

BUYING LOCAL FISH? IT MAY NOT BE TRUE

Associated Press

MONTAUK, N.Y. (AP) — Caterers in Washington tweeted a photo of maroon sashimi appetizers served to 700 guests attending the governor’s inaugural ball last year. They were told the tuna was from Montauk. But it was an illusion. It was the dead of winter and no yellowfin had been landed in the New York town.

An Associated Press investigation traced the supply chain of national distributor Sea To Table to other parts of the world, where fishermen described working under slave-like conditions with little regard for marine life.

In a global seafood industry plagued by deceit, conscientious consumers will pay top dollar for what they believe is local, sustainably caught seafood. But even in this fast-growing niche market, companies can hide behind murky dealings, making it difficult to know the story behind any given fish.

Sea To Table said by working directly with 60 docks along U.S. coasts it could guarantee the fish was wild, domestic and traceable — sometimes to the fisherman.

The New York-based company quickly rose in the sustainable seafood movement. While it told investors it had \$13 million in sales last year, it expected growth to \$70 million by 2020. The distributor earned endorsement from the Monterey Bay Aquarium and garnered media attention from Bon Appetit, Forbes and many more. Its clientele included celebrity chef Rick Bayless, Roy’s seafood restaurants, universities and home delivery meal kits such as HelloFresh.

As part of their investigation, reporters staked out America’s largest fish market, followed trucks and interviewed fishermen who worked on three continents. During a bone-chilling week, they set up a time-lapse camera at Montauk harbor that showed no tuna boats docking. The AP also had a chef order \$500 worth of fish sent “directly from the landing dock to your kitchen,” but the boat listed on the receipt hadn’t been there in at least two years.

Preliminary DNA tests suggested the fish likely came from the Indian Ocean or the Western Central Pacific. There are limita-



AP Photo/Julie Jacobson

Surrounded by ice, commercial fishing boats are docked in their slips after more than a week’s worth of frigid weather froze the harbor in Lake Montauk in Montauk, N.Y., on Jan. 7. Only a few commercial boats remain in Montauk harbor during the winter months fishing for species such as porgy, tilefish, monkfish and black sea bass.



AP Photo/Julie Jacobson

A fishmonger rinses swordfish carcasses just pulled from their shipping containers Jan. 8 at the New Fulton Fish Market in New York.

tions with the data because using genetic markers to determine the origins of species is still an emerging science, but experts say the promising new research will eventually be used to help fight illegal activity in the industry.

Some of Sea To Table’s partner docks on both coasts, it turned out, were not docks at all. They were wholesalers or markets, flooded with imports.

The distributor also offered species that were farmed, out of season or illegal to catch.

“It’s sad to me that this is what’s going on,” said chef Bayless, who hosts a PBS cooking series. He had worked with Sea To Table because he liked being tied directly to fishermen — and the “wonderful stories” about their catch. “This throws quite a wrench in all of that.”

Other customers who responded to AP said they were frustrated and confused.

Sea To Table owner Sean Dimin stressed that his suppliers are prohibited from sending imports to customers and added violators would be terminated.

“We take this extremely seriously,” he said.

Dimin also said he communicated clearly with

chefs that some fish labeled as freshly landed at one port were actually caught and trucked in from other states. But customers denied this, and federal officials described it as mislabeling.

The AP focused on tuna because the distributor’s supplier in Montauk, the Bob Gosman Co., was offering chefs yellowfin tuna all year round, even when federal officials said there were no landings in the entire state.

Almost nightly, Gosman’s trucks drove three hours to reach the New Fulton Fish Market, where they picked up boxes of fish bearing shipping labels from all over the world.

Owner Bryan Gosman said some of the tuna that went to Sea To Table was caught off North Carolina and then driven 700 miles to Montauk. That practice ended in March, he said, because it wasn’t profitable. While 70 percent of his yellowfin tuna is imported, he said that fish is sold to local restaurants and sushi-bars and kept separate from Sea To Table’s products.

“Can things get mixed up? It could get mixed up,” he said. “Is it an intentional thing? No, not at all.”

Some of Gosman’s foreign supply came from Land, Ice and Fish, in Trin-

idad and Tobago.

The AP interviewed and reviewed complaints from more than a dozen Indonesian fishermen who said they earned \$1.50 a day, working 22 hours at a time, on boats that brought yellowfin to Land, Ice and Fish’s compound. They described finning sharks and occasionally cutting off whale and dolphin heads, extracting their teeth as good luck charms.

“We were treated like slaves,” said Sulisty, an Indonesian who worked on one of those boats and gave only one name, fearing retaliation. “They treat us like robots without any conscience.”

Though it’s nearly impossible to tell where a specific fish ends up, or what percentage of a company’s seafood is fraudulent, even one bad piece taints the entire supply chain.

Dimin said the labor and environmental abuses are “abhorrent and everything we stand against.”

For caterers serving at the ball for Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, who successfully pushed through a law to combat seafood mislabeling, knowing where his fish came from was crucial.

The Montauk tuna came with a Sea To Table leaflet describing the romantic, seaside town and the quality of the fish. A salesperson did send them an email saying the fish was caught off North Carolina. But the boxes came from New York and there was no indication it had landed in another state and was trucked to Montauk. A week later the caterer ordered Montauk tuna again. This time the invoice listed a boat whose owner later told AP he didn’t catch anything for Sea To Table at that time.

“I’m kind of in shock right now,” said Brandon LaVielle of Lavish Roots Catering. “We felt like we were supporting smaller fishing villages.”

Turn yellow squash or zucchini into ribbons for a fun side

By AMERICA’S TEST KITCHEN

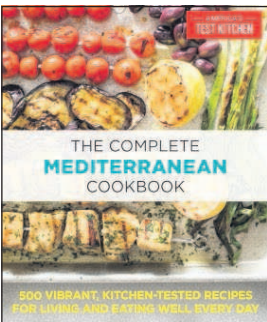
Quick-cooking and delicately flavored, yellow summer squash and zucchini are favorites in Mediterranean cuisines and perfect for a light side dish. To create a fresh, simple recipe, we started with very thinly sliced squash, using a peeler to make even “ribbons” and discarding the waterlogged seeds.

The ultrathin ribbons browned and cooked so quickly that they didn’t have time to break down and release their liquid, eliminating the need to salt them before cooking.

The cooked squash needed little embellishment; a quick, tangy vinaigrette of extra-virgin olive oil, garlic, and lemon and a sprinkle of fresh parsley rounded out the flavors.

We like a mix of yellow summer squash and zucchini, but you can use just one or the other. The thickness of the squash ribbons may vary depending on the peeler used; we developed this recipe with a peeler that produces ribbons that are 1/32 inch thick.

Steeping the minced garlic in lemon juice mellows the garlic’s bite; do not skip this step. To avoid overcooking the squash, start checking for doneness at the lower end of the cooking time.



America’s Test Kitchen via AP

The cover for “The Complete Mediterranean Cookbook.” It includes a recipe for sauteed zucchini ribbons.



Daniel J. van Ackere/America’s Test Kitchen via AP

This undated photo provided by America’s Test Kitchen in May 2018 shows sauteed zucchini ribbons in Brookline, Mass. This recipe appears in “The Complete Mediterranean Cookbook.”

SAUTEED ZUCCHINI RIBBONS

- Servings: 4-6
- Start to finish: 20 minutes
- 1 small garlic clove, minced
- 1 teaspoon grated lemon zest plus 1 tablespoon juice
- 4 (6- to 8-ounce) zucchini or yellow summer squash, trimmed
- 2 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon extra-virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- 1 1/2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
- Combine garlic and lemon juice in large bowl and set aside for at least 10 minutes. Using vegetable peeler, shave off 3 ribbons from 1 side of summer squash, then turn squash 90 degrees and shave off 3 more ribbons. Continue to turn and shave ribbons until you reach seeds; discard core. Repeat with remaining squash.
- Whisk 2 tablespoons oil, 1/4 teaspoon salt, 1/8 teaspoon pepper, and lemon zest into garlic-lemon juice mixture.
- Heat remaining 1 teaspoon oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Add summer squash and cook, tossing occasionally with tongs, until squash has softened and is translucent, 3 to 4 minutes. Transfer squash to bowl with dressing, add parsley, and gently toss to coat. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve.
- Nutrition information per serving: 132 calories; 83 calories from fat; 9 g fat (1 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 0 mg cholesterol; 318 mg sodium; 11 g carbohydrate; 3 g fiber; 7 g sugar; 4 g protein.
- For more recipes, cooking tips and ingredient and product reviews, visit <https://www.americastestkitchen.com>.
- Find more recipes like Sautéed Zucchini Ribbons in “The Complete Mediterranean Cookbook.”

Marking Tabasco’s 150th birthday with a tour of Avery Island

By BETH J. HARPAZ
AP Travel Editor

AVERY ISLAND, La. (AP) — One of the world’s most famous condiments, Tabasco, celebrates its 150th birthday this year.

Edmund McIlhenny created the famous pepper sauce in 1868 on Avery Island, Louisiana. The company is still headquartered there, and it is still run by McIlhenny’s descendants. But whether or not you’re one of those pepper fiends who shakes Tabasco on everything from eggs to burgers, Avery Island is a fun destination with a neat history. Tour the Tabasco museum and factory, try free samples of Tabasco-infused goodies, dine on Cajun food and consider trying a bloody mary (spiked with Tabasco, of course). There’s also a unique nature preserve called Jungle Gardens where you’ll learn the story of how Avery Island helped save an entire species of bird from disappearing in the U.S.

Despite its name, though, Avery Island is not an island. It’s a salt dome, a geological phenomenon in which an underground bed of salt pushes up the terrain. That salt is used to flavor Tabasco.

TABASCO HISTORY

As the story goes, McIlhenny planted some pepper seeds he’d been given and liked the peppers they grew. He mashed them up with



AP Photo/Beth J. Harpaz

A sign directing visitors to attractions on Avery Island in Louisiana, where Tabasco sauce is made.

Avery Island salt, let the mixture age, then added vinegar and packaged the result in bottles designed for cologne. The spicy sauce was a hit.

Museum exhibits include vintage bottles along with the wooden barrels still used to age the sauce. A greenhouse displays some pepper plants, though the peppers are now mostly grown outside the U.S. The sauce is bottled here, though, and you’ll get a good look at the factory where a stream of bright red bottles flies past. The factory can produce up to 700,000 bottles a day, and you’ll see the day’s tally on a digital ticker. By the way, the seeds have no connection to the state of Tabasco in Mexico, but the word tabasco

is derived from an Aztec term that means “humid land” and the seeds McIlhenny planted are said to have originated in Latin America.

Across the decades Tabasco has become a cultural phenomenon as well as a culinary staple. One video in the museum shows Tabasco turning up in everything from Bugs Bunny cartoons to James Bond movies. Tabasco was used as a wartime code word and was included as a condiment in prepackaged meals for U.S. soldiers. And it’s sold in 195 countries and territories worldwide.

Tabasco’s current CEO, Tony Simmonds, is McIlhenny’s great-great-grandson. He says only 2 to 4 percent of family businesses make it

to the fourth generation, but Tabasco is already in the hands of the fifth generation.

“My family is very tied to Avery Island,” Simmonds told the AP Travel podcast “Get Outta Here!” in an interview. “Avery Island is part of the reason we’ve been able to hold onto our business for 150 years.”

FOOD AND DRINK

At the onsite country store, you can try free samples of Tabasco-infused edibles ranging from soft ice cream to soda to pickles. Souvenirs for sale include men’s underwear decorated with little red peppers.

Next door at the 1868 Restaurant, yummy Cajun food like gumbo, crawfish etouffee and boudin sausage is dished out cafeteria-style. And as long as someone else is doing the driving, go ahead and treat yourself to a bloody mary.

JUNGLE GARDENS

A short drive from the Tabasco complex, you’ll find Jungle Gardens. A driving route offers a dozen numbered stops for attractions including a palm garden, live oaks and a 900-year-old Buddha statue. Watch where you step: alligators abound.

But the highlight of Jungle Gardens is Bird City, where on a June day about 1,000 egrets could be seen chattering and calling to one another from raised platforms around a lagoon. Some swooped overhead as an alligator floated by.

The story of how the colony was established is remarkable. In the 1890s, snowy egrets had “almost been wiped out to extinction in the U.S.,” according to Erik Johnson, director of bird conservation for Audubon Louisiana. The birds were hunted for their feathers, which were used in ladies’ hats. E.A. McIlhenny, son of Tabasco’s founder, managed to acquire eight snowy egrets, built an aviary for them and hand-raised them. Then he set them free. When they returned on their seasonal migration, they brought more birds with them and the numbers grew. By the time former U.S. President Teddy Roosevelt, a champion of environmental conservation, visited Avery Island in 1915, he said 40,000 birds were nesting there.

Snowy egrets have rebounded nationwide since then, and these days several thousand nesting pairs of snowy and great egrets typically arrive on Avery Island in late winter and stay through summer. But McIlhenny’s “legacy goes well beyond egrets,” Johnson said. McIlhenny also helped secure passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which was signed into law in 1918.

That means Tabasco’s 150th birthday isn’t the only milestone being marked this year. The Migratory Bird Act, credited with saving many bird species from extinction, marks its centennial this year, too.