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The introduction of a seafood specialist at Canyon Market, San Francisco, Calif., has increased sales in the department in less than two months.

The section now looks better, thanks to an improved display, is educational and is informational, with recipes provided.

"We were hoping to find someone who would want to take a particular interest in seafood," said Richard Tarlov, owner of the store. "It was an orphan in our whole lineup; we had never had a person who had adopted it as their own."

Finding someone with a passion for seafood was difficult, he said, but he ultimately found Paula "Tuffy" Eldridge, who had worked as a seafood department supervisor at Whole Foods Market. "She knew the product and what customers need as far as service," said Tarlov.

"I love selling seafood because it's a product that comes in virtually every day and it's fresh," pointed out Eldridge. "I love maintaining it and teaching people about sustainability and as every year goes by it's more and more important."

Seafood is a small department at Canyon Market with a case just four feet wide, but all fish is fresh, on ice. The appearance of the display has improved since bringing a dedicated category expert on board, said Tarlov, because Eldridge has improved how the ice is packed in, how it's sloped and how the display is garnished.

"It's important to garnish because so much fish can be dull white," said Eldridge. She uses colorful garnishes such as whole red onions, lemons, limes, radicchio, fennel tops, kale, leeks " 'things that have a bit of color so your eye goes from the fish to the color to the next fish," she explains. All her garnishes are food that she would cook with the fish.

She also strategically merchandises fish with different colored flesh, such as red meat trout and Hawaiian opa, to keep things interesting.

"The case is just a little more lively, not so rectilinear, more creative, and there's more product," said Tarlov.

Eldridge also educates customers and helps them out with cooking tips and verbal recipes. The latter are simple such as olive oil, salt, pepper and citrus. She gives advice on where to find good recipes online, too, and plans to have written recipes available in the near future.

In terms of education, consumers want to know about sustainability, mercury and more recently, genetically modified salmon" another key reason why Tarlov sought expert help for the department. Eldridge stays current with the latest in seafood news and trends by listening to NPR, reading trade magazines and the Monterey Bay Aquarium web site and talking with her distributor, Royal Hawaiian Seafood.

In terms of sustainability, the store is trying to adhere to the Monterey Bay Aquarium's list of recommended seafood.

"But it's very difficult," explained Tarlov.

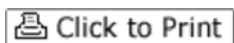
"It's impossible not to carry some things," added Eldridge, "but we try to be as sustainable as we can with fish that's as responsibly caught as possible. That's the goal and we still keep the customers' wants and needs in mind."

To make things easier for customers, the store has educational reference sheets available.

What's surprising is that Canyon Market's customers are an educated, affluent group; it's just that "people are not that educated about sustainable protein," Tarlov pointed out, and they have a lot of questions, a lot of concerns. "It's a very complex area and it's hard to convey information over the counter in a few sentences."

Another reason Tarlov is glad he's paying attention to his seafood department is

that there are several Whole Foods stores nearby and that the chain recently introduced a seafood coding practice highlighting "Best Choice," "Good Alternative" and "Avoid" seafood with a simple new color coding scheme in its seafood departments, and has promised to eliminate all "Avoid" fish by Earth Day in 2013.



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