

NUTRITION

THE PERFECT FISH

Fish is fast becoming a guilty pleasure, thanks to the collapse of fisheries and worrying levels of mercury. Kona Kampachi to the rescue. by ZACH BRAUN

TWO YEARS AGO SCIENTISTS warned us that if we didn't change the way we fished, there wouldn't be any fish left in 50 years. Then just a few months ago we were told there was so much mercury in New York City sushi you could all but take your temperature with a piece of bluefin. Did it change our eating habits? Not really. But now there's finally something on the seafood menu that could make a real impact: Kona Kampachi, a plentiful mercury-free yellowtail, and this new high-grade specimen is by design.

In 2001 marine biologists Neil Anthony Sims and Dale Sarver made it their mission to harvest tasty yellowtail that was as healthy for those eating it as it was for the environment. It all started in Kona, Hawaii — hence the company name Kona Blue — where the yellowtail is native and the ocean is among the cleanest on Earth. Now, after nearly a decade of innovative farming, they're producing a fish that has all the fatty omega-3 benefits of our favorite brain food without any of the poisons.

Kona Blue's breakthrough is especially significant in light of the abnormally high levels of mercury recently found in commercially purchased fish. All fish contain traces of mercury, as it's a naturally occurring environmental element, but predatory species can acquire toxic levels of it. Ingest enough of it, and you'll get methylmercury poisoning, which attacks the central nervous system. Recent studies have even linked it to decreased fertility in men.

Originally from Australia, Sims says the key is having control over the fish from hatch to harvest, from conception to consumption, from spawn to sashimi. "We even control the diet of the broodstock that spawn the eggs," says Sims, whose early work as a fisheries researcher in the atolls of the South Pacific led him to his good sense of aquaculture. One of the ways they maintain this level of control is by starting with a broodstock of only 300 fish.

**WHAT:**

Kona Kampachi is a yellowtail. Other species of yellow tail include Japanese hamachi, California yellowtail, and Gulf Coast amberjack.

WHERE:

It's found in tropical and subtropical waters, particularly around Hawaii.

WEIGHT:

The average weight of a fish is five to six pounds.

WHY IT'S SO GOOD FOR YOU:

All the omega-3 goodness, none of the mercury

HOW TO BUY IT:

It costs nearly the same as toto sushi in a restaurant or \$17-\$20 per pound online (kona-blue.com)

Recently fish farms have gotten (and deserved) a bad name — mostly due to overcrowded salmon farms, which have disastrous environmental effects when farmed fish escape and introduce injected growth hormones, inbred DNA, and mutant diseases into the wild. Overcrowding also produces toxic clouds that pollute areas down-current of the farms.

Most farms are not truly "sustainable" because they use two pounds of fish to produce one. Kona Blue has reduced feed levels from 80 percent three years ago to the current level of less than 28 percent. Tim Fitzgerald, a scientist with the Environmental Defense Fund, likes what he hears about Kona Blue but admits the jury is still out. "Their farming technique is too new to determine if the claims of sustainability are valid," he

says. "But I can say they certainly are environmentally conscious."

If nothing else, Sims's take on the future of fish farming is a step in the right direction. "As an insurance policy, we like to splice wild

fish into our spawning groups to ensure there is no discernible genetic difference between what's inside and outside the cage," he says. "And since our fish are grown in deep water with brisk currents, there is no detectable environmental impact beyond the immediate area of the net pens. You can't tell the difference between the water quality up-current or down-current of the farm."

Although Kona Blue isn't a huge operation, it has raised nearly a million fish to marketable size to date, at a rate of about 25,000 pounds per week, and has managed to get Kona Kampachi into hundreds of restaurants across the country. "There's a romance in wild fishing," Sims explains. "But there's a future in good farming."

TRY IT TONIGHT:

Local Style Kona Kampachi Sashimi:
A simple sushi recipe for the full flavor experience of Kona Kampachi

- 2 fresh Kona Kampachi fillets, sliced sashimi-style
- 1/4 cup soy sauce
- 1 tsp wasabi (Japanese green mustard)
- 1 cup julienned radishes and carrots

Arrange sliced sashimi on a bed of julienned radishes and carrots. Serve with soy sauce and wasabi on the side.