Fishing for Profits

Four years ago, Jacqueline Claudia was working in the aquaculture industry, intending to become a fish farmer. Then she realized: No brand was cutting through the scary seafood-industry headlines and making it easy for consumers to buy responsibly farmed, nutrient-rich fish. Today, the gourmet frozen fillets of Boulder, Colorado—based Love the Wild—co-founded by Claudia and Christy Brouker—are in nearly 2,700 stores nationwide, including Super Target, Safeway, and Whole Foods. –HANNAH WALLACE

Clean Sourcing
Love the Wild works with farms across the world, most of which are certified or recommended by Seafood Watch, the Global Aquaculture Alliance, or Whole Foods. Claudia and Brouker buy only from farms that are seeking to reduce or eliminate the use of wild fish as feed, that don't use antibiotics prophylactically, and that have very low stock densities. Trout, one of the company’s best-sellers, usually comes from farms in the U.S., but in winter, when the fish stops breeding, LTW sources it from an open aquaculture farm on Lake Alcurá, in Argentina.

Leaving a Trail
The fish industry is notoriously opaque, but LTW makes it easy to find out which farm a fillet came from—it’s on the back of each box. Online, customers can find the name of the person who runs the farm and see what type of pen that farm uses—information consumers typically can’t get when they purchase fresh fish. “We are a pain in the ass to work with, because our criteria are so tight,” says Claudia.

$3 million
Series A funding

Freezing Freshness
Fish is frozen at the peak of quality, often within a few minutes of being killed. “Frozen technology has come so far that most people can’t tell the difference between something that was properly frozen and something that is fresh,” Claudia says. Blast freezing, the technology that LTW’s partner farms use, drops the temperature to minus-20 degrees Fahrenheit in about a minute, “causing less damage to cell membranes and preserving texture,” Claudia says. Freezing also means the sauces—roasted red pepper almond sauce for the striped bass, mango Sriracha chutney for the barramundi—use zero fillers or preservatives.

Accidental Design
When the co-founders were getting started, Claudia had to transport salsa verde to a potential investor and didn’t want to lug a whole gallon. She happened to have a heart-shaped ice-cube tray left over from her daughter’s birthday party. “I put the frozen sauce in front of the investor and he was like, ‘This is brilliant! It signals heart-healthy.’ And I said, ‘Yeah. Obviously,’” recalls Claudia. Customers now place the sauce cubes atop the frozen fillet before wrapping the dish in parchment paper and cooking it in the oven.

Portion Control
The company launched with a box of two six-ounce fillets starting at $15, but seafood buyers generally aren’t keen to stock anything over $10 a box, says Claudia. So LTW also began selling a box containing just one fillet, which is what its retail partners carry today. “What we found is that a beefy guy after a workout ate two boxes,” says Claudia. “An older couple on a fixed income bought one box and shared the fillet. A young woman would use it as a garnish on a salad.”

Titanic, Anyone?
Last year, Brouker and Claudia attended Fish 2.0, a global business accelerator for the sustainable seafood sector. They met with VCs who ultimately passed, but mentioned that one of their advisers, Leonardo DiCaprio, was intrigued. “They said, ‘Do you mind if we introduce you?’” recalls Claudia. The actor is now an investor and an adviser.