



SOBEYS

Time to act!

Sobeys is currently immersed in an extensive process to develop a sustainable seafood policy. While the list of organizations being consulted is impressive and the interest in sustainability encouraging, no concrete action has been taken as of yet, and it is impossible to evaluate the policies and practices until they are announced and put in place. Sobeys would do well to take inspiration from its more progressive elements such as BC's Thrifty Foods, provide clear information to its customers, stop selling Redlisted species, and promote sustainability up its supply chain.

Sobeys came to be as a single grocery store in Stellarton, Nova Scotia in 1907 and has since grown to become Canada's second largest food retailer, under the ownership of Empire Company Limited. It operates more than 1,300 food and drug stores across Canada. It also distributes food to its company-owned stores and to other retailers. In the increasingly competitive Canadian grocery market, Sobeys is positioning itself as being 'focused on food,' with an emphasis on service and high-quality food.

As Sobeys is a relatively decentralized company, some banners, notably the BC chain Thrifty Foods and Québec health food chain Rachele-Béry, have more developed sustainable seafood practices than others.

Banners

Sobeys, IGA Extra, IGA, Price Chopper, Foodland, Thrifty Foods, Marché Bonichoix, Les Marchés Tradition, Clover Farm, Western Cellars, Needs, Rachele-Béry.

Sustainable seafood policy

Sobeys has undertaken a process to finalize a sustainable seafood policy and states that 'the policy will include commitments on educating our staff and customers, engaging with our supply chain, continuing to participate in industry initiatives, and providing our customers with the seafood assortment they seek.' The company has not indicated when it plans to release the policy. Sobeys recently conducted a national survey of 1,028 Canadians about seafood and sustainability to help guide its policy development and implementation plans.

Sustainability initiatives

Sobeys has consulted with numerous stakeholders to help develop its sustainable seafood policy, including federal government bodies, the David Suzuki Foundation, the Living Ocean Society, Greenpeace, SeaChoice, Canadian aquaculture producer organizations, and aquaculture and wild-caught certification bodies. Sobeys is active in the Food Marketing Institute's Sustainable Seafood Working Group and supports FMI's work with the Common Vision for Sustainable Seafood developed by the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions. In addition to providing input into the development of Sobeys' sustainable seafood policy, Thrifty Foods is committed to supporting local sustainable products and plans to launch a joint retail program with OceanWise and SeaChoice in the coming year.

Labelling and transparency

Sobeys currently provides no labelling other than what is required by law, with the notable exception of some Ontario stores and the Thrifty Foods chain.

In Ontario, Sobeys banner stores provide labelling at the seafood counter on the country of origin and whether the fish is farmed or fresh. In the Thrifty Foods chain, relevant products are labelled in the store and in flyers as 'farmed' or 'wild,' and the chain is working with Sea Choice and OceanWise on labelling that will state additional information such as the type of gear or fishing method used. It is also developing educational materials on sustainability certification for customers. Thrifty Foods' managers and staff are informed of the chain's sustainability initiatives and provide information for customers upon request.

Redlist seafood sales

Sobeys sells 14 of the 15 Redlist species: Arctic surfclams, Atlantic cod, Atlantic halibut, farmed Atlantic salmon, Atlantic sea scallops, Chilean seabass, Greenland halibut, haddock, orange roughy, shark, skates, swordfish, tropical shrimp, and tuna (bluefin, yellowfin).

Thrifty Foods sells only the following species from the Redlist: farmed Atlantic salmon, Atlantic sea scallops, orange roughy (soon to be delisted), swordfish, and yellowfin tuna.

The Rachelle-Béry chain sells only the following species from the Redlist: Atlantic cod, Atlantic halibut and organically produced tropical shrimp.

