

# Plant-based Seafood From Good Catch Has Us Hooked

Story by NATHAN MATISSE Photos by GOOD CATCH

The Yard in Austin's revitalized St. Elmo warehouse district has a reputation as a wide-reaching hotbed of innovation. Bleeding edge companies in housing (the 3D-printing pioneers at ICON), transportation (a sparkling new showroom for Tesla) and alcohol (the first in-state Texas Saké Company) all sit side-by-side, nestled into repurposed industrial spaces.

Soon, these successful start-ups will welcome another equally innovative neighbor: one that operates within an industry most may not even know exists — plant-based seafood.

"I love the taste of seafood, but I've been vegan for 20 years and I didn't go vegan because I don't like the taste or experience," says Chad Sarno, co-founder and chief culinary officer of Gathered Foods and its latest venture, the plant-based seafood brand Good Catch. "People ask, 'If you're vegan, why do you want it to taste like meat?' Well, I'm an ethical vegan. I still friggin' like to eat good food at the end of the day; I just want to know it's beet juice running down my hand and not blood."

Sarno's been a vegan in the culinary world for more than two decades. His background is traditional for the space, having been a chef who started and ran a restaurant group in Europe. From there, he's moved naturally into many different areas of the food world. Sarno came to Austin once upon a time to help a pre-Amazon Whole Foods develop its healthy eating program. He taught

plant-based cooking at an online culinary school. And alongside his brother Derek, he eventually co-founded Gathered Foods, the parent company for both Good Catch and Wicked Kitchen, another plant-based food company based on the brothers' popular blog and books.

"I've been an activist my whole life, so now I'm simply doing that more through food," Sarno says. "We looked at that [meat alternative] white space and asked what could have the biggest impact, and it was 'fin and fish.' That's salmon and tuna. If you look at the info. out there around the

destruction of the oceans, it's directly linked to the commercial fishing industry."

"Years ago people were looking at straws. 'Oh straws are the biggest culprit,' so everyone got on board with greenwashing around straws," he continues. "But if you look at the effect, straws were killing around anywhere from 500 to 1,000 sea turtles a year globally. When it comes to commercial fishing 'bycatch' — the unintentional fish or sea life caught — 40 percent of a commercial fishing industry catch is bycatch. These animals may die and get thrown back; [a few hundred thousand] sea turtles die as bycatch."

Gathered Foods' St. Elmo-area HQ will be the heart of the company's overall efforts to further plant-based proteins and reduce the environmental impact for various sections of the food industry. Both the business and culinary operations will be centered in Austin, so kitchen labs and studio space will be side-by-side with the leadership team's offices. Sarno says Good Catch, in particular, has always been "culinary-first," and the team (many of whom are Austin locals) has never been shy about putting its product in front of people and partners. They once operated a vegan tuna food truck outside a Subway and have done vegan crab cake testing in Maryland. A home base at The Yard gives Gathered Foods a place to bring in potential collaborators for sampling or training, and Sarno envisions hosting small supper club events in the future for locals to taste Good Catch creations firsthand.

The new space is simply the latest milestone in Sarno and Good Catch's rapid growth journey since launching their first plant-based seafood products in 2018. Today, the company offers nine different products — from traditional breaded fish sticks and fillets to crab cakes and shelf-stable tuna — that are available across the world in the U.S., UK, Canada, Spain and Singapore. And

Good Catch's seafood has already been adopted by seemingly every area of the food industry. Traditional competitors like Bumble Bee Tuna have become distribution partners. Nationwide grocers like Randall's, BJ's, and Sprouts carry the products. And restaurants both big (the fast food chain Long John Silver's) and small (places like Lucky Robot or Brunch Bird here in Austin) have started incorporating this plant-based seafood into their menus.

Still, for future growth and maximum societal impact, Sarno recognizes that plant-based seafood must overcome a few challenges other plant-based proteins do not encounter. For example, almost any kind of seafood has a stigma for certain eaters because of its unique smell. Then, when compared to staples like chicken or beef, seafood has a significantly different texture, which Sarno thinks of as a much thinner layer of protein versus the almost bouncy consistency of something like cooked chicken.

"Consumer adoption is the slowest piece because this is a new space. And just putting the words together, 'vegan seafood,' I think it freaks a lot of people out," he says. "Vegan chicken doesn't, because it's been around for 10 years. But when you think of seafood, the negative attribute it carries is smell for people who don't like it. So you might think vegan is weird for a lot of people, let alone [a vegan version of] something stinky."



Chad and Derek Sarno

To solve these issues, Good Catch came up with its own particular base protein. While many vegan alternatives are based on common options like soy, pea protein or wheat, Sarno and colleagues created a protein from six legumes — peas, chickpeas, lentils, soy, fava beans and navy beans — that more closely mimics seafood's distinct texture. Results so far indicate Good Catch has found the right mix. If the wide array of businesses offering Good Catch products doesn't prove it, tasting things like the Crab Cake Totchos at Community Vegan (featuring Good Catch's Crab Cake plus tater tots served nachos-style) will. So whether it's down at The Yard or on a nearby grocery shelf, expect to be seeing more of Good Catch in the coming years.

"[Plant-based meat and seafood] was a trend when I was doing it with restaurants, but it's grown far beyond that," Sarno says. "Where we are with plant-based meats today, it's around where non-dairy sales were 10 years ago. And that's almost 40 percent of the market right now, which is insane. It all comes back to consumer demand — and people are asking for this."







## THAI FISH CAKE BÁNH MÌ

Makes 2 servings

### For Quick Pickled Veggies

- 1 c. rice wine vinegar
- ¾ c. sugar
- ½ c. water
- 2 T. fine sea salt
- 1 T. coriander seeds
- 2 c. ribboned carrots
- ½ c. thinly sliced jalapeño pepper
- ½ c. thinly sliced yellow onion
- ¼ c. thinly sliced garlic

### For the Bánh Mì Sandwich

- 1 pkg. Good Catch® Plant-Based Thai Style Fish Cakes, thawed in refrigerator
- 2 T. olive oil
- 2 6-inch pieces baguette
- 12 basil leaves
- 1 cucumber, cut into 4 6-inch planks
- ½ c. cilantro leaves

### For the Ginger Mayonnaise

- 1 c. plant-based mayonnaise
- 1½ T. ground ginger
- 2 t. agave syrup
- ½ t. fine sea salt
- ½ t. smoked paprika

To make the quick pickled veggies, add rice wine vinegar, sugar, water, salt and coriander seeds to a heavy-bottomed pot over medium - low heat. Bring to a simmer and cook for 15 minutes.

Place carrots, jalapeño, onion and garlic in a large bowl. Pour the hot pickling liquid over the vegetables and let cool at room temperature. When ready to use, drain the pickled vegetables very well.

For the ginger mayonnaise, place all ingredients in a bowl and whisk until everything is completely incorporated. Chill until ready to use.

Slice the 6-inch baguette pieces in half lengthwise and toast the cut sides in a toaster oven until golden, about 5 minutes. In a cast-iron pan or nonstick ceramic skillet over medium heat, add olive oil. Sauté 4 plant-based fish cakes on one side for 3 minutes, then flip and cook the other side another 3-4 minutes or until golden in color.

To build the bánh mì, slather each side of the baguette with 2 teaspoons of prepared ginger mayonnaise. On the bottom slice, place 6 basil leaves, followed by 2 cucumber planks. Next, place the sautéed patty on top of the cucumber, then top with ½ cup pickled veggies and ¼ cup cilantro, and top with the top slice of baguette.

## VEGAN BAJA FISH TACOS

Makes 4 servings

### For the tacos:

- 1 box of Good Catch® Plant-Based Breaded Fish Sticks
- 3 T. extra virgin olive oil
- 6 6-inch tortillas
- ½ c. shredded green cabbage
- Red radishes, sliced thin, for garnish
- Cilantro, for garnish
- Pico de gallo and diced avocado (optional)

### For the Lime Aioli:

- ¼ c. plant-based mayonnaise
- 1 clove of garlic, minced
- 1 t. lime zest
- Juice from ½ a lime
- Pinch sea salt
- Pinch black pepper

Preheat the skillet (cast iron preferred) over medium-low heat and add oil. Place frozen sticks in skillet and cook for 4-5 minutes. In a small bowl, mix together all the lime aioli ingredients. Flip sticks and cook for an additional 3-4 minutes. Remove from heat. In the same pan or a new pan, warm the tortillas. Lay out warm tortillas and begin to assemble the tacos with 2 sticks on each tortilla and top each taco with lime aioli, cabbage, radishes and cilantro.

Serve with pico de gallo and avocado, if using.



## FILLET-NO-FISH SANDWICH

Makes 2 servings

### For sandwich:

- 1 box of Good Catch® Plant-Based Breaded Fish Fillets
- 3 T. extra virgin olive oil
- 2 burger buns
- 2 slices plant-based cheese
- ½ c. shredded lettuce
- 1 small red onion, thinly sliced
- ½ c. diced dill pickles

### Classic Tartar Sauce:

- ¼ c. plant-based mayonnaise
- ¼ c. dill relish, drained
- ½ t. dried dill
- 2 t. Dijon mustard
- ¼ t. ground black pepper



Preheat skillet (cast iron preferred) over medium-low heat and add oil. Place frozen fillets in skillet and cook for 4-6 minutes. Butter the buns and lightly toast in a separate pan. Flip fillets and cook for an additional 4 minutes. Remove from heat.

In a small bowl, mix together all tartar sauce ingredients.

Assemble each sandwich by spreading tartar sauce on each side of the bun and sandwich together with cheese, fillet, lettuce, onion and pickles.