



CATCH A FOLLOWING

Messaging Strategies for US Midwest-Produced Fishes



*Bluegill, Largemouth Bass, Walleye,
Yellow Perch, and Rainbow Trout*

PURPOSE

This bulletin translates recent social media sentiment research into actionable messaging strategies for aquaculture producers, marketers, and industry partners in the Midwest and Great Lakes region working with Bluegill, Largemouth Bass, Walleye, Yellow Perch, and Rainbow Trout.

These recommendations are designed to strengthen consumer trust, align marketing messages with public perceptions, and enhance the market position of Midwest-produced fish.

The research analyzed public sentiments toward each species using a score from -100% to +100%. Scores above 0% indicate positive sentiment and scores of 50% and above reflect strong positive public perception.

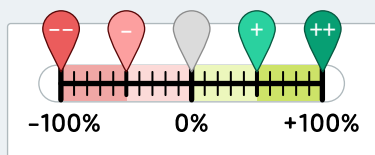


Photo Credit: University of Wisconsin Stevens Point Northern Aquaculture Demonstration Facility (UWSP NADF). Photographer: Narayan Mahon for Wisconsin Sea Grant.

INDUSTRY MESSAGING FRAMEWORK

A BUILD ON EXISTING CONSUMER TRUST

- » Public sentiment toward all five species is overwhelmingly positive, indicating that most online conversations reflect favorable attitudes toward both the fish themselves and their consumption.
- » This positive sentiment provides producers with a strong foundation for marketing, allowing them to reinforce existing goodwill rather than overcome negative opinions.
- » In food-related discussions, farmed fish consistently receive stronger positive sentiment (60% or higher) than wild-caught fish, signaling consumer confidence in aquaculture products when they are positioned as food.



MESSAGING TAKEAWAY

"Responsibly farmed Midwest fish deliver consistent quality, great taste, dependable availability and support sustainable fisheries."

B EMPHASIZE SUSTAINABILITY & STEWARDSHIP

- » Online conversations frequently mention concerns about overfishing, habitat degradation, and regulatory pressures, indicating that consumers care deeply about environmental stewardship.
- » Aquaculture is increasingly viewed as part of the solution because it helps reduce pressure on wild fisheries while supporting healthy aquatic ecosystems.
- » Communicating sustainability effectively can help position producers as responsible stewards of natural resources, not just food suppliers.



MESSAGING TAKEAWAY

"Modern aquaculture supports healthy lakes and rivers by producing fish sustainably, reducing pressure on wild fish populations, and protecting aquatic ecosystems for future generations."

C CONNECT FOOD, FLAVOR, AND EXPERIENCE

- » Conversations about these species frequently highlight taste, freshness, cooking methods, and memorable dining experiences.
- » Species commonly associated with recreational fishing--such as Bluegill, Bass, and Walleye--are tied to memories, recreation, and outdoor traditions, creating an emotional connection beyond food.
- » Successful messaging should connect these emotional experiences with the enjoyment of eating locally produced fish by telling a compelling "water-to-plate" story.



MESSAGING TAKEAWAY

"From water to plate, Midwest fish offer exceptional flavor, fresh quality, and a connection to the region's outdoor traditions."

SPECIES-SPECIFIC MESSAGING GUIDANCE



Photo Credit: UWSP NADF

Walleye

- » Walleye generates the highest level of online engagement among the five species.
- » Strong positive sentiment reflects its reputation as a premium eating fish with cultural significance.
- » Conversations often peak during the summer fishing and tourism season.



MESSAGING FOCUS:

"A premium, iconic regional fish offering exceptional taste and culinary versatility with year-round availability provided by aquaculture."



Bluegill

- » Strongly associated with family fishing traditions and nostalgic outdoor experiences.
- » Frequently connected to relaxation, recreation and summertime memories.



MESSAGING FOCUS:

"A family-friendly fish that celebrates local traditions, outdoor recreation, and delicious meals."



Largemouth Bass

- » Most conversations focus on sport fishing rather than food.
- » Farmed bass receives substantially more positive sentiment than wild fish, indicating untapped opportunity as a food product.



MESSAGING FOCUS:

"A high-quality farm-raised fish with untapped culinary potential and dependable year-round availability."



Yellow Perch

- » Receives less overall attention but continues to gain visibility, signaling potential for growth.
- » Frequently associated with Great Lakes identity and regional fishing traditions, highlighting its cultural importance.
- » Farmed-raised perch generates stronger positive sentiment than wild-caught fish.



MESSAGING FOCUS:

"Supporting Great Lakes traditions through reliable, sustainable, year-round production."



Rainbow Trout

- » Continues to gain popularity and online engagement, suggesting expanding market potential.
- » Consumer questions often focus on production quality, fish health, and nutrition, which can influence purchasing decisions.



MESSAGING FOCUS:

"Fresh, nutritious fish, produced through transparent farming practices with quality consumers can trust."

KEY MESSAGING THEMES



Photo Credit: UWSP NADF

① “FARM-RAISED MEANS RELIABLE AND SUSTAINABLE”



Consumers respond positively when aquaculture is presented as providing:

- » Consistent quality
- » Year-round availability
- » Environmentally responsible production
- » Reduced strain on wild fisheries



② “FROM WATER TO PLATE” STORYTELLING



Consumers connect with stories that illustrate the journey from production to the dinner table, including:

- » Local farms
- » Freshness – harvest practices
- » Recipes and preparation ideas



③ “CONNECT RECREATION WITH FOOD”



- » Conversations about these species frequently highlight taste, freshness, cooking methods, and memorable dining experiences.
- » Species commonly associated with recreational fishing—such as Bluegill, Bass, and Walleye—are tied to memories, recreation, and outdoor traditions, creating an emotional connection beyond food.
- » Successful messaging should connect these emotional experiences with the enjoyment of eating locally produced fish by telling a compelling “water-to-plate” story.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION



DIGITAL & SOCIAL MEDIA

- » Share **recipes, cooking videos, and taste profiles.**
- » Highlight **farming practices and sustainability initiatives.**
- » Leverage **seasonal interest during peak summer fishing months.**

INDUSTRY POSITIONING

- » Promote aquaculture as **complementary to wild fisheries**, not competitive.
- » Use **data-driven messaging** informed by sentiment tracking.



Photo Credit: UWSP NADF, Photographer: Narayan Mahon for Wisconsin Sea Grant.



PARTNERSHIPS

Collaborate with:

- » **Chefs and restaurants** to showcase culinary uses
- » **Commercial fishing networks and organizations**
- » **Government agencies** to support outreach and education programs
- » **Land and Sea Grant Extension**

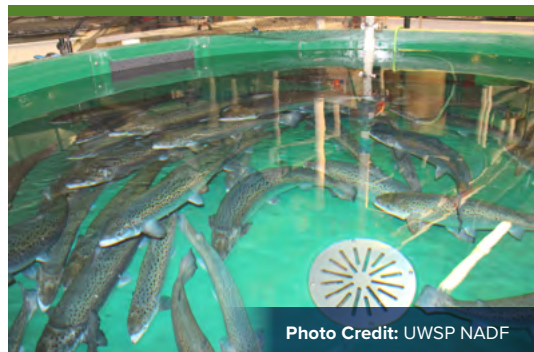
SUMMARY

The greatest opportunity for Midwest aquaculture producers is to consistently reinforce core messages:

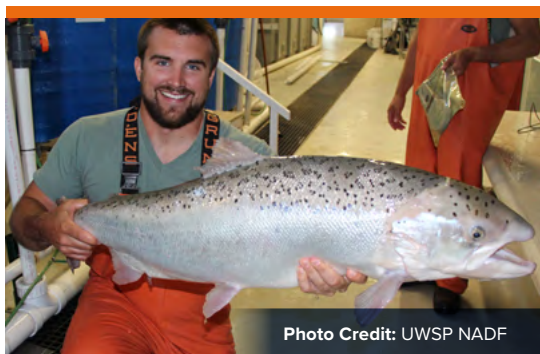
EXCEPTIONAL TASTE & EATING EXPERIENCE



SUSTAINABILITY & ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP



CONSISTENCY & YEAR-ROUND AVAILABILITY



REGIONAL IDENTITY AND PRIDE



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**North Central Regional
Aquaculture Center**



National Institute of Food and Agriculture
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



Illinois Extension
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



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