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Changes in consumer preferences for seafood products due to the COVID-19 pandemic: Summary of Nassau County, NY results

Authored by Charles Clark, Research Specialist Virginia Seafood AREC, Virginia Tech; Jonathan van Senten, Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist Virginia Seafood AREC , Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, Center for Coastal Studies Affiliate Faculty, , Virginia Tech; Michael Ciaramella, Seafood Safety and Technology Specialist New York Sea Grant, Cornell Cooperative Extension; Matt Parker, Aquaculture Business Specialist Maryland Sea Grant Extension, University of Maryland

Summary

The health crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic led to the shutdown of restaurants and nonessential businesses throughout the United States. With the majority (68%) of seafood products purchased at food service establishments, this has resulted in an unparalleled shock to U.S. fisheries and aquaculture producers (NOAA 2018). Furthermore, the USDA Census of Aquaculture reported that for shellfish farms only 4% of their first point of sales were direct to consumers (USDA 2019). As farms and businesses attempt to respond to the loss of revenue from traditional marketing channels and establish direct to consumer channels, a key question concerned the extent of changes in consumer demand and preferences for seafood products. Thus, the goal of this project was to gather market information on changes in how, when, and where consumers purchase seafood in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This report summarizes the results of information specific to responses related to seafood purchases at households within Nassau County, NY. Survey respondents were asked about seafood purchases prior to (2019) and during (2020) the COVID-19 pandemic.

There were 122 usable responses from participants living within Nassau County, NY. Respondent location was self-reported via zip code. The greatest percentages of respondents had completed a 4-year college degree (30%) or Some college (22%) (Figure 1). The greatest percentage of respondents self-reported as “Black or African American” (40%), followed by 22% who self-reported as “Hispanic”, 14% “White”, and 12% “Asian”. Female and male genders accounted for 62% and 35% of respondents, respectively. Sixty-five percent of respondents reported being 35 years old or younger. This was followed by 23% who reported being 36-45 years old, 5% being 56-65, 4% being 46-55 years old, and 3% being 66 years or older. Figures 2 illustrates the proportion of respondents by income prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The greatest percentage of respondents reported 2019 household income of $50,000 to $99,999 (30%), followed by Less than $30,000 (25%), $30,000 to $49,999 (18%), and $100,000 to $149,999 (16%). A shift was seen in 2020, with the greatest percentage of respondents reporting 2020 household income Less than $30,000 (26%), followed by $30,000 to $49,999 and $50,000 to $99,999 (22% each), and $100,000 to $149,999 (20%).

When asked about frequency of seafood consumption during the pandemic (2020), the largest percentages of respondents (44%) indicated they ate about the same as they did in 2019 (Figure 3). This was followed by 36% who indicated they ate

seafood less frequently in 2020, and 21% who indicated they ate seafood more frequently in 2020.

Between 2019 and 2020, consumers reported increased consumption of seafood products prepared at home and delivered to home as a prepared meal (Table 1). Conversely, consumers reported decreased consumption of seafood products as takeout from restaurants and at restaurants. The percentage of respondents who did not consume seafood products increased between 2019 and 2020.

Regarding method of preparation, respondents indicated they preferred grilled finfish products and grilled mollusk products when purchasing as takeout from a restaurant or delivered to home as a prepared meal. This was observed both prior to (2019) and during the pandemic (2020) (Figures 4 & 5). In 2019, respondents indicated they preferred grilled crustacean products when purchasing as takeout or delivery in 2019, but indicated they preferred broiled crustacean products when purchasing as takeout or delivery in 2020. Participants indicated they preferred broiled seaweed products when purchasing as takeout or delivery in 2019, but indicated they preferred baked seaweed products when purchasing as takeout or delivery in 2020.

When purchasing at a restaurant in 2019, respondents indicated they preferred grilled finfish products, grilled mollusk products, broiled crustacean products, and baked seaweed products (Figure 6). These preferences changed when asked in 2020, as respondents indicated they preferred baked finfish products, baked mollusk products, grilled crustacean products, and grilled seaweed products when purchasing at a restaurant during the pandemic.

Survey participants were asked about the amount spent per shopping trip on seafood products for home preparation in 2019 and 2020 (Figure 8). The majority of respondents in both 2019 (73%) and 2020 (77%) indicated they purchased less than $30 worth of seafood products per shopping trip. Similarly, survey participants were asked about the quantity (in pounds) purchased per shopping trip or home preparation (Figure 9). The majority of participants in both 2019 (88%) and 2020 (83%) indicated they purchased 10 pounds or less of seafood products per shopping trip.

In 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of respondents (60%) indicated they ate more seafood during a particular season of the year (Figure 10). Fifty-two percent indicated summer was the preferred season. In 2020, during the pandemic, 42% indicated they ate more seafood during a particular season, indicating a shift away from seasonal consumption with the majority of respondents in 2020 (58%) not eating more seafood during a particular season of the year.

Regarding advertisement methods, the greatest percentages of respondents indicated methods such as test message and social media posting (Facebook and Twitter) were not important at all (Table 2) The greatest percentages of respondents found methods such as mailed flyer, in-store cards/tabletops, in-store notification/text. QR code, and seafood counter clerk or waitstaff to be moderately important. Email and word of mouth were found to be the most important methods of advertisement, as the largest percentages of participants indicated these to be very important methods.

Respondents were asked to identify establishments from which they purchased seafood products for home preparation in 2019 and 2020 (Figures 11 & 12). Forty-three percent of respondents in 2019 and 45% in 2020 indicated they purchased more than 50% of seafood products for home preparation at supermarkets or grocery stores. This was followed by 31% in both 2019 and 2020 that purchased 10% or less of seafood products for home preparation at supermarkets or grocery stores. Twenty-seven percent of respondents in 2019 and 24% in 2020 indicated they purchased 11% to 50% of seafood products for home preparation at supermarkets or grocery stores. Purchases from all other establishments were uncommon in 2019 and 2020, with 70% or more of respondents in 2019 and 77% or more of respondents in 2020 indicating 10% or less of seafood purchases being made at all other establishments (seafood market, farmer's market, food hub, online seafood distributor or producer, etc.). Overall, supermarkets or grocery stores were the most common establishment from which to purchase of seafood products for home consumption in 2019 and 2020. Regarding preferred establishments from which purchase seafood products for home preparation, minimal change was observed between 2019 and 2020 (pre-pandemic vs. pandemic).

References

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United States Department of Agriculture. 2019. 2018 Census of Aquaculture. Volume 3. Special Studies. Part 2. AC-17-SS-2. Available at: https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2017/Online_Resources/Aquaculture/Aqua.pdf

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Appendix

Changes in consumer preferences for seafood products due to the COVID-19 pandemic:

Summary of Nassau County, NY results

Charles Clark, Virginia Tech

Jonathan van Senten, Virginia Tech

Michael Ciaramella, Cornell Cooperative Extension

Matt Parker, Maryland Sea Grant Extension

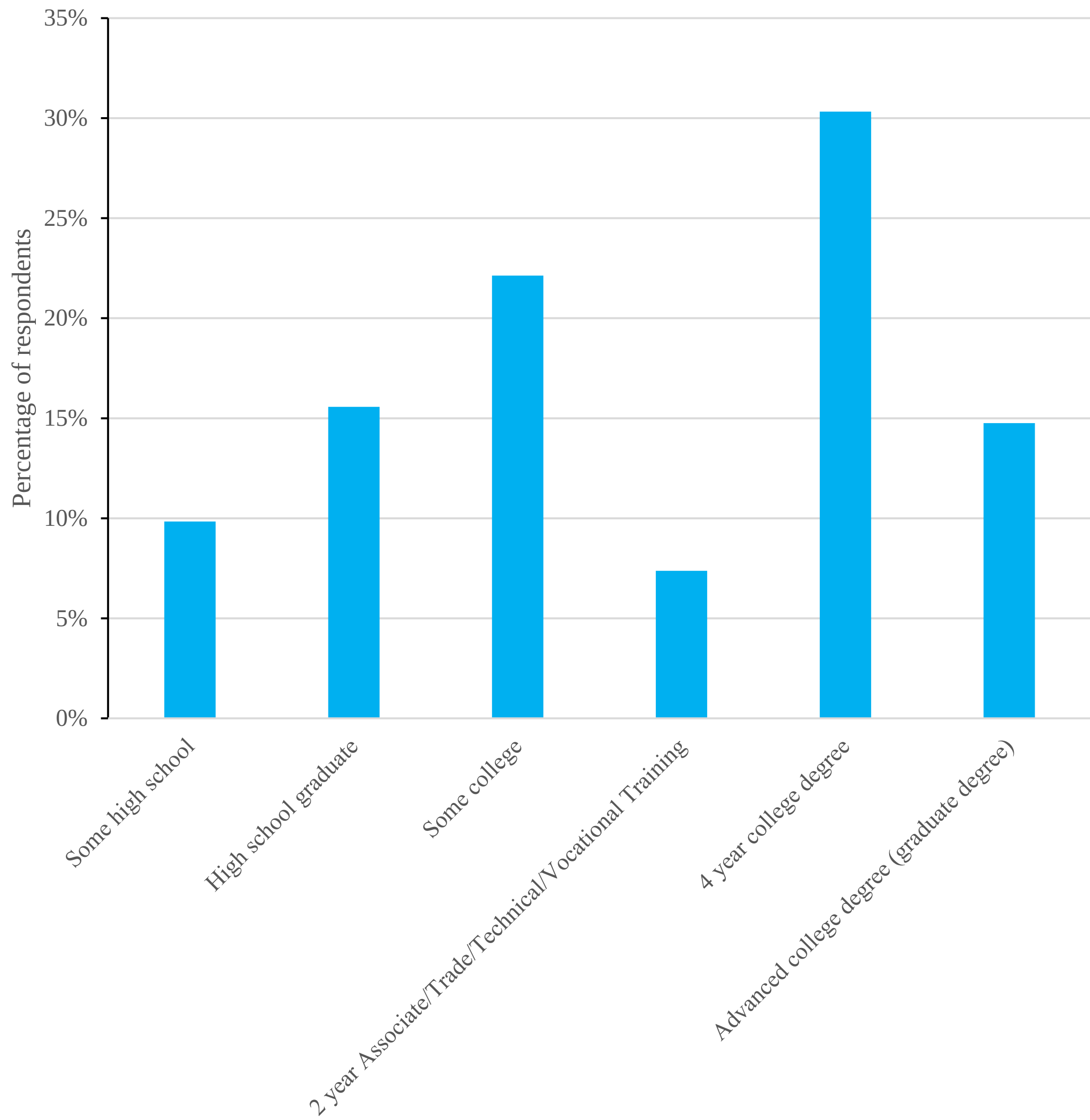

Figure 1. Level of education completed by survey respondents.

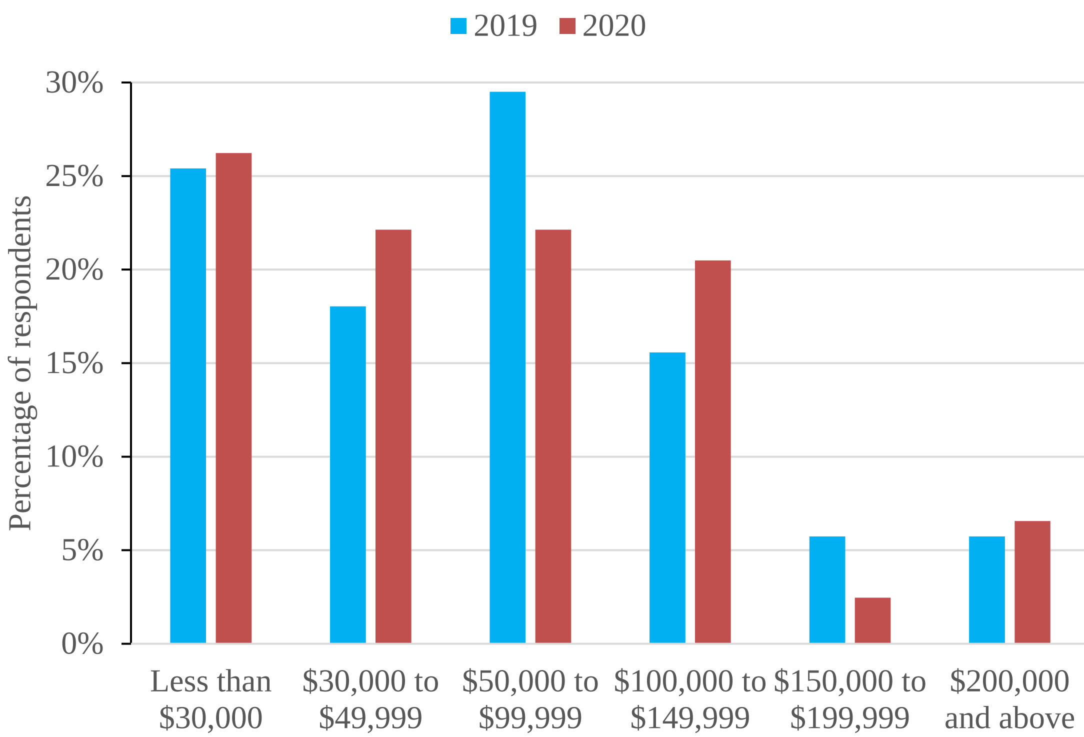

Figure 2. Household income of survey respondents in 2019 and 2020.

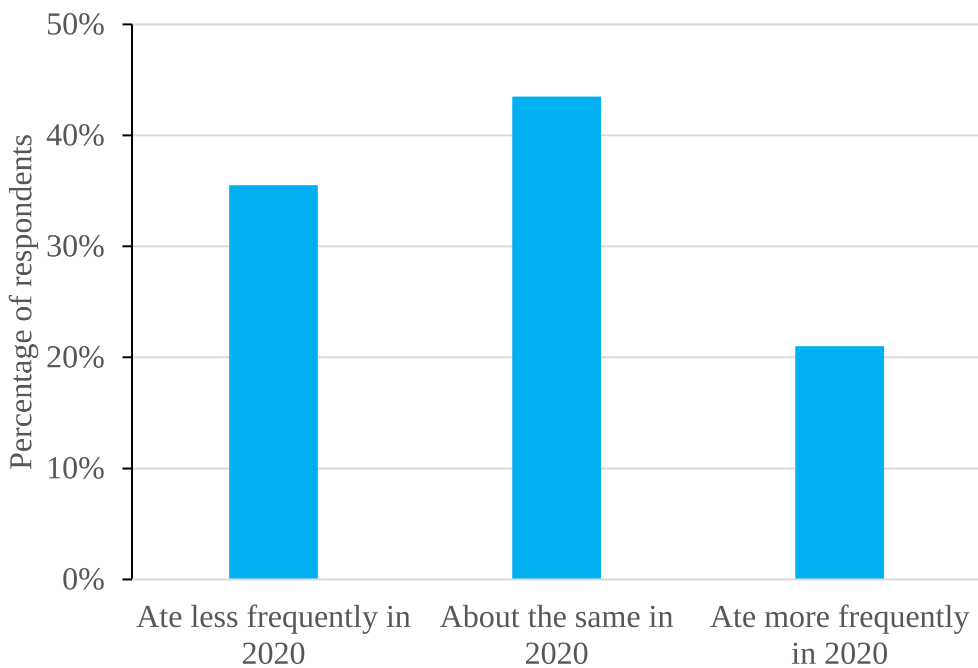

Figure 3. Frequency of seafood consumption of seafood products in 2020, with respect to seafood consumption in 2019.

Table 1. Methods of consumption of seafood products reported in 2019 and 2020.

Methods of consumption	2019	2020
Prepared at home	34.0%	36.0%
Takeout from a restaurant	21.5%	17.8%
Delivered to home as a prepared meal	10.3%	15.3%
At a restaurant	18.0%	10.3%
Other	1.8%	2.5%
Did not consume	14.5%	18.3%

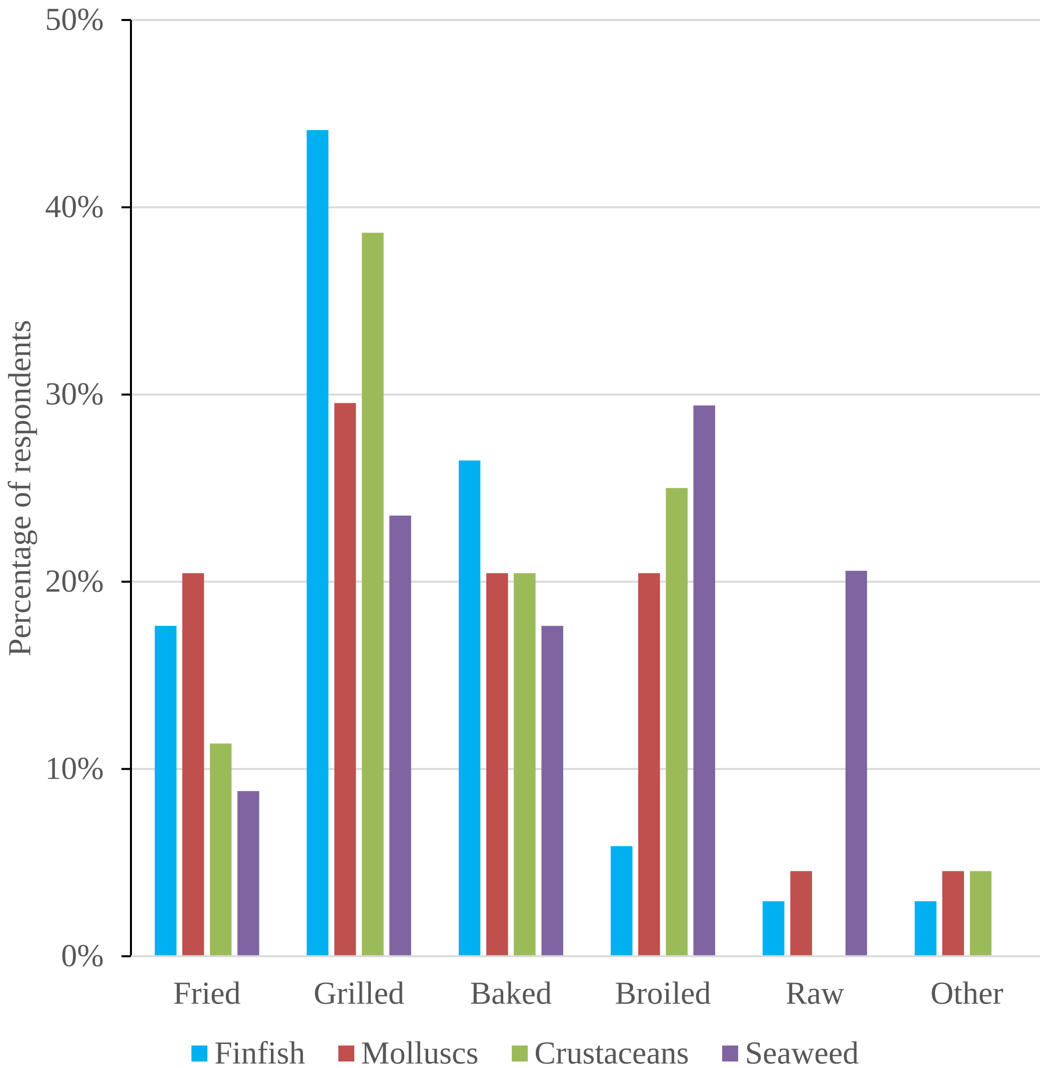

Figure 4. Preferred method of preparation of seafood products purchased as takeout from a restaurant or delivered to home as a prepared meal reported in 2019.

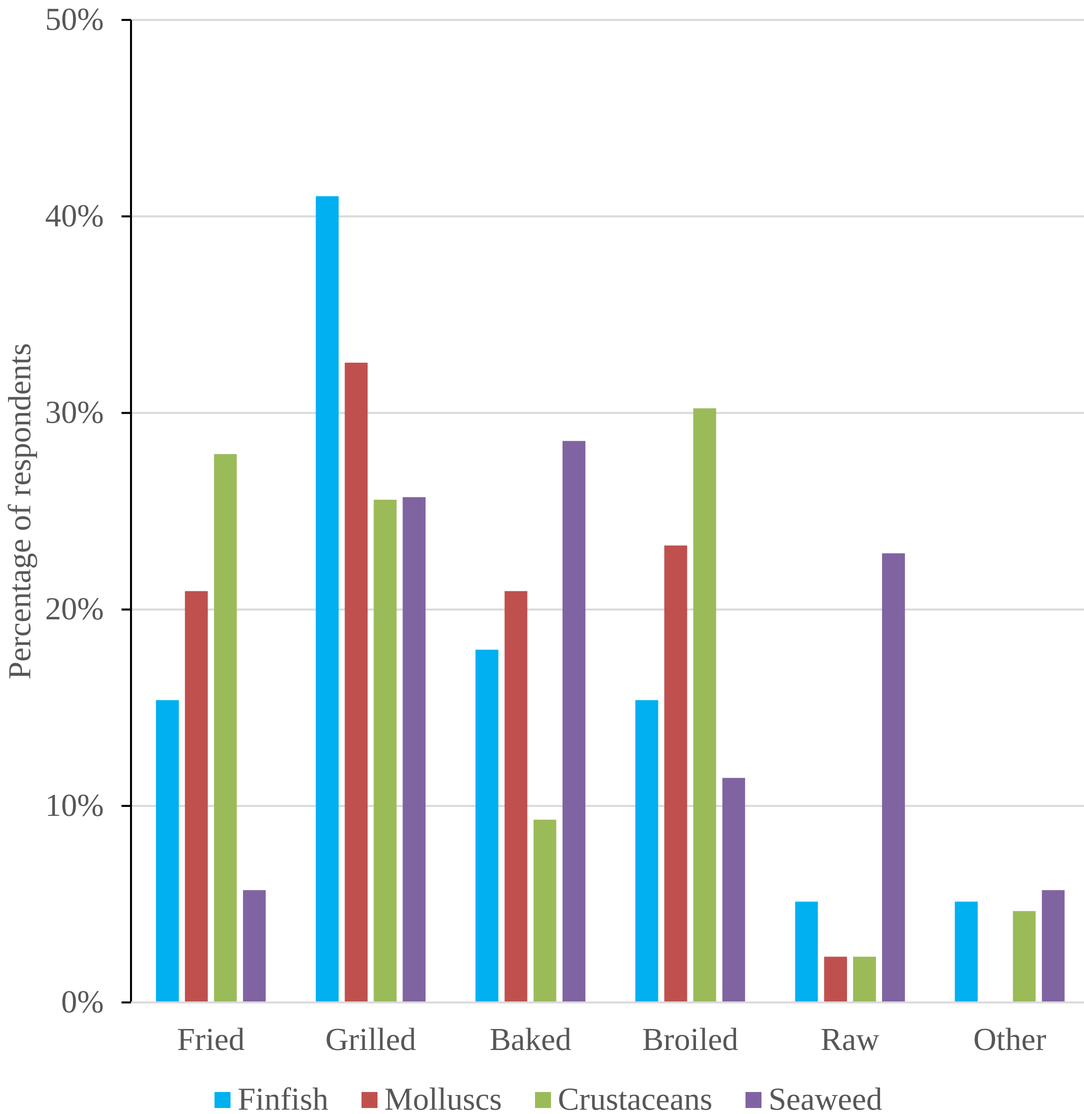

Figure 5. Preferred method of preparation of seafood products purchased as takeout from a restaurant or delivered to home as a prepared meal reported in 2020.

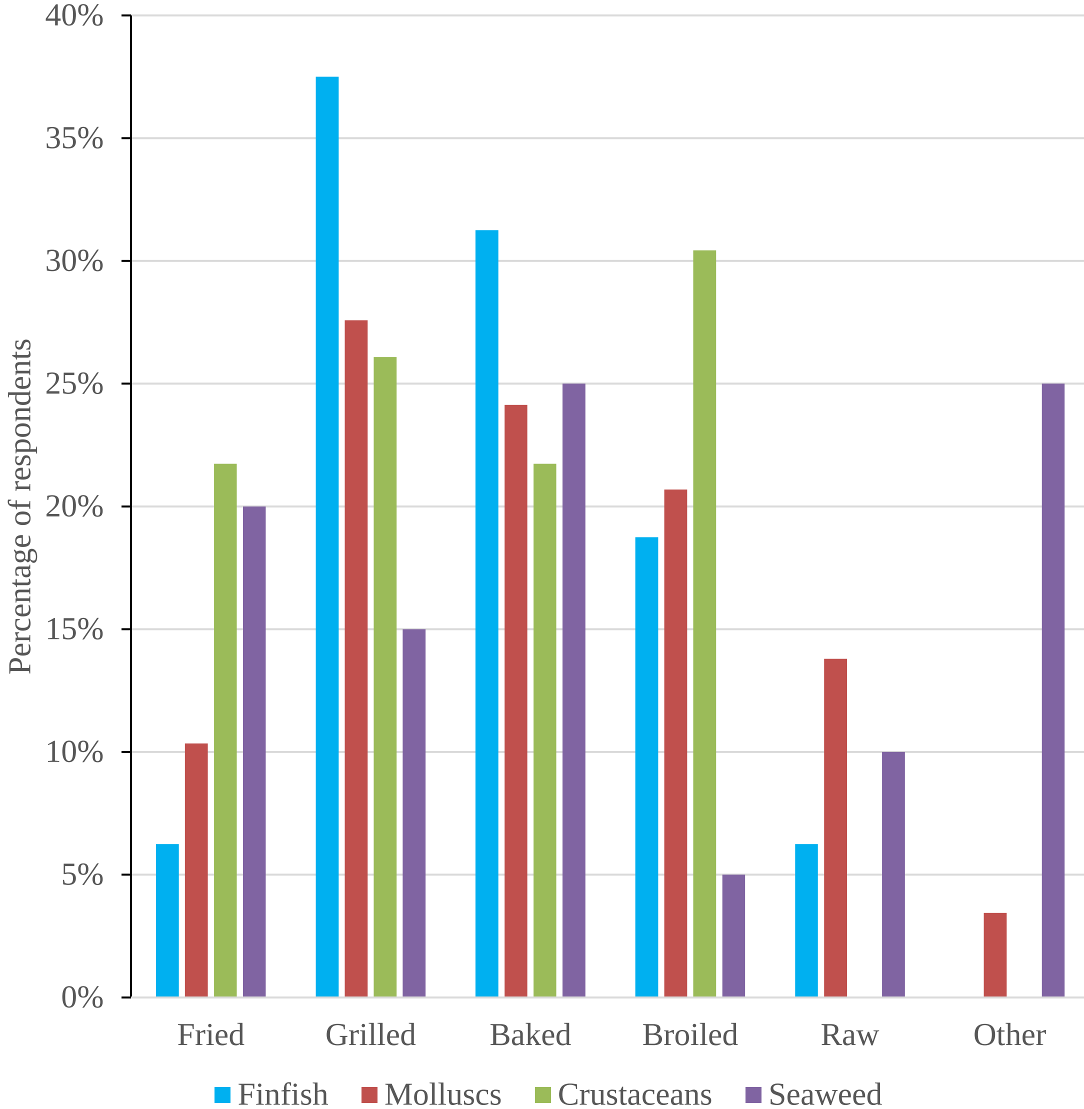

Figure 6. Preferred method of preparation of seafood products purchased at a restaurant reported in 2019.

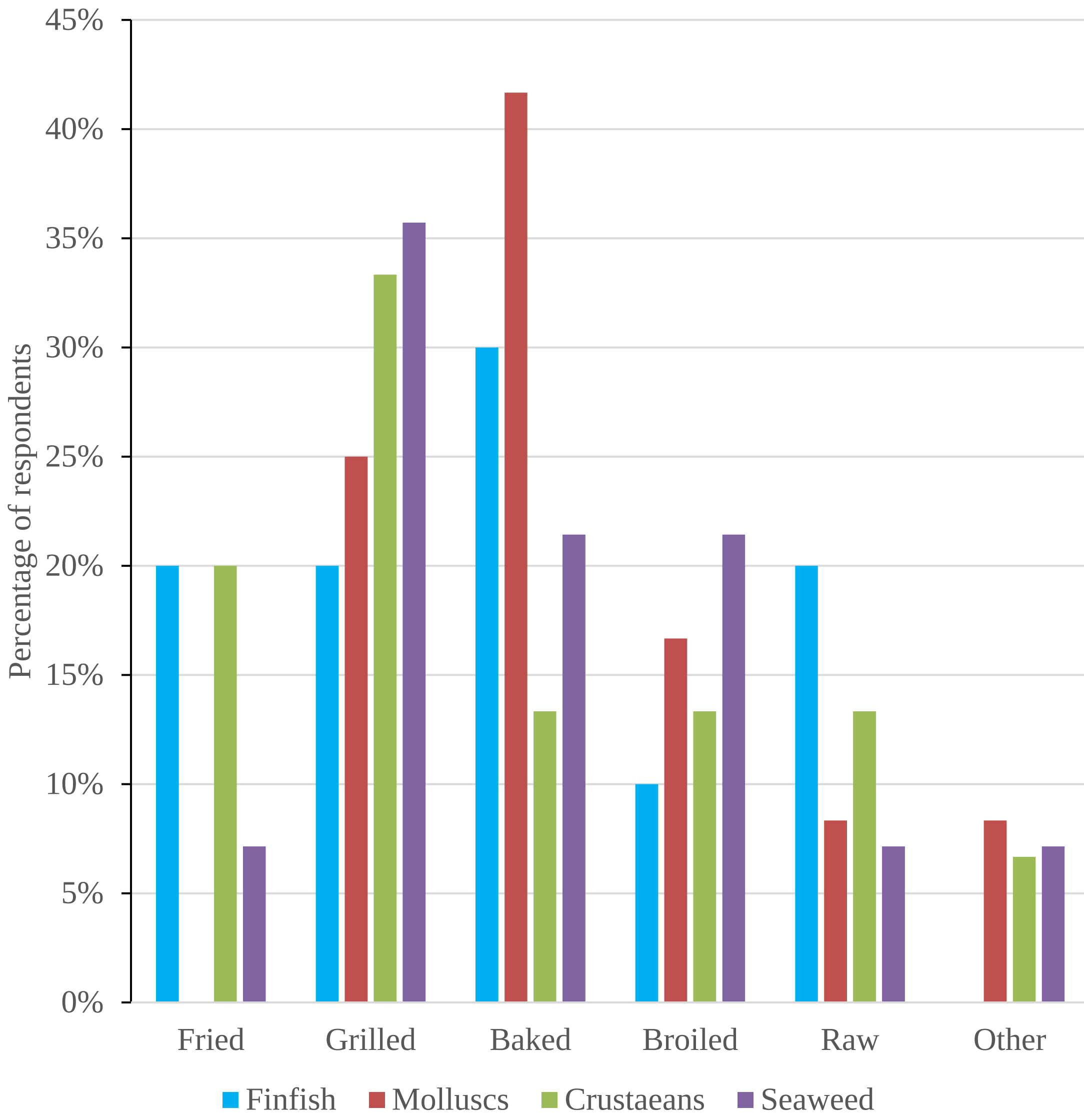

Figure 7. Preferred method of preparation of seafood products purchased at a restaurant reported in 2020.

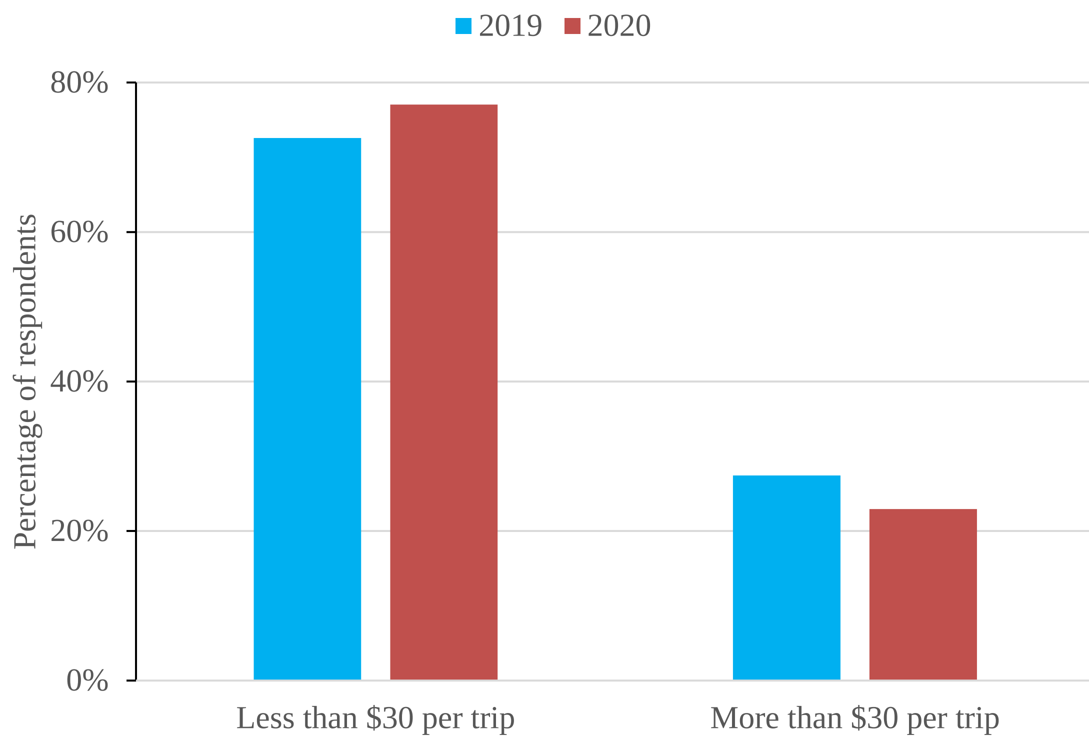

Figure 8. Amounts spent per shopping trip on seafood products for home preparation reported in 2019 and 2020.

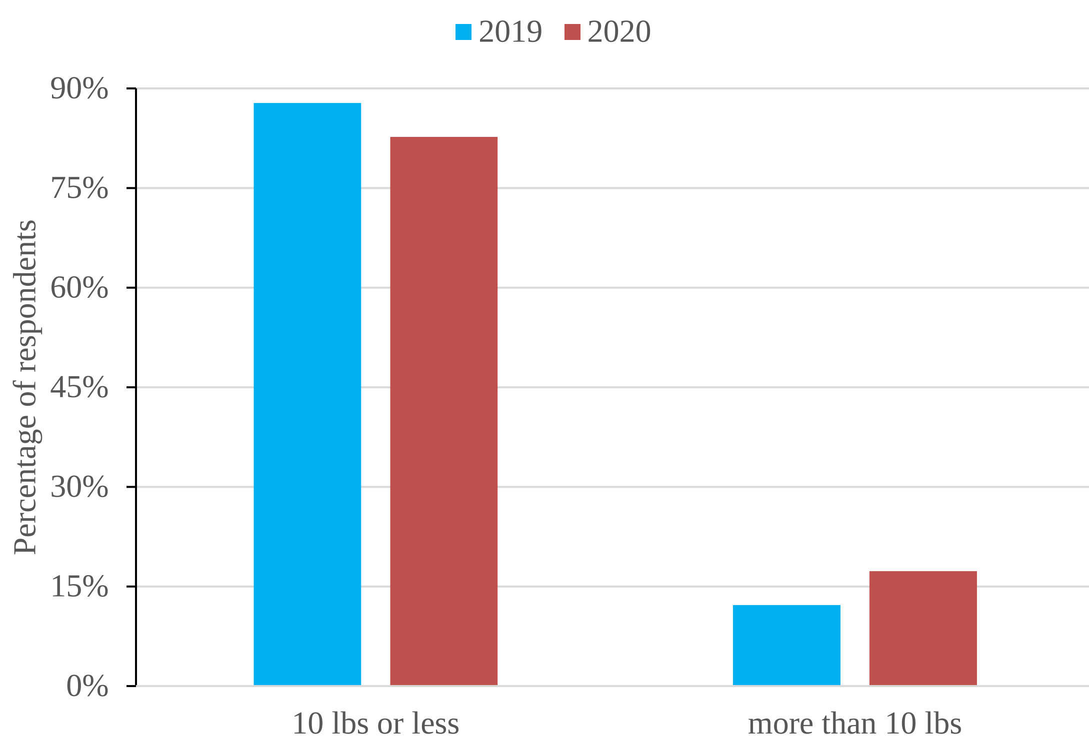

Figure 9. Quantities of seafood products purchased per shopping trip for home preparation reported in 2019 and 2020.

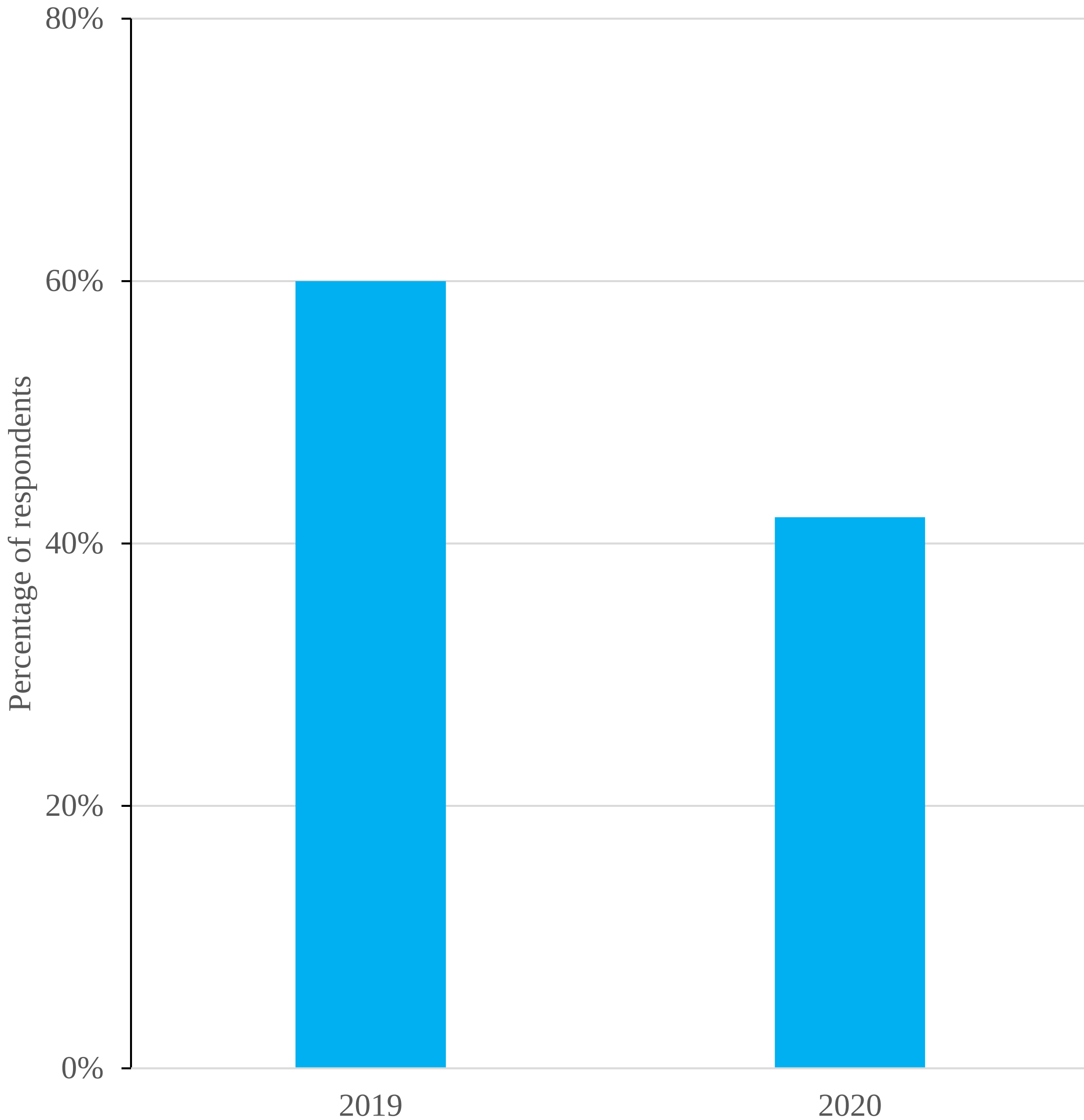

Figure 10. Percentage of respondents who consumed more seafood during a particular season in 2019, prior to the pandemic, and 2020, during the pandemic.

Table 2. Ranked importance of options to receive advertising information about seafood, according to survey responses in 2020 (* indicates greatest percentage).

	1 (not important at all)	2 (slightly important)	3 (moderately important)	4 (very important)	5 (extremely important)
Mailed flyer	24%	23%	27%*	17%	9%
E-mail	20%	22%	19%	24%*	16%
Text message	24%*	20%	21%	15%	20%
Facebook posting	31%*	20%	15%	16%	18%
Twitter posting	34%*	13%	23%	16%	14%
In-store cards, table tops	17%	18%	26%*	24%	15%
In-store notifications, text	19%	16%	27%*	20%	18%
QR code	20%	19%	26%*	18%	17%
Word of mouth	16%	12%	25%	27%*	20%
Seafood counter clerk or waitstaff	15%	15%	29%*	22%	20%
Other	38%*	11%	25%	13%	12%

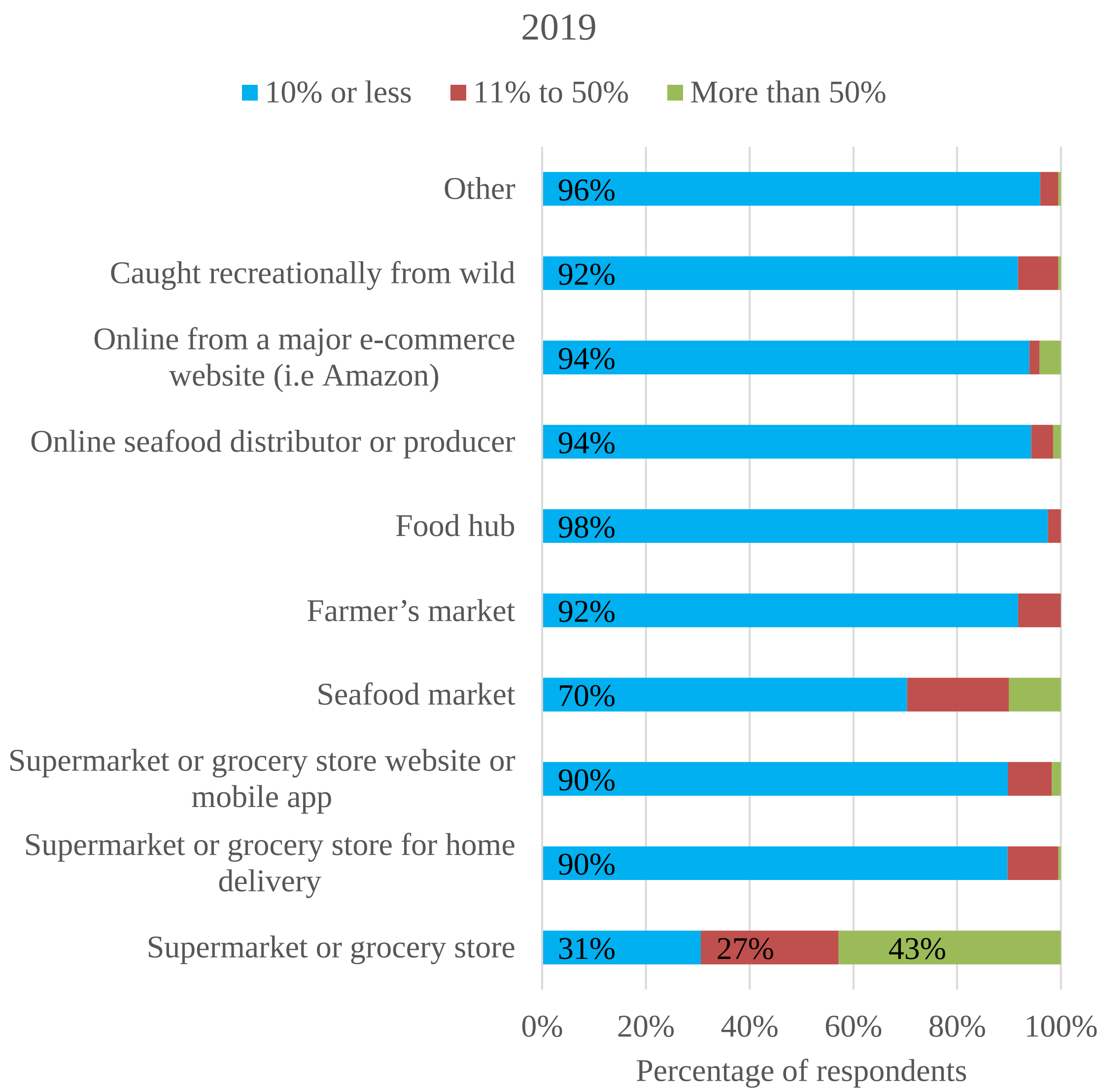

Figure 11. Percentage of seafood products purchased at varying establishments in 2019.

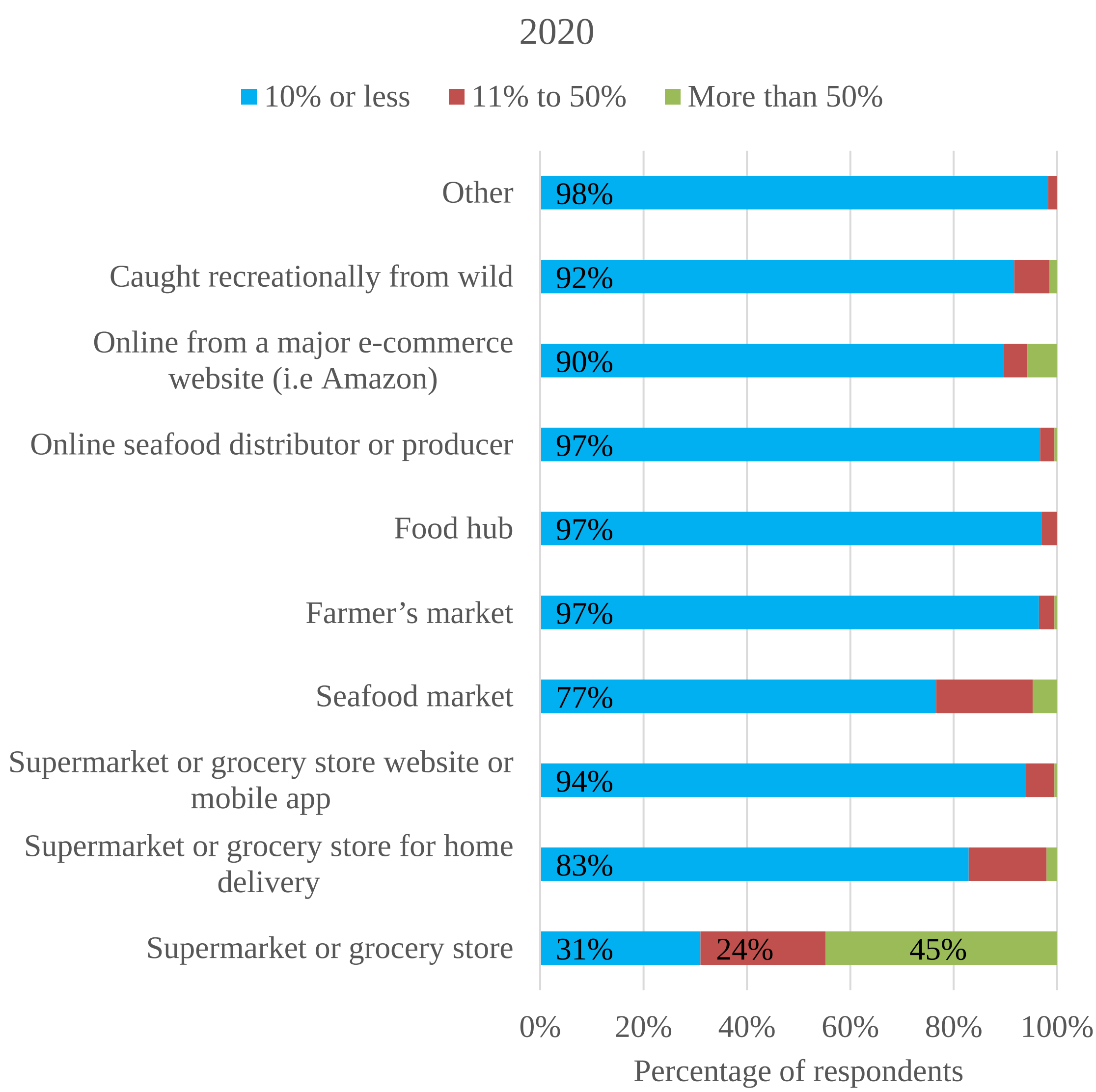

Figure 12. Percentage of seafood products purchased at varying establishments in 2020.