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## Norway

### Fishery Products

### Hard Times for Norwegian Salmon

**2006**

**Approved by:**

Margaret E. Thursland  
Agricultural Counselor  
U.S. Embassy Stockholm

**Prepared by:**

Asa Lexmon  
Agricultural Specialist

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**Report Highlights:**

Once again, the safety of Norwegian salmon is making the headlines in the Norwegian and Swedish press. The Russian ban on Norwegian salmon imports and a Cornell University study on the risks of farmed salmon are amongst the most recent challenges to the Norwegian farmed salmon industry. Adding salt to the wound, the Norwegian Food Safety Authority has discovered the unauthorized use of nitrites by eight Norwegian salmon producers. The Norwegian Food Safety Authority is vigorously defending Norway's farmed salmon industry.

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## The Safety of Norwegian Salmon Questioned - Again

Norwegian salmon is once again making the headlines in the Norwegian and Swedish press with the focus on high levels of cancer-causing toxins in farmed salmon.

In a January 2004 issue of Science Magazine, U.S. and Canadian scientists reported high levels of cancer-causing toxins in farmed salmon. These findings were extensively reported in the Swedish and Norwegian media. At that time, the Government of Norway (GON) and the Norwegian salmon industry vigorously refuted those claims. The Norwegians were most successful in their repudiation as exports of farmed salmon continued to reach record levels following the 2004 reports.

Now two years later, the Norwegians once again have reason to worry as the safety of farmed salmon is further called into question. Effective January 1, 2006, the Russian Veterinary Service has banned imports of all chilled seafood from Norway (GAIN Report RS5090). While trade analysts point to the dispute over fishing rights in the Svalbard Archipelago in the Barents Sea as the reason behind the ban, Russian scientists claim lead levels 10 to 18 times higher than Russian standards and cadmium levels nearly four times above normal.

The November 2005 issue of the Journal of Nutrition published an article comparing the benefits and risks associated with farmed and wild salmon by region, recommending that consumers should limit consumption of farmed salmon from Scotland, Norway and eastern Canada to no more than three times a year. The researchers were among the major contributors to the January 2004 article as well as numerous other scientific studies on the benefits and risks associated with seafood consumption.

Norway's afternoon daily, *Aftenposten*, picked up this story on January 4, 2006 with the headlines, "American warning for Norwegian salmon: Russia is not the only nation accusing Norwegian farmed salmon of being tainted, and American researchers have renewed warnings not to eat much of the fish."

One of the major authors was quoted in a December 22, 2005 Cornell University article stating that the "benefit-risk analysis showed that consumers should not eat farmed fish from Scotland, Norway and eastern Canada more than three times a year; farmed fish from Maine, western Canada and Washington state no more than three to six times a year; and farmed fish from Chile no more than about six times a year. Wild chum salmon can be consumed safely as often as once a week, pink salmon, Sockeye and Coho about twice a month and Chinook just under once a month."

The article also quoted one of the researchers as saying, "For a middle-aged guy who has had a coronary and doesn't want to have another one, the risks from pollutants are minor ones... But for people who are young...or pregnant women...those risks are great enough that they outweigh the benefits."

The complete Cornell University article can be found at:  
<http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/Dec05/salmon.ssl.html>

## Strike Three -- Nitrite Found in Norwegian Salmon

Unfortunately, a third farmed salmon safety issue in as many months has hit the local press. This time, however, the Norwegian Food Safety Authority (NFA) will have a harder time fighting the negative press as the NFA itself has uncovered the unauthorized and unlabeled

use of nitrite by eight Norwegian salmon producers. Of these eight companies, six have exported smoked salmon, hot smoked salmon and cured salmon abroad. The products affected are currently being withdrawn from the market, and the authorities of recipient countries have been notified.

Norway applies EU regulations on food additives, according to which nitrite is allowed as a food additive in certain types of meat, but not fish. Nitrite is added in processed products to enhance the pink color of fish meat. Fresh salmon is not affected. The NFA stressed that it finds the use of unauthorized additives in food unacceptable and that it is intensifying its monitoring and control through inspection and sampling. The NFA also reported that nitrite has only been used by a minority of producers in the industry and not the industry in general.

The processors concerned have now stopped using nitrites. Nevertheless, as this story was widely publicized internationally – coming as it did on the tails of the Russian ban and new research results – the consequences to the Norwegian salmon industry remain to be seen.

Negative consumer reaction could hit the Norwegian salmon industry hard as nearly 90% of total production is exported. Seafood is Norway's third largest export item, with oil and gas in first place followed by metal. Recent preliminary trade data indicates that Norwegian seafood exports to Russia soared by nearly 50% in 2005 over the previous year. In 2004, the value of Norwegian seafood exports amounted to NOK 28.2 billion (US\$ 4.2 billion), salmon and trout accounted for almost half of total exports. Russia was the third largest market for salmon in 2004, behind Denmark and France, accounting for nearly 10% of total salmon exports (GAIN Report NO5006).

### **NFA Working Hard to Defend Norwegian Safety**

The Government of Norway is vigorously defending the safety of its farmed salmon industry in light of these recent events with NFA leading the fight.

In response to the Russian import ban, on November 30, 2005, the NFA announced that they rejected " Russian claims that Norwegian salmon contains too high levels of harmful metals," declaring that Norwegian legislation concerning heavy metals was in accordance with EU regulations. On December 20, 2005, an NFA delegation met with Russian veterinary authorities in Moscow in an attempt to avoid the January 1, 2006 import ban implementation date. At the meeting NFA officials stated that, "Since 1995, Norwegian seafood authorities have annually analysed farmed salmon through a large monitoring programme, and all values for lead and cadmium have been well under the limits set by the EU."

Local press carried news of the January 13, 2006 meeting between Norwegian and Russian officials in Berlin, Germany to discuss the Russian ban and work towards a resolution. Reportedly, the two countries will establish a bilateral working group that will meet in Oslo shortly. Press reports highlighted tests by trading partners Japan and Singapore that found Norwegian salmon "perfectly safe to eat."

In response to the North American study published in the Journal of Nutrition, the NFA responded on January 4, 2006 calling the report "old news" and stating that an ongoing assessment of fish conducted by Norway's Scientific Committee for Food Safety would be ready in February/March 2006. In the meanwhile, "The general dietary advice to the Norwegian population today is that we should eat more fish."

On January 16, 2006, the NFA announced the "withdrawal of processed fish products with unauthorized food additives" and intensified monitoring and control by inspections and sampling.

Earlier this week on January 17, 2005, the NFA conceded that, "The extensive press coverage recently on possible dangers from eating Norwegian farmed salmon have caused many to worry." They pointed out that the NFA followed advice from the World Health Organization and the European Union and that the most current information was "regularly re-evaluated." They continue to recommend "eating both salmon and other fatty fish on a weekly basis."

The Norwegian Food Safety Authority's press releases can be found in English at:

[http://www.mattilsynet.no/portal/page?\\_pageid=54,40103&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL&language=english](http://www.mattilsynet.no/portal/page?_pageid=54,40103&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL&language=english)

Additional reports related to Nordic/Baltic and EU seafood can be found on the website of the Foreign Agricultural Service at the U.S. Embassy in Stockholm at [www.usemb.se/Agriculture](http://www.usemb.se/Agriculture), the website of the Foreign Agricultural Service at the U.S. Mission to the European Union at [www.useu.be/agri](http://www.useu.be/agri) or through the FAS website at <http://www.fas.usda.gov/scripts/attacherep/default.asp>.