



FAO in Action

Healthy, tasty and cheap FAO encourages Peruvians to eat anchovies

They are nutritious, they taste good and they are plentiful and cheap. Each year Peruvian fisherfolk haul in between 7 and 8 million tonnes of anchovies, but since the 1950s, the anchovies have always ended up as fishmeal used as animal feed.

Peruvians do eat fish, but they only like big, white ones, explains Melva Pazos, head of technical cooperation at Peru's national fish institute, the Instituto Tecnológico Pesquero (ITP). ITP is, together with FAO, carrying out a two-year project to encourage Peruvians to eat anchovies. The project is targeting five distinct audiences: poor women who run soup kitchens in Lima's impoverished neighbourhoods; primary school children; doctors and health workers; the middle class and, of course, the suppliers - the fishers themselves.

"Doctors tell people that anchovies make you sick," says Ms Pazos. "And this is true - but only because the fish handling is so bad that by the time the fish reach the market they are no longer fresh." So the project is working to educate fishers and fish handlers - and to improve fish handling and hygiene.

The starting point has been a 15-vessel artisanal fleet near Pisco, three hours from Lima, where there is a small anchovy processing plant. To break the habits of generations, the project began with the basic education. "We could have just bought new vessels for the fishermen," says Melva Pazos. "But we didn't because we wanted them to learn how to handle fish properly and to adapt their boats to carry ice." FAO experts worked with the 150 fishermen and with the 120 women at the processing plant, teaching them the basics of hygiene and improved handling.

Once the fish are packed in ice in insulated vans, they are taken to poor neighbourhoods on the outskirts of Lima, where they are distributed to soup kitchens of the slums. Although Peru's economy has stabilized since the 1980s, half of its 26 million people live in extreme poverty, and malnutrition is endemic.

The government subsidizes the soup kitchens, and the project has decided to use them to raise awareness of the benefits of anchovies. Recipes for tasty, nutritious anchovy-based meals have been developed, and young professionals have been drafted in to help the women in the soup kitchens prepare the meals. In addition, the young professionals use theatre and acting to "brand" anchovies as a tasty, fun and healthy meal. So far 20 soup kitchens and 1,100 school children have been involved.

The project is also working with health workers in the poor neighbourhoods to teach them the benefits of eating properly treated anchovies. "Training the doctors will help take care of past misinformation," says Ms Pazos. So far 189 health workers in the Lima region have been trained and other regional health departments are expressing an interest in the scheme.

It has been important for the project not to stigmatize anchovies as the food of the poor. Therefore, a campaign has been initiated to convert the middle class to the fish too, emphasizing the high concentration of Omega 3 oil which is good for preventing stress and heart problems.

"Now fishers know how to produce the anchovies for human consumption, and we have enough to feed a lot of people," Melva Pazos says "So if people want anchovies, they can have them. And they are starting to want them."



Facts and figures

About fisheries

The mission of the Fisheries Department of FAO is to facilitate and secure the long-term sustainable development and utilization of the world's fisheries and aquaculture.

FAO has been the lead agency in establishing a Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. This Code sets out principles and international standards of behaviour for responsible practices with a view to ensuring the effective conservation, management and development of living aquatic resources, with due respect for the ecosystem and biodiversity. The Code recognizes the nutritional, economic, social, environmental and cultural importance of fisheries and the interests of all those concerned with the fishery sector. The Code takes into account the biological characteristics of the resources and their environment and the interests of consumers and other users. States and all those involved in fisheries are encouraged to apply the Code and give effect to it.

FAO has more than 66 ongoing field projects in fisheries, including not only specific fisheries projects, but also multi-disciplinary projects where fisheries comprise a significant component, and which are organized with a global, inter-regional, regional or national scope.

World production of fish, shellfish and other aquatic animals increased from 117 million tonnes in 1998 to 125 million tonnes in 1999. Capture fisheries production amounted to 92.3 million tonnes; although this represents an increase of 7 percent compared with 1998, it is still 1.4 million tonnes below the record levels reached in 1996 and 1997. Aquaculture output increased by 2 million tonnes to reach 32.9 million tonnes in 1999

About 47 to 50 percent of major marine fish stocks are currently fully exploited, with no room expected for further expansion. Another 15 to 18 percent are overexploited, whereas 10 percent of stocks have been depleted or are recovering from depletion. An estimated 25 to 27 percent of stocks are underexploited or moderately exploited and represent the main potential source for expansion of total capture fisheries.

Fish is a food of excellent nutritional value, providing high quality protein and a wide variety of vitamins and minerals, including vitamins A and D, phosphorus, magnesium, selenium, and iodine in marine fish. Its protein - like that of meat - is easily digestible and favourably complements dietary protein provided by cereals and legumes that are typically consumed in many developing countries. It is estimated that between 15 and 20 percent of all animal proteins come from aquatic animals.

Artisanal fisheries lose a substantial amount of the value of their catch before it can be eaten. Particularly in tropical countries, high temperatures mean that fish can spoil while still in the boat, at landing, during storage or processing, on the way to market and while waiting to be sold.

Fisheries and related industries provide a livelihood for as many as 140 million people worldwide. Vital to the poorest, fisheries contributes significantly to world food security and accounts for over US\$50 billion in international trade.

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