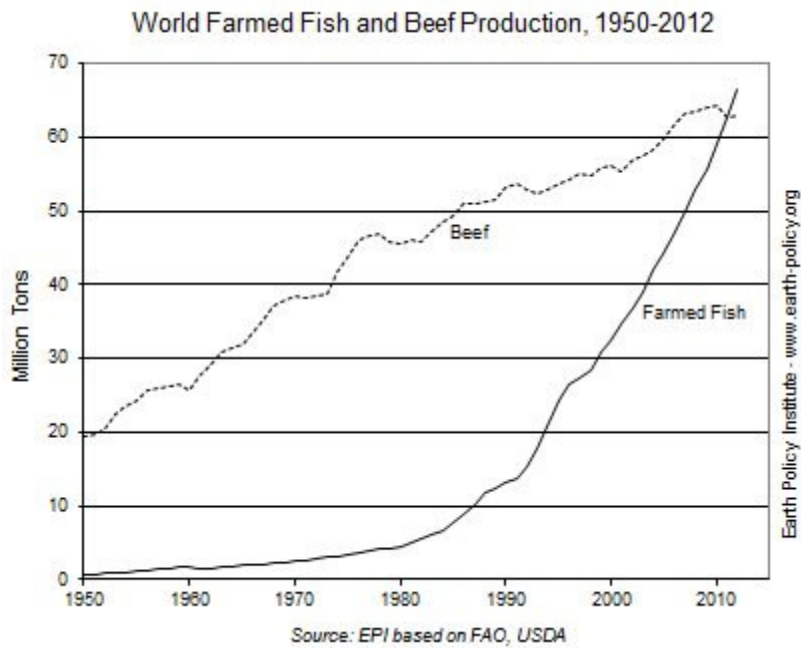


Posted: 06/13/2013



The production of farmed fish has overtaken the production of beef for the first time in modern history, according to an article from environmental think tank Earth Policy Institute.

In 2012, world beef production reached 63 million, but it couldn't top the production of fish farming, or aquaculture, which soared to 66 million. This year, too, could be a milestone — consumption of farmed fish may surpass those caught in the wild.



So how did this happen? Beef production boomed in the second half of the 20th century, but has been slowing since the late 1980s. The amount of fish caught in the wild has remained constant for the last three decades. According to the institute, getting more food from natural landscapes is looking increasingly unlikely as the world's fisheries and grasslands reach exhaustion. Cattle feedlots and farmed fish are the results.

Grain and soybean prices have risen, which means that raising cattle has become more expensive. Raising fish, on the other hand, is strikingly more efficient — and this is perhaps to thank for its rising production numbers.

“Cattle consume seven pounds of grain or more to produce an additional pound of beef,” writes the article's authors, Janet Larsen and J. Matthew Roney. “Fish are far more efficient, typically taking less than two pounds of feed to add another pound of weight.”

That's not to say that all farmed fishing is efficient. Fish we often see in grocery stores, like salmon, tuna and shrimp, are fed with smaller fish. The combined mass of these smaller fish is greater than that of those grocery store fish, meaning the input is greater than the output.

In the Earth Policy Institute's eyes, reliance on farmed fish is problematic also because it means we're eating beyond the constraints of our natural environment. It recommends “slowing population growth” and consuming less meat, milk, eggs and fish.

Some groups are critical of aquaculture, like ocean conservancy group Oceana, which says that the practice leads to unhealthy fish. Other groups, like Whole Foods is more complimentary of it — when done right.

“Farming seafood can provide a consistent, high-quality, year-round supply of healthy and delicious protein,” reads the grocery chain's website. “And when it's done right, aquaculture can be environmentally friendly and can be a crucial way to supplement wild-caught fish supplies.”