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Technical Report 139

"Plate-sized" farmed turbot in five restaurants during the 1976 Argyll Seafood Festival - an acceptability trial of the 1976 harvest.
## Index

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Harvesting and delivery to the restaurants</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Presentation and pricing</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Reactions to the farmed turbot</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Display of wet fish at Crinan</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Conclusions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. References</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SUMMARY

Farmed turbot weighing approximately 500-550g each were served at five restaurants, during the Argyll Seafood Festival in early July 1976, and were also displayed wet at the gala at Crinan.

The trial confirmed that this is the optimum size for serving farmed turbot as a plate-size single portion, as they were well received by the management of the restaurants, the chefs and customers alike. Larger fish, about 900g in weight and suitable for serving two portions, were not so well received, as they were not so easy to handle in the kitchen.

A price of 75p/lb in 1976 to the restaurants were satisfactory as this when converted to a menu price of £2.00 to £2.40 per dish including vegetables, was acceptable to their customers.

The appearance of the wet fish was attractive to many visitors to the gala and a price of £1.00 per fish (82p/lb) was thought too low.
1. **Introduction**

Following the acceptability trials with farmed turbot in 1974 and 1975 (Refs. 1 to 3) which showed farmed turbot to be well received by the consumer and which indicated that the desired size for farmed turbot was about 500g for serving as a "plate-size" single portion, farmed turbot were offered for sale in five restaurants in conjunction with the Argyll Seafood Festival from 2nd to 4th July 1976: similar fish were exhibited and served at the Crinan exhibition on 3rd July.

The turbot used were wild stock, caught on the beaches when juveniles of 3cm length and subsequently reared to marketable size at the White Fish Authority's Marine Cultivation Unit at Ardtoe, Argyllshire.

2. **Harvesting and delivery to the restaurants**

The turbot were harvested on 28th June 1976 and carefully packed and held in cold store for 4 days, as detailed in Ref. 4, to ensure that the fish were presented in prime condition. The fish were thus delivered when they were four days old, to ensure that the characteristic turbot flavour had developed, before they were served to the customer. Delivery on 2nd July was by W.F.A. staff who discussed methods of preparation and serving with the hotel owner or manager and the chef.

The restaurants taking part in the exercise were:

2. The Cairn Restaurant, Kilmartin.
3. The Crinan Hotel, Crinan.
4. Tarbert Hotel, Tarbert.
5. Lochgair Hotel, Lochgair.
The following information relates to the consignments of turbot delivered to each restaurant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Restaurant</th>
<th>Galley of Lorne</th>
<th>The Cairn Restaurant</th>
<th>The Crinan Hotel</th>
<th>Tarbert Hotel</th>
<th>Lochgair Hotel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of turbot</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average weight (g)</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum weight (g)</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>585</td>
<td>585</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum weight (g)</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference + (g)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference - (g)</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although it was desired that the fish weight lay in the range 500 to 550g, because of limited numbers on the farm, only forty percent of all the fish delivered were in this range: the weight of each consignment was however adjusted to put the average weight within the desired range. Along with each consignment were supplied free of charge, three fish weighing approximately 900g (21b) each for serving two people in the manner of Chateau Briand steak, to elicit more information on the acceptability of this larger size which had met with a mixed reception in the 1975 trials. It should be noted that it is not considered economically feasible to grow the fish to the size normally regarded as suitable for steaking, i.e. over 2.5kg (5lb).
3. Presentation and pricing

The "plate-sized" turbot were accepted by the restaurateurs at 75p/lb (165p/kg) and they were asked to price their menus accordingly.

The fish were prepared and cooked by the chef of the establishment and served in the restaurant on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, 2nd to 4th July 1976. Serving was either poached or grilled with a sauce. Some of the presentations included:-

a) the chef at the Lochgair Hotel served the turbot grilled with butter to bring out the full flavour, and also poached it in a hollandaise sauce.

b) at the Tarbert Hotel the turbot was filleted, as the chef thought the fish too large for a single portion, and served with a white wine sauce.

c) while at the Galley of Lorne, the chef cut off the head and fins, coated it in flour and grilled it, serving it with parsley butter.

Based on a cost price of 75p/lb for farmed turbot, the restaurants offered it at varying prices, averaging at about £2.00 per head including vegetables. It appeared on the different menus in the following manner:-

i) Lochgair Hotel - as a main course for £2.40 including vegetables.

ii) Tarbert Hotel - it was included in the £3.50 per head a la carte menu and was not offered as a special.

iii) The Cairn Restaurant - at £1.70 including vegetables, putting it among their cheapest dishes.

iv) Crinan Hotel - at £2.20 with vegetables.

v) Galley of Lorne - the turbot was included in the three course meal menu for £2.75
4. Reactions to the farmed turbot

The reactions from the management, chefs and customers were very favourable in four of the five restaurants. Unfortunately at the Cairn Restaurant, which prides itself in its shellfish dishes, the chef unlike the owner was convinced that the farmed turbot would prove "disastrous" and his attitude sufficiently affected the reception that it reflected his view.

However at the other four restaurants the favourable comments included good flavour, easy to handle with very little waste, stored well, ideal for the single portion, the customers appeared to enjoy it they readily sold their consignment over two meals.

In all cases the fish was sold as "farmed turbot", sometimes including the adjectives "baby" "young" or "chicken". The name turbot was favourably recognised by most customers, but the adjective "chicken" appeared to be off-putting.

Only one restaurateur commented positively on the larger size turbot (900g) which he found was not suitable for his type of restaurant as his waiters were not accustomed to serving in the style of Chateau Briand steak.

Four of the restaurants were very willing to buy farmed turbot again at the same price, which appeared to be about right for both themselves and their customers.

5. Display of wet fish at Crinan

The highlight of the Festival was the Saturday gala event held at Crinan. The Authority set up a small stall, equipped with display panels, posters and give-away leaflets and featuring a display of whole turbot on ice. Around lunchtime four larger turbot (each about 1.5kg) were cooked (boiled) and served with butter and lemon to over 100 visitors to the gala. Many children in the 3 to 10 age group were amongst those receiving the samples.
Although there was no deliberate attempt made to collect comments, there were no adverse reactions and the majority of those offering an opinion stated their liking for the flavour and texture. It was noticeable that samples in the second serving were taken up more rapidly, because of the interest generated from the first serving.

At the end of the gala, in response to the many requests to purchase the raw fish, the display fish of about 550g found a ready market at £1 each (82p/lb, 182p/kg) and an order was taken from an Arran hotelier (Lagg Hotel) for 48 fish of 500g at 75p/lb (165p/kg). This order, delivered in August, met with the same favourable reaction as given in Para. 3 and included a request for further larger quantities during the 1977 tourist season.

A frequent request was for the names of fishmongers who sold small turbot, the "on-the-slab" appearance of the fish as well as its flavour, proving attractive to many visitors.

6. Conclusions

1. The results of this trial confirm the findings of 1974 and 1975 that the flavour and texture of farmed turbot are liked and that fish of approximately 500-550g individual weight are suitable for serving as "plate-sized" single portions. In this form they are very acceptable to management, chefs and customers alike.

2. Smaller fish, down to 450g forming approximately 25% of the consignment, evoked no comment, but fish of nearer the 600g size were thought by some chefs to require filleting.
3. The "plate-sized" turbot appeared to be sensibly priced for 1976, as at 75p/lb (165p/kg) the restaurateurs were able to offer it on their menus at a price acceptable to their customers. In this trial this was £2.00 to £2.40 per dish which included vegetables.

4. In addition, the display of wet fish at the Crinan gala showed that the appearance of the 550g sized whole turbot was attractive to many people who thought £1.00 per fish (82p/lb; 182p/kg) to be low.
7. References


