

Catfish

Marketing Association



An Informed Industry Will Always Improve The Industry

Forget Iraq, the real worries are catfish and plasma tv's

By Peter Ruehl

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If this is the weekend, then we must be talking advance that as an adviser for the Catfish Institute of the United States, he takes the subject pretty seriously.

Some people go to Washington to meet lobbyists for oil companies and banking groups. Me, I catch up with the catfish lobby. Actually, it was more or less by accident that I met this guy Jeff at a backyard party, and I was warned in advance that as an adviser for the Catfish Institute of the U. S., he takes the subject seriously.

And you have to understand that catfish eating is pretty serious pastime in certain parts of America, where the Civil War is still called the War of Northern Aggression (and they're only half joking).

Catfish is normally fried in batter so when you eat it you've set yourself apart from the California bean-sprout and bottled-water crowd.

Your real catfish nut wouldn't put bottled water into his car radiator, much less down his throat, on general principle.

It's pretty tasty fish under all that batter. Catfish sandwiches are a staple on southern restaurant menus and campers love to catch them in streams and fry them in butter. I hate the camping part but I love to wolf down one every now and then.

Anyway, the problem is Chinese catfish. And this is where Jeff comes in. About catfish and high-definition television—a couple of issues we've been overlooking lately.

Catfish are farmed and it turns out Chinese, according to the Catfish Institute (who else?), are cheating. The Chinese are exporting them to the US— and not only is it bad enough that we're getting communist catfish, but they also being bred on overcrowded farms in polluted water.

Seafood Bills Passed

The FDA bill that passed the house and the senate will give more authority to state seafood inspectors and will overturn the Piazza Seafood case in Louisiana in favor of the Ag Comm.

The problem is that while a fish market or grocery store has to label where its seafood comes from, restaurants don't. At this stage of the conversation, Jeff started getting nearly poetic about the virtues of the better-tasting American catfish, plus the safety advantages it has over the competition. He wants Congress to pass legislation requiring restaurants to identify imports on their menus, although he stops short of demanding the catfish get strip-searched upon entry.

One of the things that has struck me is the resurgence of the "Buy American" movement, which died years ago after people noticed Ford didn't make the best cars and Budweiser didn't make the best beer. It had a hokey ring to it and implied you couldn't tell you Guccis from your Puccis. I think it dates back to when people discovered Mateus Rose and were surprised to find it didn't come from Oklahoma. ("Hey, that there foreign wine is good. Pass me some of that new garlic bread stuff too!")

The reverse is now happening and it's not just the blue-collar types who are pushing it. The left is jumping on board for environmental footprint reasons and the anti-global bakeheads are going on about losing jobs to lower-paid overseas workers, just as is happening in Australia. T-shirt manufacturers, guitar makers and Detroit are banging on about it in their ads, all of which is going to make it difficult for a self-respecting Amnesty International-head to trade in his Volvo for a compact Plymouth.

Which brings us to HDTV. It's not as though anybody's flocking to buy American-made appliances of any kind because most work like they've been put together by people wearing oven mittens—and televisions are no exception. But the anti-globies aren't going to get a break on this one.

The word is out: don't buy an HDTV now because the Asian producers are getting geared up to flock the market with them, probably just after Christmas in the US. Manufacturers, especially in Taiwan, are ready to crank them out like mainland catfish as they try to crack a US market that so far has been reluctant to buy. (Morgan Stanley research shows that two-thirds of American households won't buy an HDTV until the price drops below \$600 (\$714).