

# FLORIDA VOTERS' VIEWS ON AQUACULTURE

POLL REPORT | JULY 2021

## HIGHLIGHTS



Over 7 in 10 Florida voters would eat more seafood if there was more farmed fish available that came from sustainable sources and was produced with higher safety standards.



Voters have concerns about the health and environmental impacts of *both* foreign and domestic aquaculture.



Voters want more consumer protections and stronger regulations on farmed fish sold in the U.S., and more seafood raised here using those higher standards.

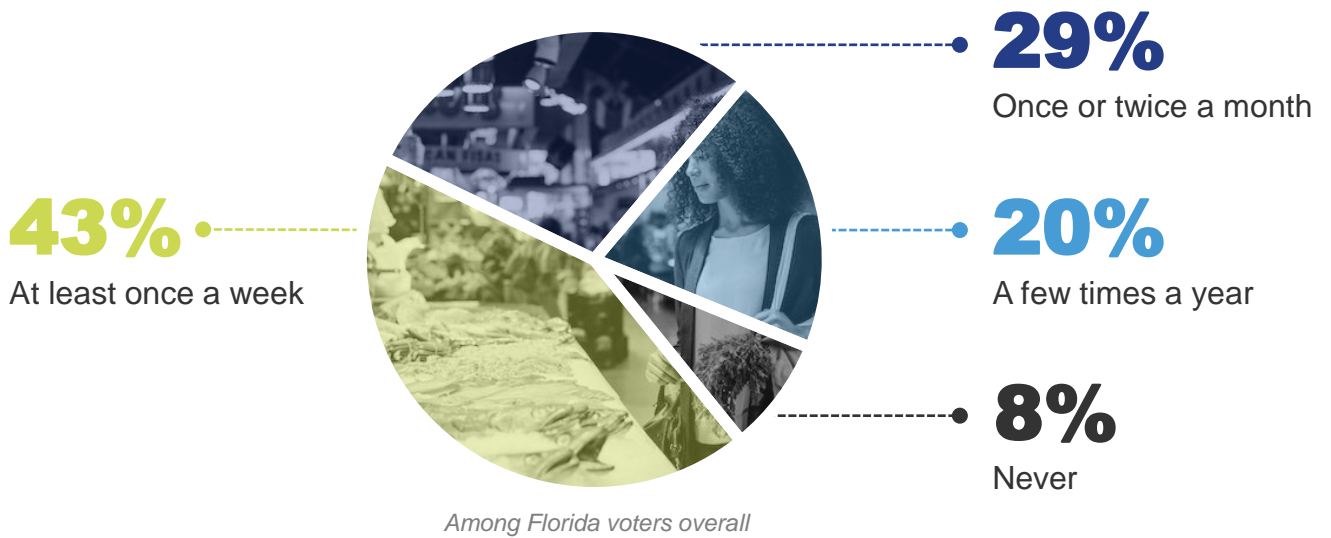


There is strong support for a proposal to first “examine the risks and opportunities of fish farming in U.S. federal waters before setting high standards and regulation for safe and sustainable aquaculture.”



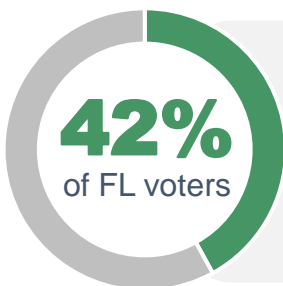
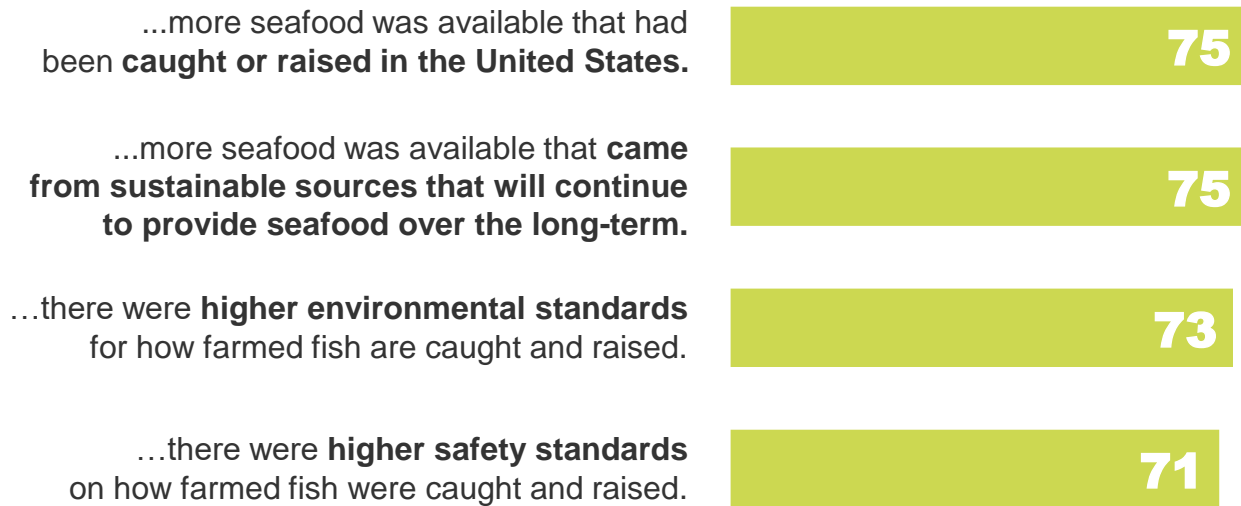
Voters reject extreme stances on both sides of the aquaculture debate, with the overwhelming majority preferring the proposal above to either immediately opening federal waters or forever keeping them closed to aquaculture.

# Over 2 in 5 Florida voters eat seafood at least weekly



## But over 7 in 10 would eat more if...

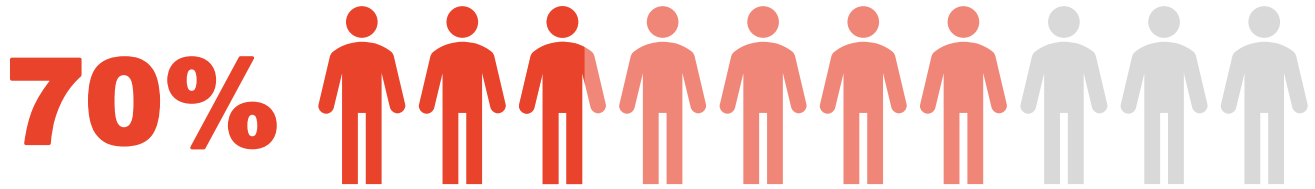
% of Florida voters saying they are **likely to eat more seafood**



### ...would buy less meat if they were buying more seafood

Fish farming is the most environmentally-friendly and low carbon way to produce not just seafood, but all animal protein for humans to eat – making domestic aquaculture an important opportunity to have a positive environmental impact.

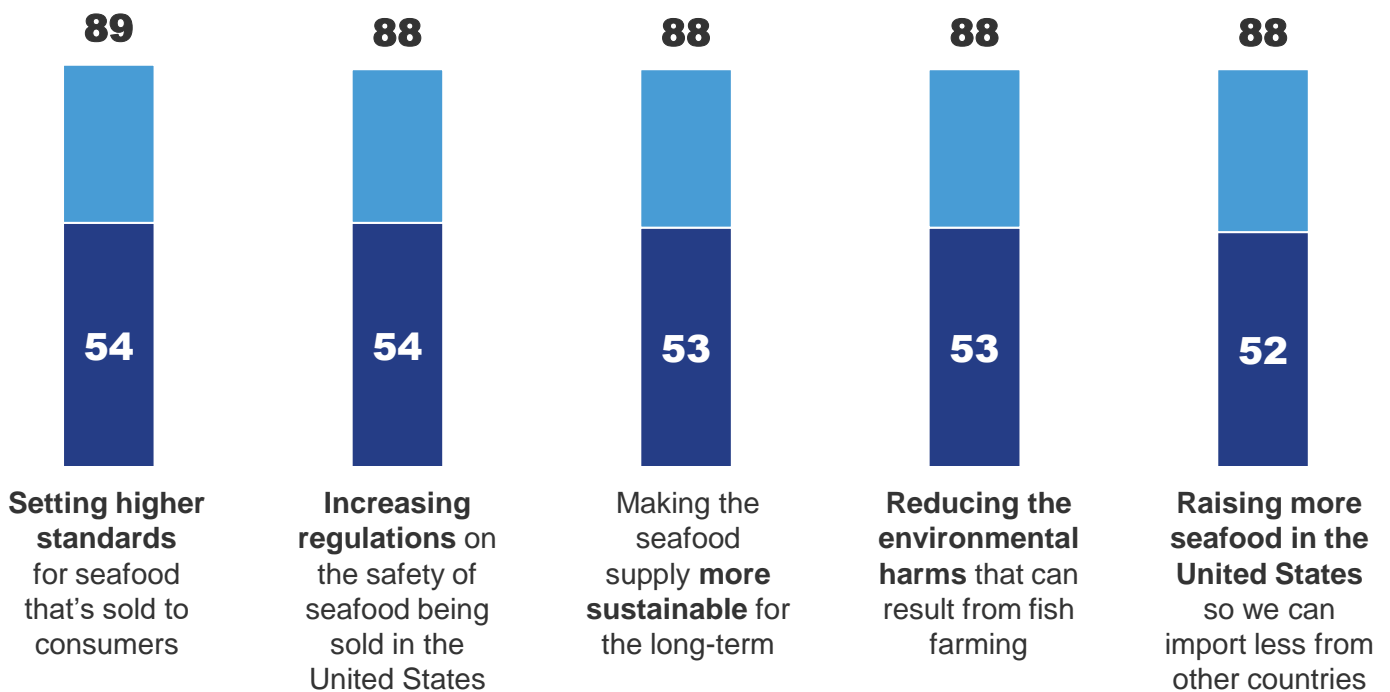
# Florida voters want more consumer protections and stronger regulations on seafood sold in the U.S.



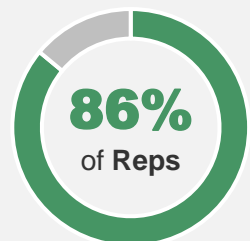
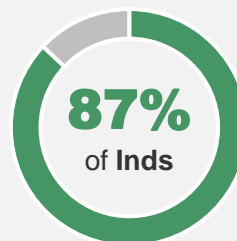
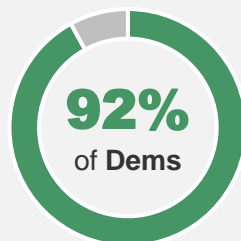
**27%** are *very* concerned

## Priorities for Seafood Supply

*% saying it is a **very important** priority / Total % saying it's an important priority  
Among Florida voters overall*



Voters across the political spectrum **overwhelmingly believe it is important to increase regulations on seafood sold in the U.S.**



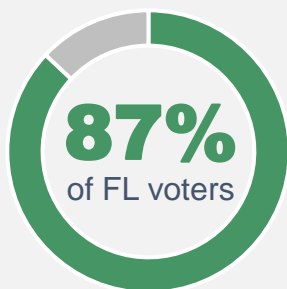
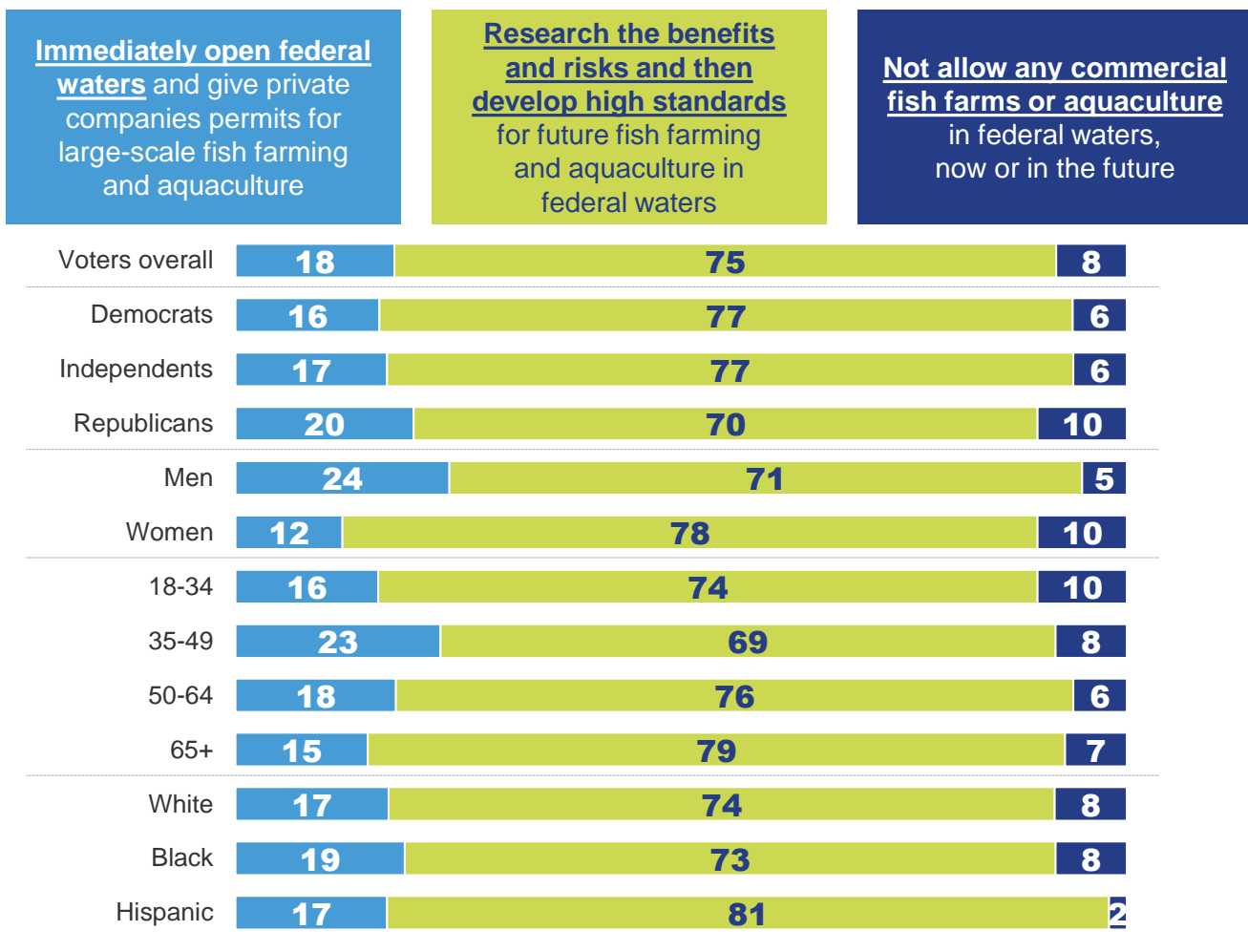
*Total % saying it's an important priority*

# Florida voters reject extreme stances on both sides of the aquaculture debate and embrace a plan to first study benefits and risks, then develop standards

Across demographic and partisan lines, voters believe fish farming in U.S. federal waters needs to be done *right* – that means taking the time to research the benefits and risks so we can develop high standards that keep Americans healthy and our environment safe.

## Preferred U.S. Government Approach on Aquaculture

There are currently not any active fish farms, or aquaculture, in U.S. federal waters. Do you think the U.S. government should:



...would support a proposal “that would first **examine the risks and opportunities** of fish farming in U.S. federal waters before **setting high standards and regulation** for safe and sustainable aquaculture.”

**87%** of Democrats | **86%** of Independents | **89%** of Republicans

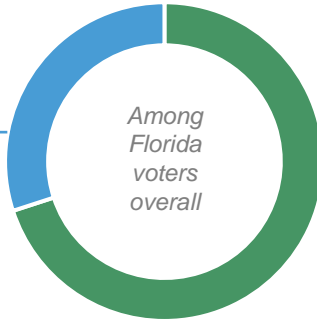
# Florida voters across the political spectrum agree on the importance of getting aquaculture right in the U.S.

When presented with competing arguments from both the left and the right, a strong majority of voters side with an approach to aquaculture that keeps our environment safe, while offering benefits to the economy.

**30%** side with

## Factory fish farms should never be built

Huge factory fish farms should never be built in our oceans. Industrial aquaculture dumps fish waste and antibiotics into the ocean and makes climate change worse. Industrial fish farming also threatens fishermen's livelihoods and coastal economies.



**70%** side with

## Done right, fish farming creates a sustainable seafood supply

When done right, fish farming is the most environmentally-friendly and low carbon way to produce not just seafood, but all animal protein for humans to eat. It creates a sustainable seafood supply to feed the country and the world.

**33** Democrats **67**

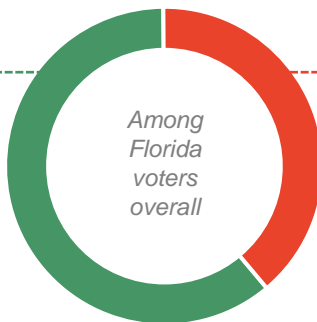
**28** Independents **72**

**30** Republicans **70**

**61%** side with

## Done right, fish farming benefits the economy

When done right, aquaculture off America's coasts can offer huge benefits to the economy, the security of our food supply, and the environment. But we can't let for-profit companies set up their own farms in federal waters before assessing the risks and establishing high standards to protect consumers and coastal communities.



**39%** side with

## U.S. federal waters should be opened immediately to private companies

With nearly all of America's seafood currently being imported, we should immediately set standards and regulations and issue permits for private companies to farm fish in U.S. federal waters. Not only will it create thousands of jobs, it will secure our food supply.

**59** Democrats **41**

**65** Independents **35**

**59** Republicans **41**

# There are real concerns about the health and environmental impacts of *both* foreign and domestic aquaculture, making high standards and strong regulations top of mind for FL voters

## Concerns About Foreign Aquaculture

*% Very concerned / % Total concerned*  
Among Florida voters overall



The health threat created when **poorly regulated seafood** producers overuse antibiotics and overcrowd fish in pens



**Lower environmental standards** for raising and catching fish than here in the U.S.



The **pollution created and dumped** into the open water



The U.S. **losing out on the jobs and economic benefits** of producing our own seafood supply



**Dangerous working conditions** and poverty-level wages for workers at fish farms

## Concerns About Domestic Aquaculture

*% Very concerned / % Total concerned*  
Among Florida voters overall



Fish waste and antibiotics can **pollute the water of coastal regions** in the U.S.



Industrial fish farms **threaten the livelihoods of fishermen** and the economies of coastal communities



Large-scale fish pens can be a breeding ground for **disease and parasites**



Farmed fish can **escape and threaten the health and ecosystems** of the oceans and wild fish

## Methodology

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- On behalf of Environmental Defense Fund, Benenson Strategy Group conducted 799 online interviews with registered voters in Florida from July 9 – 15, 2021.
- The margin of sampling error is  $\pm 3.4\%$  at the 95% confidence level.
  - *Note: the margin of sampling error is higher among subgroups.*
- Due to rounding, answer choices may not always add up to 100%.

1



**Aquaculture**, also known as fish farming, is the breeding, rearing, and harvesting of fish, shellfish, algae, and other organisms in all types of water environments.

2



The U.S. already grows **97 million pounds of marine aquaculture every year**. The majority of American marine aquaculture is farmed oysters, mussels, clams, and shrimp which helped bring in \$1.5 billion for the fishing industry in 2017 alone. These are raised near shore.

3



**Offshore aquaculture** is an emerging approach to fish farming where farms are placed some distance offshore. The farms are positioned in deeper and less sheltered waters, where ocean currents are stronger than they are inshore. This is a common practice in countries outside of the United States.

4



The U.S. is the world's second largest consumer of seafood.

5



Demand for seafood in the U.S. and abroad will only continue to grow with global demand projected to be at least **232 million metric tons by 2030**.

6



Seafood is a more climate-friendly source of protein than other protein sources.

7



Today, **Americans import more than 85% of all the seafood we eat and more than half of that is farmed**. But it often comes from countries that lack strong standards for safety, environmental protection and other issues.

That is why EDF recently announced efforts to support a comprehensive approach to ensure that **any expansion of offshore aquaculture in the United States is done in the most environmentally sustainable way possible and prioritizes economic growth and jobs for historically disadvantaged communities** — those experiencing the greatest burdens of environmental harm, economic inequality and climate change.

To better understand the opinion landscape of aquaculture in the United States, EDF contracted Benenson Strategy Group to conduct this survey.