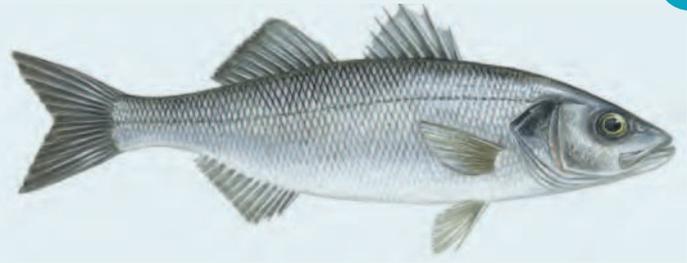


Seabass

Dicentrarchus labrax



Biology

European seabass (*Dicentrarchus labrax*) is common all over the Mediterranean, the Black Sea and the North Eastern Atlantic from Norway to Senegal. It inhabits coastal waters to a depth of 100 m (normally in the winter), as well as brackish waters in estuarine areas and coastal lagoons (in the summer). Occasionally it can be found in rivers. Young fish are gregarious, especially during the seasonal migrations, and form schools. Adults are less gregarious. Seabass is a voracious predator, feeding on crustaceans, molluscs and fish. In the Mediterranean, they reach sexual maturity at three years in males and at four years in females; in the Atlantic at four years and seven years respectively.

Farming

Seabass, like gilthead seabream, have long been reared by traditional extensive methods, where fish are allowed to enter lagoons. The entrance is then closed off, trapping them inside, as in the 'vallicultura' in Italy and the 'esteros' in southern Spain. The trapped seabass feeds naturally until it is harvested. However, in the 1960s, Mediterranean scientists started to develop intensive rearing methods based on complex hatchery techniques. At the end of the 70's these techniques were well developed in most Mediterranean countries.

The operation of a hatchery is quite technical and requires highly trained staff. Hatcheries are often independent and sell young fish to fattening farms.

The reproduction of seabass is fully controlled in the facility. The fertilised eggs are collected on the surface of the spawning tank and placed in incubator tanks, where they hatch. The larvae are then transferred to rearing tanks. Once the larvae have absorbed their yolk sac they are given a very specific diet, based first on micro-algae and zooplankton, then, as they grow, on artemia (a small crustacean). This live food is always produced in the hatchery. After one or two months, the larvae are transferred to the weaning unit where they become accustomed to an artificial diet. Then the fry are transferred to the juvenile unit, where they feed on pellets. After two months they can be moved to the grow-out farm.

In most cases the fish are cultivated in floating cages (i.e. in the Mediterranean and the Canary Islands). Other farms raise sea bass in land-based tanks, generally using a recirculation system that controls the water temperature. A few farms still use traditional extensive and semi-intensive methods.

Farmed seabass are generally harvested when they weigh 300 g to 500 g, which takes from a year and a half to two years, depending on water temperature.

Production and trade

Aquaculture is the major production method for seabass, but fishing still accounts for more than 10% of the total seabass production worldwide. The EU is the largest producer of seabass with a share of 80%, far above the second producer (Egypt). Within the EU, Greece is the first producer, followed by Spain. There are very few exports outside the EU, while imports from third countries are significant, coming mainly from Turkey. Italy, Greece and the Netherlands are the main importers of seabass from Turkey. As far as Italy is concerned, these imports supply local demand, but Greece and the Netherlands tend to re-export seabass to other EU countries. Indeed, intra-EU trade is very important, Greece being the major exporter and Italy the major importer, followed by the United Kingdom, France, Spain and Portugal.



Presentation on the market

Seabass, like seabream, is nearly always presented as a whole-portion-sized fish in the chilled section of sales outlets.

Nutritional value per 100 g (portion size – average)

Calories: 123 kcal

Protein: 21 g

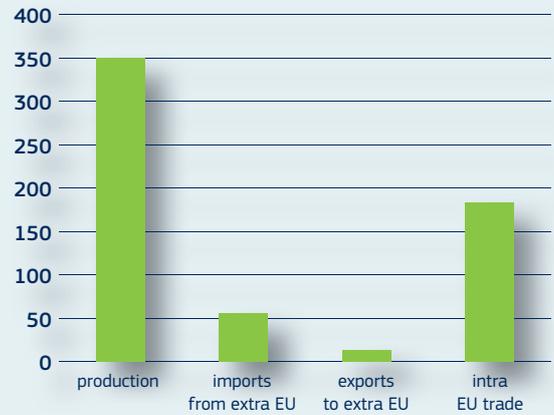
Selenium: 8 µg

Vitamin D: 2.3 µg

EPA: 438 mg

DHA: 579 mg

EU seabass supply and trade* (2009) (MEUR)



* from fishery and aquaculture.

Source: Eurostat.

Filet of seabass in a potato crust

Ingredients (serves 4)

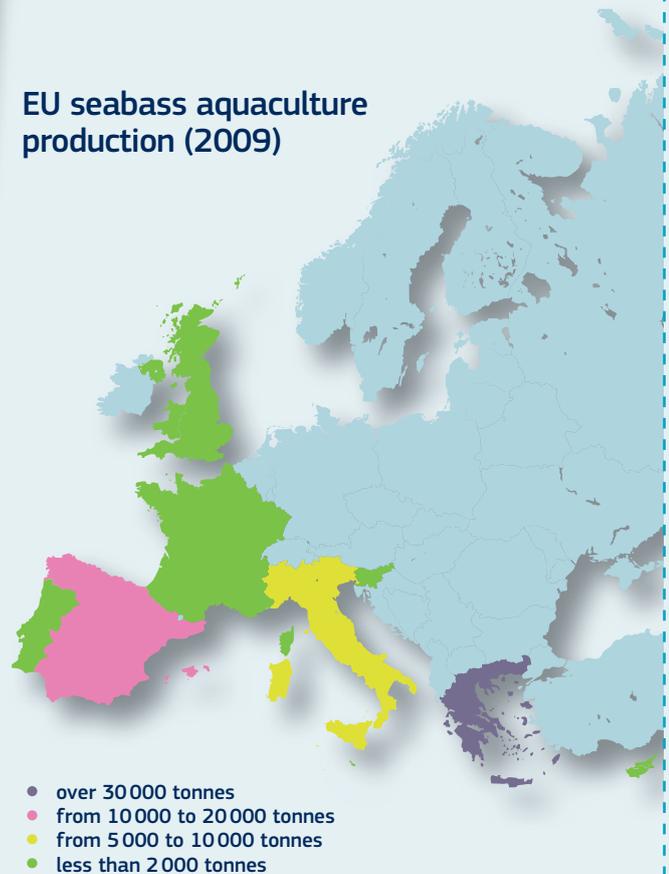
- 600 g seabass fillets
- 1 large floury potato
- 1 egg
- 1 onion
- 2 garlic cloves
- Aromatic herbs (chervil, parsley, dill or tarragon)
- 50 g butter
- 50 ml olive oil
- Flour
- Salt and pepper

Method

1. Finely chop the onion.
2. Lightly fry the onions in olive oil, add the finely chopped herbs and garlic. Remove from heat, and leave to cool.
3. Peel and grate the potato.
4. Mix the ingredients with the egg, season with salt and pepper.
5. Season the fillets and dip them in the flour.
6. Coat the fillets in the potato mix.
7. Fry on both sides in butter and olive oil until golden brown. Transfer to the oven and bake at 175°C for about 7 minutes.

Recipe courtesy of chef Philippe Votquenne (Euro-Toques Belgium)

EU seabass aquaculture production (2009)



Source: Eurostat.