



'Pescatarianism packs a punch!'

Celebrity Chef Sanjeev Kapoor highlights health benefits of ocean-focused diet option that has region hooked.

The Arabian Gulf region has a long history with the sea and all things fishing so it's perhaps no surprise that demand for fresh seafood from local, regional and global producers and suppliers remains high.

While the desire for all things ocean could continue to grow by 8 per cent annually through 2030 according to a new report from the UN's Food and Agricultural Organisation, the variety of flavours and food options, nutritional benefits and ease of access to high-quality seafood produce, is driving a growing Pescatarian movement, a vegetarian diet containing fish and seafood, according to industry luminaries such as celebrity chef Sanjeev Kapoor and global market intelligence experts.

The regional and global seafood trade is riding something of a wave, with consumption rates across the GCC closing the gap on meat, driven by strong

demand for high-quality seafood in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, according to SEMrush, the leading industry digital marketing suite.

SEMrush's regional data highlights the shift with the term 'seafood' registering a staggering 820 per cent increase in online searches in the Kingdom, while UAE searches for the same term have increased by 170 per cent. SEMrush estimates the Gulf's seafood industry to be worth USD300 million annually and, while analysts put its per capita fish consumption at 10-20kgs compared with meat consumption of 60-70kgs, global industry players believe ocean protein sources will fast close the gap, with an ocean of opportunities for more seafood brands and start-ups taking advantage of soaring online searches.

"We can expect more seafood brands to emerge to compete in a region that is also increasingly searching for information

on seafood products online. The winners will be those who develop sustainable industry practices as well as brands that optimise their marketing with digital tools that dig deeper into consumer lifestyle and dietary preferences," added Adam Zeidan, Corporate Communications Manager – GCC and Turkey, SEMrush.

Food for thought – and health

Internationally-renowned chef Kapoor, who has signature restaurants in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, has witnessed the trend first hand and admits diners across the region are helping to tip the scales on a shift towards ocean-focused food options. The Indian chef's views will be reflected at SEAFEX, the only professional seafood event for the Middle East, Africa and Asia, which runs at the Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) from October 30-November 1.

"Besides the fact that it is super tasty - a diet that is a mix of veggies, grains

and plenty of seafood, minus any meat, is low in calories and high in nutrients. It exactly fits the trend where people are looking for a variety in flavours and food options, while maintaining the focus on the health and nutrition," said Kapoor who has endorsed SEAFEX as the place to discover the latest trends shaping the seafood industry. "Availability is probably another reason: you don't have to live in a coastal area to enjoy fresh seafood anymore. Good quality produce can easily be made available wherever you are."

Highlighting the health benefits of fish and seafood, Kapoor added: "Fish and most other forms of seafood are loaded in minerals like zinc, selenium, iron and a host of vitamins like A, B and E. Fish is also a great source of the all-important Omega 3 fatty acids which are good fats known to improve heart health and reduce the risk of lifestyle related heart diseases. Though the protein content in seafood is not as high as in meat, a pescatarian diet makes up for the lack of it with other nutrients which help your body in several ways. From improving digestion, brain function and eyesight to

even reducing risk of depression and certain types of cancer – a diet rich in seafood and veggies is great for you."

Net gains for seafood suppliers

While consumers increasingly seek provenance and freshness from their seafood suppliers, tinned producers, believe they too can net dividends from the rising tide of demand. The world's largest canned tuna supplier, Thai Union, will be promoting its boned delicacies at SEAFEX 2018 claiming even high-end international restaurants are now open to opportunities that ready-prepared seafood can bring.

The result is a surge in big brand and private label seafood manufacturers making themselves available for drop-in or pre-booked meetings at SEAFEX 2018, according to show organisers DWTC.

"Alongside the pescatarian diet momentum, is the trend towards seacuterie – preserved seafood bites," said Trixie Lohmirmand, Senior Vice President, Exhibitions & Events Management, DWTC. Encouraged by mainstream restaurant sensations like fish tacos and

ceviche, modern chefs are 'oceanising' mixed sharing platters to harvest smaller, alternative seafood varieties that represent less waste and better profit margins.

SEAFEX visitors will get the latest low-down on what seafood consumers are eating, asking about and willing to pay for in today's more ethically conscious market from nearly 150 exhibitors from 25 countries.

Show information

SEAFEX is part of a quartet of specialised food-related events which together present a unique international market overview of the region's retail trade and foodservice industry. The show is co-located with: the Speciality Food Festival, the gourmet and artisan food event for the Middle East, Africa and Asia which features the Global Date Market; yummex Middle East, the region's dedicated professional sweets and confectionery event and Gulfhost the specialty food and equipment trade show. All four are powered by the expansive Gulfood trade show series. ♦

