

SALMON OF THE AMERICAS



Medical, health and food safety experts advise reading past the headlines in the new news about farmed salmon.

Reading only the headlines or the first paragraph can be misleading and nowhere is that more apparent than in the current debate about farmed salmon and PCBs.

A new study that defines levels of PCBs has grabbed the headlines. Even though the numbers are not new, they serve as a launching point for the authors to give their opinions on farmed salmon consumption—Advice that is out of tune with the facts as presented by a host of experts in medicine and food safety, including some of the most widely experienced and respected people in their fields.

Here is a sample of what they say in various published articles and interviews:

Officials of the Food and Drug Administration disputed the study's recommendations.

- “We’ve looked at all the data and our advice to consumers is not to alter their consumption of farmed or wild salmon,” said **Terry Troxell, director of the FDA Center for Food Safety and Nutrition.**

“Salmon is an excellent source of Omega 3 fatty acids, vitamins and proteins,” he said. “These [contaminant] levels are extremely low and are not of public health concern to us.”

As quoted on ABC News, January 9, 2004

- The recent discovery of PCBs, dioxins and other pollutants in farmed salmon shouldn't scare people away from the fish.

Such scares must be put into the overall context of what Americans eat, and the nation's exposure to PCBs in particular has plummeted in recent decades, McClellan said. Because the fish is high in heart-healthy fats, "there are real benefits of consuming salmon," he added.

FDA Commissioner Mark McClellan, as quoted by
The Associated Press, January 9, 2004

Comments From Other Food and Health Experts

- The study “will likely over-alarm people in this country,” said **Eric Rimm of the Harvard School of Public Health**, a specialist on nutrition and chronic disease. “To alarm people away from fish because of some potential, at this point undocumented, risk of long-term cancer—that does worry me.”

As quoted by The Associated Press, January 9, 2004

- Eric Rimm of the Harvard School of Public Health in Cambridge, Mass., points out numbers alone may suggest farmed salmon's benefits still outweigh any risk. One in two Americans die every year from cardiovascular disease, while the risk of developing cancer from contaminants remains uncertain and undocumented.

As quoted by Los Angeles Times, January 9, 2004

- PCB's have not been proved to cause cancer in people, and industry workers who were exposed to higher levels did not have a higher cancer rate, said **Dr. Michael Gallo of the Cancer Institute at the Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.**

As quoted in The New York Times, January 9, 2004

- Echoing many of the criticisms held by other researchers in the fields of nutrition and toxicology, Mike Gallo of Rutgers University told IntraFish yesterday that while the study was comprehensive in its approach, its conclusions were faulty.

“PCBs are in all salmon. The difference between 5 ppb [parts per billion] and 30 ppb is meaningless. If you use the EPA's mathematical model...there is no difference,” Gallo said, referring to the differing PCB levels that the study's authors found in wild and farmed salmon.

Gallo, who said he helped to craft the EPA's cancer risk assessment model used by the authors, remarked that it was inappropriate for the scientists to discount the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's guidance on contaminants in fish. The FDA has never issued a public health advisory on farmed salmon and yesterday reiterated its position that the product is safe to several news outlets.

“As a professor of public health, I would never tell anyone to limit their intake of salmon,” Gallo said.
As quoted on Intrafish, January 9, 2004

- “No one is really sure how important these interactions are in the real world,” said **Dr. Mark E. Hahn, a toxicologist at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution** who has spent 20 years working on PCB's and dioxins, with no industry support.

But, Dr. Hahn said, if someone decides not to eat farmed salmon, then what? “What risk are you substituting?” he asked. “What else are you going to eat?”

“I love salmon, and I eat it a couple of times a month,” he said.

He read the Science paper carefully, he said, and “I'm not going to change my eating habits.”

As quoted in The New York Times, January 9, 2004

- **Phil Guzelian, M.D., a professor of medicine and head of the medical toxicology section at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center**, says this report is largely a confirmation of previously accumulated knowledge regarding trace amounts of chlorinated chemicals detectable in fish, in this case, in salmon. The data show quite convincingly, as has been known for some time, that regardless of whether the salmon are farm bred or caught wild, the amounts of these chemicals are small indeed, being about 100 times lower than the safe amounts recommended by the US FDA's health-based risk assessments.

In view of the lack of an evidence-based determination that these chlorinated chemicals at such low doses are toxic to humans at all, the Hites *et al.* 2003 report provides reassurance to the public to consider, without misgivings, the reported health benefits of including salmon in the diet.

- “The nutritional benefits of salmon are pretty amazing,” said **Charles Santerre, a professor of food and nutrition at Purdue University** in West Lafayette, Ind., “I strongly believe that all the data we have today suggests that everyone should be eating more farmed salmon.”

As quoted on ABC News, January 9, 2004

- Charles Santerre, a food toxicologist at Purdue University, called the study flawed because it failed to take into account the nutritional benefits of eating salmon. He said any slightly elevated risk of cancer pales in comparison with the advantages of consuming salmon rich with omega-3 fatty acids, which help prevent heart attacks.

Even an increase in farmed salmon consumption, he said, is a worthwhile trade-off in the fight against heart disease, American's No. 1 killer. “I would calculate 6,000 people getting cancer over their lifetime, that's an approximation, versus potentially saving the lives of 100,000 individuals every year.”

Furthermore, Santerre said, the levels of contaminants detected in the study show salmon to be perfectly safe, as is recognized by the FDA.

As quoted in The Los Angeles Times, January 9, 2004