gulf shrimp with a saffron cream sauce. (See www.patrizios.net.)

In some areas, fish and chips, the old British standard, is becoming trendy. Scott Joseph, restaurant critic for the Orlando Sentinel, says he is seeing this in his market. Recently, he reviewed a new restaurant called "Grouper & Chips."

The restaurant is the third location for Grouper & Chips, which originated 14 years ago on Florida's West Coast, according to Mitch Weiss, who operates the new Orlando location. He plans to open 10 more units in that market within the next five years. The concept features fresh seafood, including its signature fried grouper as well as other species and preparations, in a casual ambiance. "There is a crying need for good seafood restaurants serving fresh fish consistently," Weiss comments. Among the most popular, and nontraditional, menu items at Grouper & Chips are fish tacos and grouper Reuben sandwich made with Swiss cheese, coleslaw and Thousand Island dressing.

Note: For information on top-quality, convenient seafood products and menu application ideas, visit Foodservice Rewards sponsor King & Prince Seafood featuring Mrs. Friday's Products (www.mrsfridays.com).