Federal agencies including the Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) collaborate with state and local agencies to help ensure that aquaculture facilities are environmentally-sound. They address issues such as farm location, design, construction and management, land and water use, water quality, wastewater treatment, wetlands protection, species selection, and animal health.

According to the Scientific Report of the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee, "farm-raised finfish (e.g. salmon and trout) is more sustainable than terrestrial animal production in terms of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions and land/water use." Fish are one of the most efficient converters of feed into animal protein. For some species, it only takes between 1 and 1.5 pounds of feed to produce 1 pound of fish. For some terrestrial animals, the feed conversion rate can be as high as 8 pounds of feed to 1 pound of animal protein. Up to 60% of a salmon is edible compared to 40% for some other animal protein sources. As the world population continues to grow, it is important that we produce protein as efficiently as possible.

Growing shellfish like clams, oysters and mussels can also improve the environment. These organisms consume algae and that helps to keep the ecosystem in balance. Because of their three dimensional structure, oysters create habitats and hiding places for more than 300 marine organisms. All of this adds to bio-diversity which is the cornerstone of a healthy environment.

Buying local seafood also benefits the environment in another way. It eliminates some of the negative environmental impacts caused by shipping over long distances.

Growing U.S. aquaculture can not only provide a great source of seafood for the American table, reduce our dependence on imports and add to national food security; it can also help grow our economy. Many fish farms are located in economically challenged rural areas. Again, local is important. Taxes paid by local farmers help to support schools, hospitals, and other community services. Farms create local jobs and a source of local food. More local jobs mean that the entire community benefits. U.S. aquaculture helps preserve the maritime and farming heritage upon which this nation was built.

Selecting locally farmed seafood:
- Supplements our well-managed wild harvest.
- Provides nutritious, wholesome and safe seafood at reasonable prices.
- Improves the American diet and reduces healthcare costs.
- Helps ensure that fish and shellfish are raised in an environmentally-responsible and sustainable manner.
- Reduces our trade deficit.
- Generates jobs on and off the farm.
- Provides economic activity in challenged parts of the country.
- Supports local schools, hospitals, and other community services.
- Reduces our dependence on imports (currently over 90% of all the seafood we eat is imported).
The vast majority of the seafood consumed in the United States travels over 5,000 miles across the globe before it lands on your dinner table! U.S. farmed products are fresher, tastier and better quality because the product doesn’t have to travel as far. This is particularly true with fish and shellfish products since they are perishable and need to be handled with care.

American fish and shellfish farms are currently producing traditional favorites like salmon, trout, catfish, hybrid striped bass, tilapia, shrimp, oysters, clams, and mussels as well as exciting, new choices like redfish, cobia, sturgeon, flounder, and geoduck. The list continues to grow and makes menu choices even wider. And the good news is that fish farms can be located almost anywhere, even in urban buildings and deserts. That makes local, great tasting seafood available to consumers in the Heartland as well as along the coasts.

You might be lucky enough to have hyper-local fish and shellfish available at a nearby farmers’ market. These settings are a great link between the grower and the consumer. They provide an ample opportunity to ask questions and learn more about locally farmed seafood. In other areas, there are farms that regularly have pond or dockside sales. Nothing could be fresher than right out of the water. Visit your state department of agriculture website to find farms or farmers’ markets that sell farm-raised seafood to the public. Some supermarkets have expanded their “meet the farmer” programs to include locally farmed seafood.

Supermarkets make it easier to identify U.S. product because of the Country of Origin (COOL) labeling requirements. All seafood, farm-raised or wild harvested, sold in these markets must be labeled by country of origin and method of production. Since this is a U.S. Department of Agriculture regulation, it only applies to large food stores, not to small markets, fish stores, and restaurants. Some restaurants voluntarily include information about sustainability, heart-healthiness, calorie count, and product origin for their seafood selections. Don’t be afraid to ask questions when dining out.

Federal and state agencies, including the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference (ISSC), all play a role in helping to ensure that fish and shellfish farmed in the United States meets the highest standards for food safety and environmental compatibility. This may not be the case with imported product.

Farms or businesses that process, package, warehouse, transport and sell seafood are regulated by the FDA, state agencies and local authorities. Seafood processors must create, maintain and adhere to a Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) plan. This requires recordkeeping to help ensure the production and delivery of safe food. Because HACCP provides a continuous record, it is more efficient and effective than traditional food inspection programs that produce only a snapshot of how food is handled.

The National Shellfish Sanitation Program (NSSP), a joint effort of federal and state agencies, works to ensure the safety of our shellfish supply. States regularly test growing waters. The FDA and the states inspect shellfish handling and shipping facilities, and routinely collect samples of shellfish for further testing. These regulations help to ensure that shellfish are grown, harvested and processed to national standards so that safe, wholesome shellfish are delivered to your retailer or favorite restaurant.

In the United States, it is illegal to use antibiotics or added hormones to enhance growth in farm-raised seafood. Very few drugs have been approved for use in fish farms and the use of those drugs must be overseen by a licensed veterinarian. Before a drug is approved for use in the United States, it must be demonstrated that it will not harm the environment, public health, or the fish. In many countries that export to the U.S., the rules may not be as strict.

Enjoy U.S. farm-raised fish and shellfish. Get out of the boring dinner routine and do something good for your health at the same time. There is a wide variety of U.S. farm-raised seafood to choose from and prepare.

For great tasting recipes as well as quick and easy preparation tips visit the National Aquaculture Association website: www.thenaa.net.