

Opah

moonfish (*Lampris regius*)



Opah is also known as the **moonfish**. It is one of the most colorful of the commercial fish species available in Hawaii. A silvery-grey upper body color shades to a rose red dotted with white spots toward the belly. Its fins are crimson and its large eyes are encircled with gold. The moonfish's large, round profile may be the origin of its name. Opah landed in Hawaii range from 60 to over 200 pounds in round weight. It is an open ocean (pelagic) species often found in the deep water in the company of tunas and billfish.

Seasonality & How They Are Caught

Availability and Seasonality:

Opah are not found in schools, and thus are not caught in great numbers. However, individual fish are regularly caught by longline boats fishing in the deep ocean. Landings follow no set pattern in any particular area, but the presence of opah at the depths of longline fishing gear may be related to vertical migrations from the deep up the slopes of seamounts in search of food. Opah are taken on longline gear year-round, but landings seem to peak in April-August.

Fishing Methods:

All of the opah landed in Hawaii are caught by longlining.

Distribution:

Virtually all opah landed by longliners is sold fresh through the Honolulu fish auction.

Quality

Shelf Life and Quality Control:

The shelf life (3 weeks) is as long as that of some fresh tuna species landed by the longline fleet. The first outward signs of deterioration are faded skin colors and softness.



Product Forms and Yields:

The entire opah catch is landed as whole, fresh fish. Most is filleted for restaurant use, both in Hawaii and on the U.S. mainland. The average fillet yield is 35%.

Color, Taste, Texture:

An opah has four types of flesh, each a different color. Behind the head and along the backbone is an orange color flesh. Toward the belly, the flesh pales to a pink color. The fish's cheeks yield dark red flesh. These types of flesh all cook to a white color. Inside the fish's breastplate is another, smaller section of flesh, comprising a very small percentage of a 100-pound moonfish. A bright ruby red or liver color, this flesh cooks to a brown color and is somewhat stringy and difficult to fillet.

Preparations

The opah's flesh is rich with healthy fish oils, with a versatility of use that is attractive to restaurants. Opah is used for grilling, infrequently as sashimi, and is excellent smoked.

Historical Note

In Hawaii, the opah has historically been part of the multi-species catch of longline gear. This species be-

came commercially important in the late 1980's. The opah was viewed as a good luck fish by old-time longline fishermen, who would give it away as a gesture of goodwill rather than sell it.

The opah was previously an under-utilized species. Since then, this fish has found a special place on restaurant menus as a "catch of the day" and has become very popular.



Hawaii Seafood Council

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