



U.S. Seafood Consumers' Willingness to Pay for Rainbow Trout, Walleye, Yellow Perch Fillets and Select Product Attributes

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The U.S. Consumers Seafood Survey: From 2020 to 2025

In 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, a nationwide survey was conducted to assess consumer preferences and estimate willingness to pay (WTP) for key food fish species produced in the North Central Region (NCR). The NCR or Midwest includes 12 states: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

Three species were selected based on their historical and economic significance to regional aquaculture, cultural relevance in NCR cuisine, biological suitability to the region’s climate, and notable trade imbalances: rainbow trout, walleye, and yellow perch. Product attributes, fresh versus frozen, wild-caught versus farm-raised, and a measure of “localness” (produced inside the NCR region or outside), were used to record consumer valuation of fish fillets. In the willingness to pay study, consumers were asked to identify what type of fish filet they would buy at a set price, if any, among four provided choices. Consumers were asked to repeat this exercise six times with varying species, attributes and prices (Athnos et al., 2022).

The survey was repeated in 2025, updating prices to adjust for inflation. Despite a global pandemic and subsequent economic changes, we find U.S. consumer preferences were largely unchanged, consumers are willing to pay more for trout than walleye and yellow perch while Midwestern consumers are willing to pay lower prices and overall smaller price premiums for wild-caught and fresh fish than consumers outside of the Midwest. This report aims to inform aquaculture producers and should be read in the context of other findings from the NCRAC funded project Advancing Aquaculture in the Midwestern Region (<https://extension.missouri.edu/programs/aquaculture-fisheries/publications>).

U.S. Seafood Consumers Would Pay More for Trout and Wild-caught Fish

Rainbow trout commands a higher price per pound from consumers outside of the Midwest (\$32.29 compared to \$25.51).

Walleye and **yellow perch** attract a premium price from consumers inside the Midwest.

Survey respondents living outside the Midwest place higher value on **fresh** rather than frozen fillets.

Non-Midwesterners are willing to pay a \$3.96 premium for **wild-caught** fish. They also value fish sourced from the North Central Region and are willing to pay an additional \$2.43 per pound.

2025 Mean Willingness to Pay Study Findings

Fish Species	National (\$/lb.)	Non-Midwest States (\$/lb.)	Midwest States (\$/lb.)
Rainbow trout	29.73	32.29	25.51
Walleye	25.21	24.77	25.72
Yellow perch	22.52	21.78	23.45
Attributes			
Fresh fillets	1.06	1.02	0.82
North Central Region sourced	2.20	2.43	1.76
Wild-caught	3.50	3.96	2.69

Regional Differences within Willingness to Pay Preferences

Estimated Willingness to Pay 2025*		Differences between premiums* (\$/lb.)
 Trout \$29.73 /lb	Consumers outside the Midwest are willing to pay a higher price for:	<i>Outside Midwest</i>
	Walleye than Yellow Perch,	Walleye to Yellow Perch \$2.99
 Walleye \$25.21 /lb	Trout than Walleye, and	Walleye to Trout -\$7.51
	Trout than Yellow Perch	Yellow Perch to Trout -\$10.50
 Yellow perch \$22.52 /lb		<i>Inside Midwest</i>
		Walleye to Yellow Perch \$2.27
		Walleye to Trout \$0.21
		Yellow Perch to Trout -\$2.06

* The 2025 survey adopted 2020 survey prices adjusted for inflation

Willingness to Pay Insights for Midwestern Food Fish Producers

Producers are encouraged to read the companion report **Understanding Consumer Seafood Preferences for Midwestern Aquaculture Producers**, which provides additional consumer and marketing insights.

Willingness to pay studies offer a potential benchmark for producers as they consider direct marketing. However, these studies offer hypothetical choices and are not the same as recording actual consumer behavior.

- Use willingness to pay findings to guide your own price discovery efforts by species, market channel, and target customer. Base your species production decisions on possible profitability, capital and operating costs, and management capacity.
- Rainbow trout seems to be a species that U.S. consumers are willing to pay more for, though consumers living in the Midwest attribute slightly higher value to walleye.
- Savvy fish producers might explore opportunities to direct ship frozen fish to capture potential price premiums from distant consumers, given the low value attributed to fresh and high value associated with Midwestern fish.
- Consumers place relatively smaller price premiums on fresh fish. The highest price premiums are for wild-caught fish.

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Other deliverables from this project including a detailed industry trends report, species specific business models, and a Midwestern consumer seafood preferences report can be found at <https://extension.missouri.edu/programs/aquaculture-fisheries/publications>.

Source Materials

2025 NCRAC Consumer Survey

The project team asked Qualtrics to recruit 1,500 U.S. adults who purchased seafood to prepare at home in 2024. The survey collected 1,420 usable responses from June 13-30, 2025. The composition of recruited respondents matched nationally representative demographics for gender, age, race and ethnicity. Because this project would offer market information to aquaculture producers operating within NCRAC's footprint, the project team adjusted the survey's response quotas by region. For a nationally representative survey, the geographic composition would have been Northeast, 17%; Midwest, 21%; West, 24%; and South, 38%. The adjusted regional composition was as follows: Northeast, 23%; Midwest, 27%; South, 26%; and West, 24%.

2020 Consumer Seafood Survey

A national consumer survey launched in 2020 provided the framework for the 2025 NCRAC consumer survey. These articles summarize the 2020 survey results: Valle de Souza, S., K. Quagraine, W. Knudson, and A. Athnos. 2021. "Go FISH: U.S. Seafood Consumers Seek Freshness, Information, Safety, and Health Benefits". Choices: The Magazine of Food, Farm, and Resource Issues. Vol. 36-04. Publisher: Agricultural and Applied Economics Association: [Choices Magazine Online](#), Athnos A, Valle de Souza S, Quagraine K, et al. "Are U.S. consumers willing to pay more by the lake? An analysis of preferences for Great Lakes region fish". Agricultural and Resource Economics Review. 2022;51(3):473-498. [doi:10.1017/age.2022.18](https://doi.org/10.1017/age.2022.18), and Quagraine, K., Valle de Souza, S., Athnos, A., Etumnu, C., Knudson, W., Kinnunen, R., and Hitchens, P. 2023. "The seafood basket: Application of zero-inflated model to fish count purchase". Aquaculture, 565: 739097. ISSN 0044-8486. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aquaculture.2022.739097> .



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