

Higher Welfare

Scottish salmon

M&S
— FOOD —

Providing high quality, high welfare salmon is a collaborative process for M&S Food, thanks to a long-standing partnership with specialist producer Scottish Sea Farms.

The two companies have worked together since 2006, pioneering many advances and setting the benchmark for the sector.

The best start

It helps that Scottish Sea Farms has control over every stage of the salmon's lifecycle, from egg through to processing and packing, creating more opportunities to make a positive difference – starting with giving the fish best possible start in life.

This includes selecting eggs on their suitability to Scottish marine conditions, including some sourced from adult fish that have been proven to thrive at the company's own farms around Scotland's west coast, Orkney islands and Shetland.

The eggs are then raised at one of the company's freshwater hatcheries where key welfare factors such as water quality, flow, oxygen levels and temperature are closely controlled.

The result is bigger, more robust fish that require up to two months less at sea and are better able to withstand the natural challenges of the marine environment while there.

Bespoke diet

Throughout their life, both at freshwater stage and at sea, the fish are fed a bespoke diet that's unique to M&S Select Farms salmon and has been developed to meet the nutritional needs of each life stage whilst also minimising the use of finite marine ingredients.

The feed ingredients that do come from marine origins are sourced from suppliers independently certified as being sustainable, as are all other raw materials used.

Dedicated fish vets

Just as the salmon's diet has advanced significantly over the 17-year partnership, so too have fish husbandry practices out at sea, where pens are stocked with just 1.5% fish to 98.5% water in accordance with RSPCA Assured welfare standards.

Aquaculture and Fisheries Manager for M&S Food, Linda Wood, explains: *"Rearing fish at sea, in conditions as close to their natural environment as possible, means they can be vulnerable to the same challenges as wild salmon."*



"That's why, in addition to their experienced fish husbandry teams, Scottish Sea Farms also has in-house veterinarians and biologists who work hand-in-hand to monitor growing conditions and pre-empt potential threats to salmon health."

As part of the team's prevention-over-cure approach to fish health and welfare, recent years have seen a move away from veterinary medicines towards non-medicinal interventions. For example, freshwater baths that help protect the gills or the use of 'cleaner fish' – so-called because they co-exist with the salmon in pens and nibble off naturally occurring pests.

And because the welfare of these fish is every bit as important as that of the salmon, Scottish Sea Farms also adhere to RSPCA Assured standards for cleaner fish, along with introducing special feed and adding kelp-hides as places to shelter and rest.

Most recently, the company has been trialling growing seaweed within its pens to continue meeting this need for shelter whilst reducing the use of artificial plastic hides.

"Scottish Sea Farms are constantly doing what they can to protect the marine environments in which they farm and keep records of the diverse flora and fauna they see around pens," says Linda.

"It's one of the biggest indicators that the local waters are being kept clean and healthy."

Always advancing

One of Scottish Sea Farms' latest undertakings is to consolidate its farming estate into fewer pens but of a larger size.

This allows more space between pens, increases water exchange and oxygen, and, in turn, enhances growing conditions even further.

There are benefits in terms of operational efficiencies too.

"With fewer pens to get around, the fish husbandry teams have more time to devote to caring for the salmon's needs," says Linda.

Award-winning humane harvesting

When the salmon reach the required size and weight, a lifecycle that can take up to 22 months, they are transferred in water to the company's processing facilities.

There, they are despatched quickly and humanely to minimise any stress, using equipment recognised with a Queen's Award for Enterprise Innovation for its contribution to farmed fish welfare.

"This high welfare, low stress approach, adopted throughout the full lifecycle, shows in the quality of the end product, ensuring that M&S Select Farms salmon has firm, textured flesh and a light, fresh taste," Linda concludes.

