Catch of the day: Sustainable fish

Firm aims to save seafood, habitat

By Julie Schnit
USA TODAY

Ten years ago, Henry and Lisa Lovejoy stood ankle-deep amid dead tuna in a Japan warehouse, the size of a football field. The tuna were headed to the dinner tables of Japan, and the warehouses would fill with fresh fish the next day. And the next. And the next. Some tuna were so young, they hadn't reproduced.

It was then that the couple, who ran a $20 million-a-year lobster export business in Boston, knew they had to stop doing what they were doing. They had a personal stake in the future of fish, and the industry had some serious environmental baggage, they said.

The industry has some serious environmental baggage, they say. We had a strong level of discomfort being part of an industry that wasn't managing its resources well. - Henry Lovejoy

That's when the company came EcoFish, an 8-year-old company that is now a pioneer in the market of sustainable seafood, a movement increasingly embraced by major seafood producers and retailers, including Walmart.

EcoFish sells only seafood that is grown or caught in ecologically sound ways. That means the fish producers don't harm the environment and keep more fish out of the sea than are born each year.

EcoFish, with $3 million in annual sales, is a small fish in the $33 billion U.S. seafood industry. But its rising profile as a company that can turn the industry around.

"They're a drop in the ocean that creates a lot of ripples," says Sutton, who serves on EcoFish's volunteer advisory board.

Declining stocks

Conservationists say the sustainability movement for seafood is gaining steam in part because of public awareness about overfishing, which is leading to declines in the populations of many species of fish.

The Lovejoys first thought they'd abandon the seafood business because of environmental concerns. Then they decided to try to remedy it. They are working to develop sustainable practices for their entire supply chain, from fishing to processing to distribution.

They watch the Monterey Bay Aquarium, which warns consumers on seafood to avoid. The Lovejoys' business now focuses on sustainably sourced seafood, including wild-caught salmon, cod, halibut, and shrimp.

EcoFish handles a dozen fish species, from salmon to tuna, and is working with restaurants and retailers to ensure that their seafood is sustainably sourced.

"We've already opened a lot of eyes," says Lovejoy. "The industry has migrated in our direction."