

# Survey Suggests Successful Claims For Seabream Marketing



At traditional fish markets in northern Spain, promotional claims seldom go further than identifying the local or regional origin of the product.

## Dr. José Fernández-Polanco

Universidad de Cantabria  
Avda. de los Castros E-39005  
Santander, Cantabria, Spain  
polancoj@unican.es

## Dr. Simone Mueller

Division of Business  
School of Marketing  
University of South Australia  
Adelaide, South Australia, Australia

## Dr. Ladislao Luna

Universidad de Cantabria

ronmental conditions or process traditions that make their seafood products stand out in national or overseas markets. This is the case of foodstuffs protected with local brands or the European Union program of “protected denominations of origin.” Oysters from Coffin Bay in Australia and mussels from Galicia in Spain are good examples of this issue.

There is also the predisposition of consumers to better appreciate local foods versus those imported or brought from other regions. This ethnocentrism plays an important role, mainly when imported products compete with the same local species.

Finally, social changes that started in the Western world and extended to developing areas have made product convenience a strong influence in purchase decisions for food. The concept of “quality fish” at households in developed countries includes ease of handling, storage and cooking. This factor can also include special preparations for specific market segments like small children, elderly people and those with unique dietary requirements.

### Field Survey

The authors recently conducted an experiment in a traditional fish market in northern Spain with 33 fresh fish retail stores where seabream is a common species offered to consumers. Traditional fish markets account for around 30% of total Spanish seafood purchases, a share which increases in the fresh fish market.

commodity with little or no promotion. Under these conditions, the market has reacted as economic theory predicts, with sharp falls in prices and losses for many firms in the sector.

### Value Factors

Four main factors are significant causes of increases in seafood’s perceived value: safety and health benefits, sustainability, country or region of origin and convenience. All of these factors affect consumer preferences about seafood purchases and the prices they are willing to pay.

Although related, safety and health benefits are two different concepts. Safety refers to the avoidance of risks, which does not necessarily result in benefits for health. Concerned consumers might derive utility from information relative to nutrient composition, preservatives, additives, and harvest procedures and methods. Even though many consumers are confused about the meaning of sustainability, the topic is playing an increasing role in food purchase decisions.

Geographic origin is also an important determinant of people’s seafood preferences. Some regions have special envi-

The typical profile of the consumers who purchased at the markets was a woman older than 50 years who owned a home and had a primary or equivalent degree of education. Although the increasing segment of young professionals and parents in the 30- to 45-year-old range living in the surrounding areas has been sought by authorities’ promotional efforts, the group represents less than 25% of the total number of purchasers.

Promotion at the markets, which are considered providers of the best quality in fresh seafood, relies on sellers providing customers both ample quantity and quality. Brands and associated claims other than local sourcing are not frequent at traditional fresh fish stores.

It is assumed that personal relationships among retailers and purchasers encourage trust, and customers are not so aware or concerned with seafood safety or sustainability. On the other hand, studies performed for the Spanish Ministry of Fisheries revealed that customers of traditional fish markets held the most unfavorable attitudes towards aquaculture species.

With these market conditions, a discrete choice experiment was conducted presenting claims for safety, health benefits and sustainability in different combi-

nations for wild and farmed seabream. Consideration of these issues was not common at the markets, and for many purchasers, it may have been the first time they had to choose among such kinds of claims.

A sample of 196 respondents, including 27 retailers, cooperated in making the eight different choices with sets of four alternatives. Factors were selected after two and whole traders focus group sessions with five retailers at the fish market (Table 1).

### Results

The main conclusions (Table 2) pointed to a strong preference for wild domestic seabream. Even so, the lower utility derived from farmed and imported products can be compensated with lower comparative prices. Country of origin was the second most important attribute for participants. The probability of choosing farmed seabream and hence



The concept of “quality fish” at households in developed countries includes ease of handling, storage and cooking.

willingness to pay was higher for a domestic than an imported product.

Sustainability claims were more effective than safety claims in increasing the probability of choosing a seabream and had a higher marginal willingness to pay. Health benefits exerted slightly smaller effects on choice and willingness to pay than sustainability exerted.

Price was the most important driver to choose seabream. The lower production cost of farmed seabream was its main advantage over wild fish. But the price differential between both harvesting methods could be offset by greater emphasis on local production, sustainability, health benefits and safety. Local origin has a strong competitive advantage for producers.

### Market Strategies

A marketing strategy focused on the local market may obtain a bigger return than one focused on overseas markets. Accurate labeling that clearly identifies the origin of the product would benefit local producers in getting higher prices than for imported species. Sustainability can be an influential claim that increases preferences toward farmed seabream when consumers are aware of this issue. Its effect is higher than that of safety and health benefits.

Certifications like Best Aquaculture Practices and “green” farmed products may gain a return from the market that could offset their costs. Safety and health benefits also exert a positive influence on choices, with safety the weakest of the three claims presented. Promotions featuring the healthy omega-3 fatty acids in seabream may be one explanation for the stronger influence of health benefits.

Table 1. Factors involved in the experiment.

Price	Four levels, 6.90 to 15.40 €/kg
Harvest method	Farmed/wild
Origin	Domestic/imported
Sustainability	Sustainable fishery/none
Safety	Anisakis-free/none
Health benefits	Natural omega-3s/none

Table 2. Results from analysis.

Attributes	Class I	Z Value	Wald	P Value	Marg. WTP
<b>Safety</b>					
None	-0.17	-5.95	35.43	0	-€ 1.55
Anisakis-free	0.17	5.95			€ 1.55
<b>Health</b>					
None	-0.23	-8.37	69.98	0	-€ 2.01
Natural omega-3	0.23	8.37			€ 2.01
<b>Sustainability</b>					
None	-0.26	-9.62	92.55	0	-€ 2.31
Sustainable	0.26	9.62			€ 2.31
<b>Origin</b>					
Imported	-0.36	-12.08	145.96	0	-€ 3.22
Domestic	0.36	12.08			€ 3.22
<b>Harvest</b>					
Wild-caught	0.36	12.00	144.08	0	€ 3.20
Farmed	-0.36	-12.00			-€ 3.20
<b>Price</b>					
	-0.11	-12.21	149.05	0	