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# MacDONALD: Consumers might turn up noses at virus-infected fish

BY BRENDA MACDONALD | TWO CENTS' WORTH



BRENDA MACDONALD

DO YOU KNOW that you can eat up to a kilogram — or more — of insects per year?

It's a little gross (and sorry to blow the whole “ignorance is bliss” deal here) but studies have shown it to be true.

Apparently, we unknowingly gulp insects down all the time (think biking, snoring), and while they may not be listed on nutrition labels, they, or bits of them, can quite often be found in the food we eat.

If you don't believe me, just go to Health Canada's website at [hc-sc.gc.ca](http://hc-sc.gc.ca), read the current Guidelines for the General Cleanliness of Food, and you'll see that there are actually “acceptable concentrations of micro-organisms or amounts of extraneous material” (such as dead mites, insect fragments or rodent hairs) allowed in our collective groceries.

Personally, it doesn't bother me too much.

I wrote about food contamination way back when I was in university and have been aware of this particular tidbit of nourishment trivia for years. I've also lived long enough to realize that finding a worm in an apple, a slug in a head of lettuce or a fly in my soup is just a natural part of life.

So when sea lice were discovered on local grocery store salmon — farmed salmon, specifically — not so long ago, I wasn't too freaked out.

I guess I figured that since sea lice could be found on wild salmon as well as farmed salmon, and that the lice could simply be washed off, much like that slug in my lettuce, I just let the whole issue slide.

But that all changed with the subsequent news that farmed salmon with infectious salmon anemia were deemed fit for human consumption. Even though I quite enjoy salmon, I actually went so far as to declare a personal and family moratorium on eating farmed salmon.

While I was able to psychologically (and pragmatically, I feel) deal with the sea lice issue, I am completely unable to get beyond the ick factor that comes with the thought of eating virus-ridden, sick, infectious and anemic fish.

I know that some people will call me misinformed. Those who work in fish farming or make money from it, or get elected based on such things, will no doubt huff at my words and consider me a thorn in their collective fiscal backside.

What such people also must realize, however, is that I am very much representative of the type of person who will ultimately decide the fate of fish farming in this province.

I buy the groceries in my household. I cook for my family, I'm the one who worries about their health and well-being.

I'm a busy mother and I have a job of my own. And while I am not a scientist or an environmental expert or an activist, I am capable of using a computer.

I am capable of learning.

When dinnertime worries begin to slide down the slippery slope from sea lice to infectious and viral salmon diseases and I begin to question what the heck is going on, I am more than capable of seeking out answers.

A few suggestions: the Association for the Preservation of the Eastern Shore at [nsapes.ca](http://nsapes.ca) or the David Suzuki Foundation at [davidsuzuki.org](http://davidsuzuki.org).

Perhaps the most important thing these people — the ones who would call me misinformed and consider me unimportant — must always remember is that I am, in addition to being all these other things, at all times also a consumer.

And in the end, it will be the consumer — will we buy or not? — who will ultimately decide just how fish is farmed, marketed and sold in this province.

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