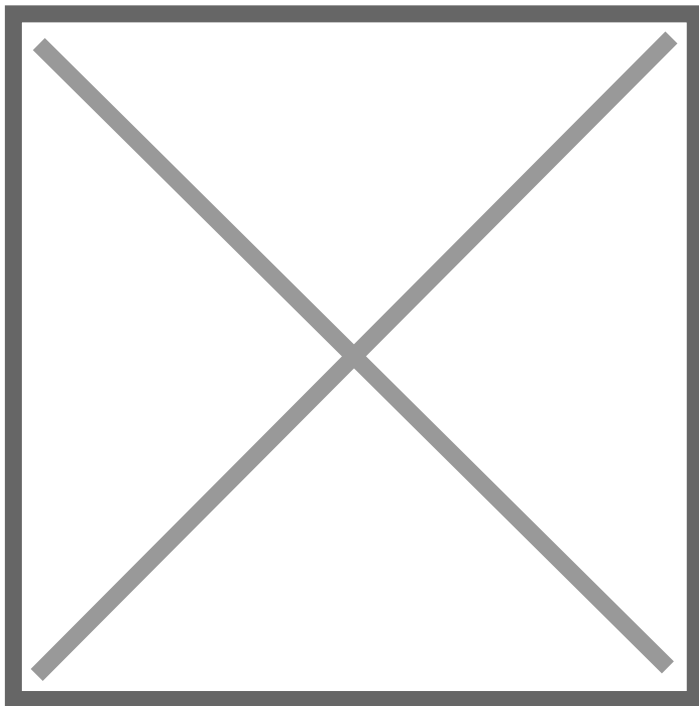


Saithe's time to shine: Meeting demand for healthy, affordable seafood

29 August 2025 | News

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As global food inflation influences consumer choices, lesser-known whitefish species are beginning to receive more attention at mealtimes. One such species is saithe, a versatile and nutrient-rich fish that has long been overlooked despite its abundance in Norwegian waters. With cod prices rising and younger consumers increasingly seeking affordable, high-protein, and sustainable food options, saithe is emerging as a strong alternative.

In an interview with NUFFOODS Spectrum, Lars Moksness, Analyst of Consumer Behaviour, and Bjørn-Erik Stabell, Head of Strategy and Sustainability at the Norwegian Seafood Council, share insights into saithe's nutritional benefits, its role in Norway's sustainable fisheries management, and the growing efforts to enhance its profile in international markets such as the UK, France, and Sweden.

What are the main reasons behind the growing consumer interest in alternative whitefish species like saithe, particularly in light of rising food inflation?

We see rising interest in alternative species in general, which could be tied to rising prices on species like cod. Saithe, however, has been underutilised in many markets up until now. Saithe is therefore one of the species that has the potential to become more popular because of its price point, as well as the species's great nutritional value and versatility.

Saithe is often described as versatile and affordable. How does it compare in terms of taste, texture, and preparation with more commonly consumed species like cod or pollock?

Saithe is known for tasting wonderful as well as being packed with nutritional value. Being quite easy to cook as well, it's a great choice for many kinds of meals. It has a silvery grey, strong and muscular body, and is a good swimmer. This impacts the taste and texture. Its pearl-grey meat is firmer than cod's, which makes the fish equally suited for cooking, pan-frying or barbecuing, and you can use it in casseroles, soups or oven dishes.

From a nutritional standpoint, how does saithe stand out among other whitefish? Can you elaborate on its protein content and other health benefits?

Saithe is rich in protein, vitamins D and B12, selenium and iodine, among other things. The species can boast a slightly higher protein content than some other whitefish species and is therefore a healthy alternative.

Is saithe farmed or wild-caught, and what sustainability practices are in place to ensure its responsible harvesting, especially in Norwegian waters?

Saithe is wild-caught, and the fishing is regulated through quotas. This ensures the fish stocks's continued stability and health. The quotas are decided based on scientific advice from the Institute of Marine Research, which provides annual recommendations on what can be harvested from the fish stock. The final quotas are set by Norwegian authorities. A rigid system for reporting and controlling catches, both in quantity and size, ensures that the authorities always have good control over the right fish being caught and that the stock is either better than, or in line with, recommended levels.

Could you explain the significance of the Barents Sea stocks and saithe's role in Norway's fishing quota system?

Norwegian saithe is caught in two fishing areas, with over 80% of the quota north of 62 degrees North, and the remaining approximately 20% caught in the North Sea and Skagerrak. Both stocks are currently considered well-managed and are regulated through the quotas and Norwegian management model. The model is based on close cooperation between several institutions, such as the Norwegian government, scientific researchers, and experts from third-party institutions.

With Gen Z leading demand for high-protein and clean-label foods, how is saithe positioned to meet the expectations of this emerging consumer group?

As long as Gen Z and other consumer groups are interested in nutrition-packed and healthy proteins, saithe could be a great alternative. As for now, highlighting the great qualities and versatility of saithe is the focus for communication, building a position for the species in general.

Are there any new product innovations or food segments where you're seeing saithe being used more creatively, such as in ready-to-eat meals, frozen formats, or health-focused meal kits?

The primary challenge we face now is to enhance the distribution of saithe from Norway. We believe there is significant untapped potential for growth in seafood sales in retail. By ensuring that saithe is widely available in retail stores, it could be a convenient choice for consumers' everyday meals. In the future, there will be opportunities for innovation, particularly in developing products that are user-friendly.

What efforts are being made to raise awareness about saithe among consumers outside of Norway, particularly in markets such as the UK, where cod consumption is declining?

Our main focus area now is to build the distribution of saithe from Norway. This is the first priority that needs to be addressed, and we believe marketing efforts and campaigns will follow when this is in place in markets where saithe is still quite new as a product. In markets like France and Sweden, where saithe already has good distribution, we will begin marketing campaigns this autumn to build awareness of saithe.

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