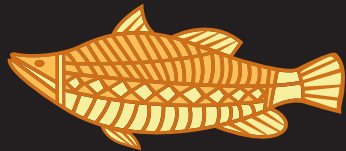


AUSTRALIS



THE BETTER FISH®



BARRAMUNDI: FIVE RESTAURANT SUCCESS STORIES

The best thing about ocean farm-raised barramundi—beyond its sustainability—is its incredibly clean flavor and unmatched versatility.

BY DAVID FEDER, RDN

BARRAMUNDI: NOT JUST ANOTHER FISH

Seafood, health and sustainability are key trends in foodservice today, and for good reason. “Eighty percent of Americans who regularly eat fish say it is ‘important’ or ‘very important’ that the seafood they buy is caught using sustainable methods,” said Eliza Barclay, of National Public Radio.

Moreover, fish convert feed to protein far more efficiently than land animals and the protein itself is uniquely healthy. As is well known, fish contain vital omega-3 fatty acids known to help promote cardiovascular health, cognitive health, brain and nerve development and even protect against some forms of cancer, asthma and diabetes symptoms.

Barramundi has been called “the perfect fish for a changing world,” not only for its ecological sustainability but for its high levels of omega 3 fatty acids and its versatility.

When it comes to serving the needs of both people and the planet, one fish stands above all others. *NY Restaurant Insider* called barramundi “the perfect fish for a changing world,” not only for its ecological sustainability but for its high levels of omega-3 fatty acids (similar to Coho salmon and more than any other white-fleshed fish) and its versatility.

As with any paradigm shift in the fickle world of cuisine, chefs are the vanguard of changing tastes, zeroing in on the new, the trendy and the important issues and flavors coming around the corner.

THE EXPERTS WEIGH IN

Recently, a group of leading chefs and restaurant executives from popular QSR groups participated in a virtual roundtable to discuss the value, quality, versatility and benefits of barramundi. Included were:

- Larry Pierson, Abuelo's: The Flavor of Mexico www.abuelos.com, Lubbock, Tex.
- Seth Miller, Talk of the Town Restaurant Group Inc. www.talkofthetownrestaurants.com, Orlando, Fla.
- Victor Topete, California Fish Grill www.cafishgrill.com, Anaheim, Calif.
- Gabriel Caliendo, Lazy Dog Restaurant www.lazydogrestaurant.com, Huntington Beach, Calif.
- Nick Saba, Coco's Bakery Restaurants Inc. www.cocosbakery.com, Carlsbad, Calif.
- Jim Campbell, LYFE Kitchens/Synergy Restaurant Consultants www.lyfekitchen.com, Palo Alto, Calif.
- Jeff Moore, CEO, Pacific Seafoods Inc. www.pacificseafood.com, Fullerton, Calif.

What these restaurant pros shared was that barramundi is an affordable, forgiving white fish alternative that succeeds in today's competitive and cost-driven restaurant environment. Here are highlights from their experiences.

RESTAURANT SPOTLIGHTS

Coco's Bakery Restaurant

EASY, VERSATILE, HEALTHY

At Coco's Bakery Restaurants Inc., recent efforts have been on healthy options. “Barramundi sparked interest due to its ‘superfood’ status as promoted by TV health personality Dr. Mehmet Oz,” says Nick Saba, vice president of the group. He notes that they were looking for a fish to accompany the mega-trendy, vitamin-rich vegetable kale on the 2014 menu. “That’s where the barramundi came in. It fit right into our ‘Fit and Lively’ category—fewer than 600 calories.”

It's a very versatile fish, very healthful and easy to cook, which certainly helps operationally. We have approximately 100 restaurants offering it and we need very consistent products. It was really a ‘win-win’, a great product that's easy to cook. Plus, we're able to put a plate-cost together that is less than the salmon we serve.

Saba adds that barramundi is easy to prepare, needing just 2-3 minutes per side on a high-heat flat-top griddle. “It's truly hard to mess it up and our operators absolutely love it” he exclaims. And the proof is in the bouillabaisse: Since introducing barramundi, on average the fish is selling about double what a typical seafood item would.

Coco's: Blackened Baja Barramundi seasoned and grilled to perfection, topped with fresh pico de gallo and avocado. (560 calories) \$12.99





Lazy Dog: Pan Roasted Barramundi on a bed of black beans, sautéed zucchini, roasted peppers and onions, topped with cilantro and a pickled carrot, onion, and orange salad. (650 calories) \$14.50

California Fish Grill

HIGH FLAVOR, HIGH VALUE

At California Fish Grill, where chef/CEO/founder Victor Topete grills nearly all entrées on a char grill, the search was on for a fish that he could “put a little more value to” yet was health-oriented. “Barramundi has a lot of health benefits, such as high omega-3s, and people are constantly looking to eat more healthfully, so we knew barramundi would be a great opportunity.” Topete also recognized barramundi would support a higher price point than other CFG entrées, yet is perceived as a high-value offering. He sells barramundi, prepared simply Cajun style or with garlic butter, for just \$11.00—the same price as salmon—and the barramundi still falls into an acceptable range for food cost.

Other advantages that Chef Topete discovered is that the fillets “firm up nicely when cooked a bit longer compared to most fish, and doesn’t dry out—it handles the heat really well.” He finds the fish is consistent. And the best advantage, as Topete declares, is that “the flavor profile is very mild.”

Talk of the Town

EVERYBODY’S TALKING

Some of the restaurants in the national Talk of the Town Restaurants Group, Inc.—Moon Fish and Fishbones, for example—offer up to 13 different fish species daily. “We are always looking for exciting new products,” says Seth Miller, head of operations for the company. Miller is excited by barramundi’s sustainability and advanced methods of farming. Understanding a restaurateur’s role as an influence for the greater good, he also likes barramundi for “the educational aspect we can provide our guests,” noting the “enhanced experience” for consumers is “cool.”

Barramundi’s excellence as a clean-tasting, versatile and easy-to-use fish plays the ultimate part for Miller: “We wouldn’t put it out if it didn’t meet the consistency of fish like Chilean sea bass or black grouper. Barramundi meets all the standards for a high-end restaurant. It really comes down to it being a good quality product. It handles well, cooks well and is consistent. And, we consider it a value fish because of the price point.”

Lazy Dog Restaurants

NUTRITIOUS & DELICIOUS

Gabriel Caliendo, corporate chef and principal at the Lazy Dog Restaurants group, Huntington Beach, Calif., was seeking the perfect fish to fit a new “Nutritious & Delicious,” section on the menu. His purveyor at International Pacific Seafoods Inc. introduced him to barramundi. It was a fortuitous match, because Caliendo had just returned from Central and South America where he’d enjoyed lots of seafood dishes. “In Belize, they prepare Mexican white sea bass, a nice whitefish, so I was trying to find something along those lines,” he explains. Barramundi was a perfect fit for the new menu section. “The feedback has been great,” Caliendo enthuses. “It’s been really well-received...it’s one of our ‘cult’ favorites.”

Caliendo has many customers who order barramundi almost every time they visit the restaurant. “That’s something we always look for in terms of the value of an item that motivates us to continue to carry it.” He notes also that barramundi is an easy-to-use fish, a quality that’s “a really nice thing, as we’re a high-volume restaurant.” He continues, “To provide the presentations and the flavor profiles we do, can be difficult if an item takes too long. Barramundi cooks quickly, which is great.”

Another advantage for Caliendo: “It’s really bulletproof; it has that good fat content, and its taste and texture is like a cross between halibut and Chilean sea bass. If you happen to cook it a little too long, it’s more forgiving than, say, a swordfish that becomes like cardboard. My chefs like that—and the same goes for management, since that’s fewer people they have to go to the table and placate.”

Continued on page 4

Barramundi has just half the calories as salmon, boasting only 137 calories per five ounce serving.

FINDING “THE NEXT BIG FISH”

Barramundi, also known as Asian sea bass, is extremely popular throughout Australia and Southeast Asia. It has long been prized for its sweet flavor and meaty texture, and is often compared with halibut and Chilean sea bass. Barramundi offers a level of culinary versatility that other farmed fish lack.

Owing to their life history, barramundi are highly suited to farming using natural methods. Australis Aquaculture, the global leader in barramundi farming, raises their fish in a unique off-shore eco farm. This pristine, 100% saltwater marine environment ensures a consistently clean flavor (often absent in pond-raised barramundi), firm texture and year round availability. No hormones, colorants, antibiotics or other additives are used in raising Australis Barramundi.

With a full traceability program in place, every Australis Barramundi is traceable from hatchery to plate, lab-tested for purity and processed in HACCP-certified, independently audited facility. This makes Australis Barramundi one of the most traceable and pure fish available.

Australis Barramundi gets high marks for its clean flavor and dense, meaty—yet buttery texture—which makes for a forgiving and deeply satisfying dining experience. Another health benefit: barramundi has just half the calories as salmon, boasting just 137 calories per five ounce serving.

HOW TO: Menu Success with Barramundi

Jeff Moore, CEO of **International Pacific Seafoods Inc.**, knows fish, especially the marketing side. Here are some of his “must know” tips for the successful “menuing” of Australis Barramundi.

- Incorporate “sea bass” into the product name or description
- Put together a compelling story

RESTAURANT SPOTLIGHTS

Abuelo’s: The Flavor of Mexico

ADDRESSING PRICE VOLATILITY

Larry Pierson, head of purchasing for Abuelo’s: The Flavor of Mexico, was looking for a replacement seafood for mahi mahi. “Mahi mahi is strictly a wild caught fish,” he points out. “That year, the catch was very low and I was concerned about availability.” In doing some research at the Boston Seafood Show, I tasted barramundi. “I was very impressed with it,” he says, “it was one of the best seafoods we tested.” After marketing tests and intensive education and training of operations and wait staff, Pierson reveals that barramundi is now outselling salmon at Abuelo’s.



Abuelo’s: Wood-grilled Barramundi Fillets topped with fresh shrimp, scallops, mushrooms, spinach, roasted peppers and sliced avocado in a delicious white wine sauce. (1410 calories)

- Focus on barramundi’s signature flavor
- Celebrate barramundi as new and different
- Utilize consumer demand for sustainable, responsible sourcing
- Train the wait staff to sell the story

“It’s Marketing 101,” Moore sums up. “It’s the emotional thing, getting people to care about this exciting new fish, barramundi.”