

Food: Fishing for new seafood pulls up a great surprise

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(Photo: Kate Lawson / The Detroit News)

My first stop in a Whole Foods market is always the fish counter. As we eat seafood at least twice a week, I'm always fishing for something new or something I love that's being featured. Favorites are halibut and salmon and, of course, tuna steaks when I'm flush. But last week I spied an unusual sounding fish and actually had to have Sean, the fishmonger, pronounce it for me a couple of times.

It's paiche (PIE-chay), also known as arapaima, a Peruvian fish native to the Amazonian Basin. Sean explained that the huge paiche (it's been known to reach up to 400 pounds) is endangered because of overfishing and deforestation. But Whole Foods has joined local Peruvian fish farms in a bid to grow the fish for both retail sales, as well as conservation efforts. He explained that Whole Foods partnered with the Peruvian government so that they can actually take the young paiche and use that to re-populate the wild stocks in the Amazon. It's

basic economics, really. The paiche fish farms in Peru raise the fish for release back into the Amazon river, but they need to sell it overseas to keep the farms afloat financially. Marketing here is crucial to keep the program afloat there and Sean was doing an excellent marketing job.

I was intrigued and impressed upon learning all this; that and the fact that Sean described the flavor of the firm, mild, white fish as a cross between halibut and sea bass and that it was on special for \$12.99 a pound was all the convincing I needed.

When I got home with my catch I Googled "arapaima" as Sean had instructed. I should warn you, it's a monster of a fish and in one photo there were four men standing abreast with the fresh water beast draped across their shoulders. Whoa.

But chefs across the country love this unique and versatile fish and now I've discovered why, thanks to a great recipe on the Whole Food's website. Calling for kale and avocado and jalapeno, I had all the ingredients on hand and even added some sliced baby bell peppers to the kale. It was colorful, healthy and so delicious. Even better, as the pound I'd purchase was too much for us to enjoy, I saved the remaining fish and reheated it to make fish tacos the next day. That's quite a bang for not many bucks and we now have a new favorite fish.

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Pan-Seared Paiche with Spicy Avocado Sauce and Greens

Recipe from Whole Foods

1/2 small avocado

3/4 chopped fresh cilantro

1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and chopped

2 tablespoons lime juice

3 garlic cloves, sliced, divided

3 tablespoons finely diced red onion

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided

1 bunch kale, collards or chard, well rinsed, stems and tough ribs discarded, leaves thinly sliced

3/4 teaspoon fine sea salt, divided

4 (6-ounce) paiche fillets

In a food processor, combine avocado, cilantro, jalapeño, lime juice, 2 tablespoons water and 1 of the garlic cloves. Pulse until finely chopped. Transfer to a small bowl and stir in onion.



Heat 1 tablespoon of the oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add remaining 2 garlic cloves and cook, stirring, 1 minute. Add greens and $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of the salt. Cover and cook, stirring frequently, until tender, about 5 minutes; add water a few tablespoons at a time, if necessary to keep greens from sticking. Transfer greens to a platter and keep warm.

Wipe out the skillet and place over medium-high heat. Add remaining 1 tablespoon oil. Sprinkle paiche with remaining $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt. Add to the skillet and cook until just opaque in the center, about 4 minutes per side. Place fish on top of greens and spoon sauce over fish. Serves 4.

Per serving: 280 calories; 13 g fat (2 g saturated fat; 42 percent calories from fat); 7 g carbohydrates; 1 g sugar; 85 mg cholesterol; 570 mg sodium; 33 g protein; 3 g fiber.

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