



Freakonomics

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August 30, 2007, 10:04 am

Shrimponomics

By [Steven D. Levitt](#)

A few days back I posed the question [“Why are we eating so much shrimp?”](#) Between 1980 and 2005, the amount of shrimp consumed per person in the U.S. has nearly tripled.

I didn't expect [more than 1,000 responses!](#)

I asked the question because **Shane Frederick**, a marketing professor at MIT's Sloan School, had contacted me with an intriguing hypothesis. He wrote about a striking regularity in the responses he got when he asked different people why we are eating so much shrimp:

Psychologists (indeed, probably all non-economists) give explanations that focus on changes in the position of the demand curve — changes in preferences or information etc., like:

- 1) People are becoming more health conscious and shrimp are healthier than red meat;
 - 2) Red Lobster switched ad agencies, and their ads are now working;
- and so on.

Economists, by contrast, tend to give explanations that focus on “supply,” like:

- 1) People have designed better nets for catching shrimp;
 - 2) Weather conditions in the Gulf have been favorable for shrimp eggs;
- and so on.

I found Shane’s hypothesis compelling. When I teach intermediate microeconomics, the students seem to understand demand a lot more easily than supply, even though (1) they see demand first, and (2) the graphs and the equations are almost identical for supply and demand, except that the labels on the variables change. Most of us have a lot more experience being consumers than producers, so we tend to view things through the lens of demand rather than supply. We need to have an appreciation of supply factors trained into us by economists.

My colleagues generated some confirmatory evidence regarding Shane’s hypothesis. All eight of the University of Chicago economists to whom I posed the shrimp question thought the answer had something to do with producing shrimp more efficiently, i.e. supply-based explanations. (It turns out that a supply story does seem to be the right one; more on that at the end of the blog.)

Which led me to open up the question to blog readers to see what their responses would look like. With the help of **Pam Freed** (a Harvard undergrad who plans to be an economics major and first gave a “demand” explanation, but quickly switched to a “supply” story in response to my withering stare), we cataloged the first 500 blog comments we received. My apologies to commenters 501 and up; if you want to tally the rest of the data yourself, I will be glad to publish it on the blog.

Well, Shane, I am sorry to report that your hypothesis only did so-so in the data.

There were 393 usable observations (107 of you didn’t follow the directions).

First, the good news for the hypothesis. As Shane conjectured, non-economists (i.e., anyone who didn’t major in economics) mostly thought that we are eating more shrimp because of demand-based reasons (e.g. the movie *Forrest Gump*, a rise in the number of vegetarians who will eat shrimp, etc). Fifty-seven percent of non-econ majors gave only demand stories, versus 24 percent who gave only supply stories. The rest had a mix of supply and demand explanations.

Where the theory didn't do so well, however, is that the 20 percent of the respondents who *were* economics majors didn't look all that different from everyone else. Roughly 47 percent of the econ majors exclusively gave demand stories, and 27 percent only supply. (Economics majors were more likely to give both supply and demand stories.)

In fairness to Shane, there is a big difference between being an economics professor and having an undergraduate major in economics. Indeed, the similarity between economics majors and everyone else is, perhaps, an indication that our current curriculum for teaching economics doesn't do a great job of instilling students with good economic intuition — or at least whatever economic intuition that my colleagues have.

Who thinks least like the academic economists? That prize goes (no surprise) to English majors and (more of a surprise) engineering majors, who together combined to give 49 responses that overwhelmingly touted demand explanations.

Interestingly, women in general were only half as likely to give supply explanations as were men. I will leave you to ponder the causes and implications of that result.

So why *did* shrimp consumption rise so much?

I'm not exactly sure, but here is what I can glean from the Internet. A key factor is that prices have dropped sharply. According to this [academic article](#), the real price of shrimp fell by about 50 percent between 1980 and 2002. When quantity rises and prices are falling, that has to mean that producers have figured out cheaper and better ways to produce shrimp. This [article in Slate](#) argues that there has been a revolution in [shrimp farming](#). Demand factors may also be at work, but they don't seem to be at the heart of the story.

So, for the diligent few who have actually read all the way to the end of this long blog post, here is another question for you: in stark contrast to shrimp consumption, the amount of canned tuna eaten has been steadily falling; is that due to changes in supply or demand?

 [ink](#)  [mail this](#)

174 comments so far...

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1. August 30th, 2007 10:16 am

Although I'm sure its a mixture of both supply and demand reasons (as everything is), it may also have something to do with tuna being seen as an inferior good. As real income has been rising for the last 20 years, people have been able to exercise their options of food choice more diligently and in turn choose to eat other fish products; trout, salmon, halibut, etc.

— Posted by Andrew

•

2. August 30th, 2007 10:18 am

Changes in demand, on my part. The quality of tuna we get now is pretty low, at least for the canned stuff. Instead of getting nice chunks in the cans, you get loose particles. Kinda nasty. And then there's the whole mercury thing.

— Posted by Davey

•

3. August 30th, 2007 10:21 am

Has to be demand - canned tuna is cheap and supply sure seems to be steady. Maybe since fewer lunches are being prepared at home, of which "tunafish sandwiches" have long been a staple?

— Posted by Panem et Circanses

•

4. August 30th, 2007 10:24 am

One word: Mercury. Fear of a product lowers the demand for that product, and thus the quantity sold.

— Posted by Jeff

•

5. August 30th, 2007 10:25 am

canned tuna hasn't changed since I was a kid 25+ years ago. If producers have made inroads in reducing the cost to the consumer it isn't enough to offset the changes in caused by 2 things.

first people read that tuna isn't heathly to eat that often since it contains mercury, so the heath conscience revolution has had some

effect.

second the alternatives available are more appealing in convenience and style than your mom's casserole. Canned meat is out.

BSEE and MBA

45

IT Manager

— Posted by Jim N

•
6. August
30th,
2007
10:26 am

Tuna consumption has dropped because it now smells like cat food. The brands that I have bought from my local supermarket all have this smell and I won't eat it or will I buy it. I don't know what happened to the solid white chunks I used to eat; the new stuff is darker, greasier, and loose.

— Posted by Larry DeBlois

•
7. August
30th,
2007
10:27 am

Changes in the demand. There are many more high(er) quality substitutes that people are now choosing over canned tuna. Frozen shrimp, fish, and other seafood are more readily available and IMO are much higher quality. I doubt the cost of canning has gone up and I haven't heard of any shortage in tuna supplies.

— Posted by Bryan

•
8. August
30th,
2007
10:29 am

It could be the fact that shrimp and canned tuna are substitutes in demand. Since there is a fall in price of shrimp, consumers would naturally choose shrimp over canned tuna. There could also be the possibility of a change in tastes and preferences since people are now exposed to a variety of cuisines.

— Posted by David

•
9. August Shrimp are also pretty low on the food chain. There's a possibility

30th,
2007
10:29 am

that the supply is up due to the fact our pollution and overfishing has killed most everything else.

That includes nice, big tuna. Supply there, definitely down. If you check out the 30-year update on Limits to Growth, you'll see a nice steady course of working our way down the food chain in terms of quality fish.

PS - Engineers probably look at demand because that is what we are out to satisfy. Dumping cheap crap on people with slashed prices is usually considered poor work in our field.

— Posted by odinseye2k

10. August
30th,
2007
10:31 am

Personally I still buy canned tuna b/c I need a simple, healthy lunch to bring to work. But I know that I'm one of the few, and truth be told I feel a bit self-conscious opening my can at my (office) kitchen. Cost isn't an issue, since tuna is \$1.30/can—must be there are more options now that smell better! Health is also an issue—even though tuna is a good source of protein I've heard many a time about the mercury levels...

— Posted by Alexis

11. August
30th,
2007
10:33 am

Tuna is becoming over-fished. With less of a population (though when does that stop tenacious fishermen?) and modest public awareness campaign, I'd say it's a bit of both. (PBS's Nature has a great website on this topic: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/oceansinglass/seafood.html>)

— Posted by Julia

12. August
30th,
2007
10:35 am

Didn't I read that supplies of tuna were falling due to overfishing. Lower supply equals higher prices, higher prices means less tuna eaten, unless there is a national craving for tuna fish sandwiches...

— Posted by Dave

13. August 30th, 2007 10:36 am Demand could be at the heart of the story of increases in demand INDUCED firms to innovate and adopt more efficient technology.
— Posted by Noto

14. August 30th, 2007 10:37 am As a late comer to this experiment and a holder of a degree in international studies, i bring a different perspective. My mind is trained to believe that one factor rarely if ever tells the whole story. I am automatically suspicious of any question which is constructed such that there can only be one answer, especially when the actions of humans are at issue.

Admittedly not having researched this, I would posit you could find many examples of products which have become much cheaper, but no less popular over the last 20 some odd years. If one makes the assumption that there was an existing and previously unmet demand for shrimp, then i take your point that a drop in price due to greater efficiency of production is the major factor to be considered. However it would seem to me that without the convergence of those two equal factors one would not see such a marked rise in consumption. Would it not seem odd for producers to spend all that time and money developing more efficient methods in the absense of an unmet demand? One could certainly make an argument that supply or demand is an important factor, however to me that just bolsters the argument that both sides deserve an equal share of the blame...

In the case of the tuna, however, i would have to argue for a third factor - the surging popularity of fresh tuna. Sorry to not conform to the four corners of your questions, but this is the way i am trained to see a problem.

And by the way, i didn't thing it was such a long post :)

— Posted by KM

15. August 30th, 2007 10:40 am Perhaps the primary driver is the price decline brought on by increased refrigerated container capacity from SE and West Asia to the USA.
— Posted by TWstroud

•
16. August
30th,
2007
10:41 am

Despite the apparent trend of the American populous to ignore legitimate health concerns and adhere to patently bogus diet and health fads, the situation with mercury may have something to do with a decline in tuna consumption. I'm not even so sure what the situation is, but after all, humanity fears what it doesn't understand. Additionally, the idea of canned fish in general seems generally unhygienic and rather paltry (not to mention that spine-bending odor), and in a world where packaging may have something like 50% to do with a product's appeal, it is no surprise that fish a la metal is slowly falling out of public favor.

— Posted by Thomas

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17. August
30th,
2007
10:43 am

Supply - because you said so :)

— Posted by Ron F

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18. August
30th,
2007
10:44 am

People just don't know what to do with tuna outside of tunafish sandwiches or tuna melts. Its become boring. There are countless ways to prepare shrimp (as stated by Bubba in Forest Gump).

My suggestion? Go the route cheese did a few years ago and include new ways to prepare it right on the packaging.

— Posted by Brad

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19. August
30th,
2007
10:45 am

Very interesting - you should do these informal studies once a week! (but since you probably have other things going on - i'd settle on once a month).

Tuna is indeed over-fished, but I haven't seen a major spike in prices - and I worked at a major retailer for 7 years in high school and college.

I would say this is both demand (and supply!) based. Tuna was

probably the main form of seafood eaten by Americans at one point in the past, but because commercial fishing for other sea fare has become easier and cheaper, people have more options. Instead of one easy and cheap option (canned tuna/fish sticks), we now have a plethora of fairly inexpensive seafood delights, like the aforementioned shrimp, but also things like salmon and crab.

(non econ major)

— Posted by EK

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20. August 30th, 2007 10:47 am

Tuna: Rising relative prices due to scarcity from overfishing.
Econ grad
— Posted by Jeff

•

21. August 30th, 2007 10:50 am

Another supply effect is recorded here - prices may not be going up but meat that was once rejected is now being sold. This is definitely not being kind to demand.
— Posted by odinseye2k

•

22. August 30th, 2007 10:52 am

Mercury and declining tuna populations. We're overfishing the oceans and farming tuna isn't catching up... and I've eaten less tuna since I've seen the mercury reports, even the reports from our own EPA increasing the amount of "healthy" mercury levels (thanks Christine Todd-Whitman!)

I'm not so sure what your thread experiment is supposed to show... how regular people or how supply biased economists think? My conception of supply and demand in our society is thus

A) Corporations control 90% of all resources in our nation.
B) Corporations use advertising to "create demand" artificially. (Think hula hoop, and then remember all the B-School idiots who think artificially creating demand is an awe inspiring phenomenon)
C) Once a corporation or cabal of corporations control a monopoly on resources/services due to government lobbying, only then does

the Supply side really enter the rubric. For instance, the oil supply crisis that ended Carter's presidency, or when Enron dabbled in California's energy woes, or the current stranglehold the DeBeers company has on diamond prices.

D) Once a supply is exhausted or nearly exhausted, the corporation or cabal of corporations actually start emulating the classic supply and demand curve... why? Because resources have grown scarce due to unrestrained over extraction. Like fish in our oceans.

-Just a fool from the Human Communications Studies Department

— Posted by Silvanus

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23. August
30th,
2007
10:54 am

I would say it has to be a decline in demand for canned tuna. Tuna is still pretty cheap, so supply cannot be the issue (i.e., if supply constraints do not impact price, then they will not impact ultimate consumption). As for what the cause of that decline in demand was... Perhaps a decrease in the cost of other things, I am going to go out on a limb and theorize that it is at least in part due to the rise in eating out, rather than taking lunch to work/school. Tuna sandwiches are pretty easy to make and canned tuna pretty much stays good for months, so if you were making lunch, demand would be higher. These are not factors if you buy lunch - the cost of shrink from ingredients going bad is shifted elsewhere. Again, just a theory... (FYI - I was a Comparative Lit. major who went on to law school).

— Posted by Charles Paul Hoffman

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24. August
30th,
2007
10:55 am

Demand.
I would guess that most canned goods are not being consumed as often. Canned goods are typically thought of as cheap, but not gourmet. We are more affluent now and have more choices. While the demand for tuna in a can has gone down, it is likely that the demand for tuna served as sushi has gone up.

— Posted by dtc

25. August
30th,
2007
10:56 am

while not a major factor in the decrease of tuna as a whole, a small part could be due to the rise in the past few years of the popularity of the nutrients found in tuna, specifically the omega-3 fatty acid. with nutrient companies now being able to extract omega-3 and endlessly market it how vital it is, while at the same time playing on a society's ever health fears by letting them know they can get this without "exposing" themselves to mercury could have a factor.

there is an AM radio station in my area that has a couple hour show every weekend just specifically marketing products that sell omega-3.

this mixed in with the ability to now get other fish at lower cost could play a small part.

— Posted by Noah

26. August
30th,
2007
10:56 am

Supply would be my choice in this matter. Due to more regulations to protect sustainable levels of tuna fish. And didn't regulations concerning nets expanded as well in order to protect dolphins for being accidently caught in tuna nets and die?

— Posted by Maarten

27. August
30th,
2007
10:59 am

My best guess would be that it is related to demand, and in particular a change in tastes. I would imagine tuna consumption in general has increased, but most of this is through sushi, tuna steaks, higher quality product. In turn, people are less inclined to consume lower quality canned tuna, once they realize what tuna is supposed to taste like. If you look at the data:

<http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2007/s2791.htm>

You see that consumption of fresh and frozen fish has increased from 2001 to 2005, whereas canned consumption (although down over the past few years, has stayed relatively stable). During this time period, overall seafood increased, with most of that increase coming from fresh/frozen seafood. Additionally, total money spent increased more than quantity, also supporting a trend towards higher priced seafood choices.

— Posted by Sam

28. August
30th,
2007
11:01 am

Save the Dolphins... Demand.
— Posted by Hal

29. August
30th,
2007
11:02 am

An interesting follow up would be to see what kind of colleges these econ majors graduated from (big state v. small private), or to pose the question to some non University of Chicago Econ Profs
— Posted by Justin

30. August
30th,
2007
11:02 am

I'm going to chalk this one up to comparative advantages. Shrimp has historically been known as a luxury food item and tuna has been a staple. Americans at least are excited about the possibility of getting a luxury item at a discount and will buy shrimp over tuna based on its perceived worth.

Run this test. Stick a shrimp cocktail and a plate of tuna on crackers out at a party and see which one you run out of first when there is no money involved. Shrimp have a perceived value that is higher and so it will run out first all other things being equal.

Tuna == bland
Shrimp == luxury

This is the demand side of the argument of course.

BS Computer Science

— Posted by Joseph Hines

31. August
30th,
2007
11:04 am

I think perception of tuna has simply changed. I remember back when I was in middle school, not too long ago, everyone seemed to associate tuna fish sandwiches with a disgusting fishy stench. The overall quality probably has gone down and people are switching to other foods.
— Posted by Dqm

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32. August
30th,
2007
11:04 am

People eat less canned tuna (and in a related way, I'm sure much less canned sardines) because of these reasons primarily:

- 1) Fresh fish is more available and more popular (due to increased health consciousness of consumers.)
- 2) Warnings on mercury content have scared some people away.
- 3) The tuna companies are not creating as good advertising for canned tuna as before. ("Where have you gone Charlie The Tuna? A nation turns its lonely eyes to you...")
- 4) There are still a LOT of people eating canned tuna, though not as many as tuna marketers would like to have, and the decrease is a natural fluctuation.

— Posted by Chad D

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33. August
30th,
2007
11:04 am

Decline in demand. Fear of fat (high calories) in oil packed tuna, while water packed lacks the flavor- so why eat it. Desire to avoid fat in mayonnaise - and so a drop-off in tuna fish sandwiches. Decline in those eating fish on Friday and the consequent decline in the number of tuna casseroles. Also more affluent and sophisticated diners spurn the traditional tuna casserole. Belief that catching tuna also means the catching and death of dolphins (much beloved.) Belief that tuna stocks are falling and so it's not Green to eat tuna. Finally the rising preference for fresh tuna displaces eating the canned variety.

— Posted by Haley

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34. August
30th,
2007
11:07 am

Both - Supply costs for canning tuna have likely gone up due to the need to change the way tuna are harvested - to avoid grabbing dolphins, which made a pariah of the industry a few years back. On the demand end, I think consumers shunned tuna for a long time because of the dolphin issue.

What really seems to have changed is that many more people seem to be eating fresh tuna - maybe because the newer ways to catch them make it easier to get them quickly to restaurants & stores or because they can make more money overall by selling them whole, rather than canning them.

Isn't this all just a question of "which came first, the chicken or the egg"?

— Posted by Debi

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35. August
30th,
2007
11:07 am

It is demand. Mercury scares are rampant as well as over-fishing concerns. On a micro-micro level, this has reduced demand in my household (3 kids, 2 adults) significantly.

— Posted by Aaron

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36. August
30th,
2007
11:08 am

One of the other issues here is that demand can be manufactured, through marketing. (In fact there is probably an interesting angle there to look at a market for demand, demand as a tradeable item (the demand for demand..yay!!), and the distorting affects of advertising on a market)

If supply is outstripping demand, then more demand can be (to some extent) manufactured.

I haven't noticed any raise in price of tuna, but feel sure (with out any evidence!) that supply is down due to overfishing. However if demand has also dropped, then the price wont rise, which would seem to be what has happened.

— Posted by jon

•
37. August
30th,
2007
11:08 am

No clue.

I like Tuna as much as I always have. Personally I haven't noticed any quality differences, or price differences, and for some reason I tell my self the mercury issues have been solved whether they have or not.

I do notice that Tuna is usually my last resort for lunch, when there is nothing else in the house.

On the road, its a different story. There I will often opt for Tuna as a known, relatively healthful high-protein food vs competition whose quality and components are unknown or suspect and appear too

heavily weighted with bread-like carbs or processed foods.

I'm gonna go with "ease-of-use" and packaging. When I fish (no pun intended) around in the fridge for lunch, its much easier to choose other leftovers or slices of lunch meat to nibble or eat .

When I think "tuna", I think I'm at least two preparatory steps away from eating. One, I have to open the can, and thereafter eat the whole can or risk wasting it, and two, I must add something to the tuna, since I rarely eat tuna alone. If there is existing leftover salad, then adding the tuna to the salad works fine, but if not then tuna requires a second ingredient and some level or preparation that becomes a barrier to use.

— Posted by Paul

•
38. August
30th,
2007

11:09 am

In this one I'd have to site demand. There has been a growing societal stigma associated with tuna throughout my life-span.

In example, the numerous concerns about tuna as a health risk. Environmental/Activist concerns with how the Tuna industry harvests it (which will also support a supply theory, as I have a strong feeling that the cost of supplying tuna has increased due to legislation and litigation).

— Posted by Theo

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39. August
30th,
2007

11:09 am

When I was young, tuna was cheap; we were porr. I never eat tuna anymore...

— Posted by L McDonnell

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40. August
30th,
2007

11:09 am

Gotta be demand. Canned tuna blows and as people can afford better food, they substitute better food.

— Posted by schadenfreude

41. August 30th, 2007 11:10 am
Reports about traces of mercury in canned tuna fish have restrained people from eating it. Especially mothers who think twice now before giving their kids' tunafish sandwiches for lunch!
— Posted by Missy

42. August 30th, 2007 11:15 am
I would say it's mostly a demand story here. The demand for canned tuna has dropped because it is viewed as an inferior good, but the demand for fresh, sushi-grade tuna has skyrocketed. There was an article in the NY Times about a month ago about major tuna shortages in Japan due to rising demand worldwide. Because of the shift in demand for tuna from canned to fresh, less tuna is worth canning, and that's why you get the dregs and little flakes in a can. This is a case of a change in consumer tastes causing producers to change how they sell their product, and moving from canned tuna to fresh.
— Posted by Peter

43. August 30th, 2007 11:15 am
Demand.
1) High levels of mercury in tuna now a well known fact -> lower demand
2) Greater availability of superior, substitute goods, such as fresh fish, (including tuna steaks) -> lower demand
If you're going to poison yourself with mercury, you might as well enjoy the experience by having sushi instead!
— Posted by Katie

44. August 30th, 2007 11:15 am
The answer is supply - thousands of shallow, polluted basins in S.E. Asian producing millions of shrimp at low cost. Yum, yum.
— Posted by Carter

45. August 30th, 2007 11:16 am Perhaps because the price on Tuna substitutes has decreased, thereby leading to substitution away from Tuna? I personally prefer chicken salad to tuna :)

I feel it's probably a demand issue. Canned Tuna prices haven't changed much, right?

— Posted by Dan

46. August 30th, 2007 11:18 am I don't know if this is a supply answer or a demand answer — probably both. Canned tuna was once just about the only fish most Americans ever ate. Unless you lived on the coast, fresh fish just wasn't available (supply) and lots of people thought fish was inferior, wierd food (demand, insofar as this attitude reflects changing tastes, but also supply, because that's what you'd think too if the only fish you ever tasted was a week old). So I think it's got more to do with transportation improvements and the supply of fresh fish generally. But that has created a demand that I don't think existed decades ago. When I was a kid (in the 70s) it used to be very common for people to say, "I don't eat seafood." When was the last time you heard that?

— Posted by David

47. August 30th, 2007 11:19 am I go with demand on this one. Catholics no longer abstain from meat on Friday like they did when I was growing up. Fridays used to mean tuna sandwiches for lunch or tuna casserole for dinner. 35% of the U. S. is Catholic, which isn't to say they are observant. With one day each week devoted to a meat replacement, seafood was a natural choice along with tomato soup and grilled cheese sandwiches. Mmmmmmmmm. So says an English major and Catholic.

— Posted by mtube

48. August 30th, 2007 11:19 am Shrimp or tuna, supply or demand - who cares? I thought the salient point of your entry was the passing comment that 23.5% of the first 500 commenters couldn't follow your directions correctly. Hopefully those folks are English majors and not engineers!

— Posted by Mike

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49. August 30th, 2007 11:20 am

Just to pile on what's already been said many times, it has an awful lot to do with news coverage about mercury levels (especially for women expecting to have children). Other than that, I would say consumption of all canned meats are probably down as uncanned substitutes have decreased in price.

— Posted by Jrrd

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50. August 30th, 2007 11:24 am

Public opinion; quality, mercury, dolphins.

— Posted by CW

•

51. August 30th, 2007 11:25 am

The combination of two facts, both affecting the “demand side”; lower prices for shrimp and others forms of seafood that are potentially substitute goods for canned tuna, and higher income levels related with the fact that canned tuna is probably an inferior good.

Bs in economics (Argentina)

— Posted by Santiago Pérez

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52. August 30th, 2007 11:26 am

Demand—Shrimp can be considered a substitute good. Since people are eating more shrimp tuna consumption would obviously decrease. Plus tuna doesn't have a cocktail...that's got to count for something.

— Posted by Cassandra

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53. August 30th, 2007

A proper Jewish home has to have a high T-count (stock pile of Bumble Bee tuna)...but, a proper Jewish mother serves it up only rarely because of the mercury levels.

11:28 am :)

— Posted by Pam's mom

54. August
30th,
2007
11:28 am

Shrimp is now farmed in warm tropical waters in Thailand and Vietnam, thus reducing cost (and creating calls for protectionist measures from Gulf fishers). Globalization is a key factor here - Clinton's reestablishment of diplomatic and commercial ties with Vietnam in the mid-nineties made a lot of the fall in price possible.

Shrimp is actually one of the most efficient ways to produce protein after soybeans, whereas beef requires huge amounts of feed to produce a pound of meat. As demand worldwide increases with rising living standards in China and India, substituting shrimp for less efficient protein sources reduces the pressure on the environment, e.g. less acres of Brazilian rainforest lost to raising soybeans or forage for cattle.

Tuna is being overfished and concerns about mercury are becoming more widespread. Demand for fresh sushi-grade tuna is actually increasing in fancy restaurants, but that increase cannot compensate for the fall in canned tuna. Tuna is one of the most efficient ways to get fish protein, about 80-90% of the fish's body mass is edible, vs. 60-70% for salmon, and agronomists have been trying to farm tuna for quite a while, with a few successes in Japanese trials, but nothing yet at the industrial scale unlike salmon for which farming is widespread and now accounts for a majority of the supply.

Consumer attitudes still lag behind reality - shrimp is seen like an expensive product even though that hasn't been the case for about two decades. Another product like that is cashews, which used to be twice as expensive as almonds but now that production from Vietnam (again) has risen to match India, prices are equivalent. That's why fancy nut mixes emphasize how many cashews they include ("now with 50% cashews") and how few peanuts, because customer perception of value is out of sync with actual cost. In the unlikely event of a diplomatic thaw with Iran, we would probably see the same thing with pistachios.

— Posted by Fazal Majid

55. August 30th, 2007 11:30 am
I'm not sure if this is true or not, but prices on Tuna may have increased when they had to start making it "dolphin safe" and other environmental factors. When tuna prices start rising and other sea food prices fall (such as Tuna), there will be a change in consumption patterns.

Also - Tuna is yucky.

— Posted by George

56. August 30th, 2007 11:31 am
Demand probably. It has been a substitution effect for other fishes.

— Posted by Luis

57. August 30th, 2007 11:31 am
Demand; tuna casserole is a comfort food. With the increase in life expectancy and the fact that more families are splitting up leaving people to die relatively alone, our need for comfort foods has declined.

— Posted by Douglas Williams

58. August 30th, 2007 11:32 am
Substitution effect. Shrimp is cheaper. People buy shrimp instead of canned tuna.

BS Biology
BS Art & Design

— Posted by oddTodd

59. August 30th, 2007 11:37 am
On the supply side:
Tuna v. shrimp
Farming tuna means capturing, towing, penning, feeding, fattening and selling at premium prices for stuff like sushi. Thus this actually puts pressure on natural breeding populations of tuna.

Farming shrimp starts with eggs.

Tuna is wet in a can. Shrimp are now packed cooked and frozen in bags of 50 or 100... whatever.

Prices for shrimp are down drastically and supplies are up whilst tuna has not paralleled either price declines or supply increases.

On the supply/demand interface:

Bite-sized, cooked, with a “toothiness” that makes it snackable (and countable), packed in bags like corn or potato chips shrimp is easy-access in any portion size you wish while tuna is still in a can or pack as a “mass”.

— Posted by Jim T

60. August
30th,
2007
11:38 am

While I’m sure it’s a mixture of both supply and demand, I’m willing to venture that it’s the changes in supply. Tuna has become overfished as the global popularity of sushi has risen throughout the years. Thus, supplies are tight, driving up prices for what used to be cheap canned tuna.

— Posted by JT

61. August
30th,
2007
11:41 am

1. Second vote for substitution effect.
2. I thought your observation about the demand/supply story was going to be a Tversky like observation: every demand story has to have a supply story, since every buyer has to have a seller, so why do we only focus on one part of the overall story. Guess I am wrong.

— Posted by michael webster

62. August
30th,
2007
11:46 am

Mercury.
Everyone else in my family stopped eating tuna for this reason, so I did, too. Now, however, we are eating it again having discovered Fishing Vessel St. Jude Company in Bellevue WA which sells troll-caught (very little mercury has had time to build up) and dolphin-safe tuna. And it’s delicious.

BGT

— Posted by BG Thorpe

•

63. August 30th, 2007 11:47 am Demand. Canned foods as a whole seem less popular than their fresh or frozen counterparts. I would think a similar trend could be seen with, salmon for example. As a young Catholic boy, I used to loathe Friday-night Salmon-patties, made with canned salmon. In 1977 if you said Salmon, I thought “canned fish.” In 2007, if you say Salmon, I think “frozen red fillet.”

— Posted by Chris Clark

•

64. August 30th, 2007 11:50 am Tuna got luck out, cuz people are focus on eating those unfortunate shrimps.

— Posted by Bon

•

65. August 30th, 2007 11:52 am Supply - canned tuna was the only cheap seafood option for most of the US, especially the landlocked US. Now? pouches of tuna, frozen shrimp, salmon, all sorts of seafood are available in places like Memphis. Since there hasn't been a huge spike in total amount of seafood consumed, that leads to the fall in the amount of canned tuna consumed. Oh, and an engineer - not that it matters for this question.

— Posted by Cullain

•

66. August 30th, 2007 11:53 am Better quality, cheaper fresh tuna (like shrimps)
General move away from canned food
Environmental concerns over dolphins

— Posted by Ian Delaney

67. August
30th,
2007
11:59 am

I'd say supply in this case. (I'd like to point out that your article probably actually primes people for some type of conditioned response. Though a quick troll through the comments seems to say otherwise.) Anyways, I'd imagine that its a combination of low catches, demand for tuna being in other products than canned, changes in regulation and what not. Also, the Mercury thing which most people seem so happy to point out probably hits the supply side just as hard as the demand (suppliers have to test for it as well.)

— Posted by Jacob

68. August
30th,
2007
11:59 am

I'm going to start out by apologizing to any feminists that this comment may offend, offence really is not intended. I was thinking about how women were more likely to provide a demand response, and came up with an interesting, albeit slightly askew, reason for this difference. Steven pointed out that most people are more used to being consumers than producers, but could this situation somehow be different for women? Even though women have made great strides in the business world over the last fifty or so years, generally we still associate men with business or the supply side. However, there is one area where women are thought of as the supplier and men the consumer (in the sense that they have the demand) and that is sex. Could this help to explain the differing responses between men and women? Does the act of being pursued sexually cause women to be more inclined to notice the supply side arguments for economic questions? I know it is a very abstract line of reasoning, but I thought I'd throw it out there and see what people think.

— Posted by Robin

69. August
30th,
2007
12:00 pm

Over here in Tokyo, there is an extreme shortage of fresh tuna, so sashimi and sushi being served rarely include tuna this month, at least at the places I can afford.

Almost all of the tuna eaten here in Japan is fresh (really, it is frozen and then thawed), and (what little) canned tuna is used on things like pizza.

But in the US, fears of mercury, and the association with killing dolphins leave a negative feeling about canned tuna, along with

mom's terrible tuna casseroles, with potato chips on top.

— Posted by Kevin Ryan

•
70. August
30th,
2007
12:01 pm

follow-up on my 11:38 AM posting

Compare tuna and shrimp to the French Fried Potato (FFP).

Shrimp can be fried and eaten with fingers like a FFP. Not Tuna.

Americans who like FFPs can trade to shrimp and pat themselves on the back. They have not only traded to a now-cheap upscale food but they have also traded carbohydrates off FFPs for proteins of shrimp.

— Posted by Jim T

•
71. August
30th,
2007
12:04 pm

Well, how much seafood can one consume? If it's a choice between tuna and shrimp, shrimp wins, hands down (or, um, squiggly little legs down). I also agree with those who mentioned mercury concerns and those Dolphins re: Tuna. Shrimp may be just as unhealthy, perhaps (to us and to Dolphins) as Tuna, but it doesn't (yet) have the bad p.r. I'm sure that's just a matter of time, however.

— Posted by Rita: Lovely Meter Maid

•
72. August
30th,
2007
12:16 pm

At the risk of falling into the same demand-based trap (history/art history major here), I'm still going with what first pops into my head.

There are other options than tuna (and than canned fish in general) that have similar costs, dolphins, and mercury are playing a role in consumer ideas.

I suspect a lot of other people will say the same thing.

— Posted by Grant

•
73. August
30th,

Without knowing much about tuna supply (except that the consumer

2007
12:17 pm

price seems to be fairly stable), I would place my bets on lots of different substitution effects on the demand side, many of which are mentioned above such as relatively cheaper shrimp (but also including ever-cheaper poultry and beef: the byproducts of highly subsidized corn farming).

One changing demand-side factor has to be the well-established trend toward eating out more, or eating more prepared foods. Fast food places don't sell a lot of anything made with canned tuna (and the tuna flavor is probably not among the most popular of the frozen Hot Pockets and other microwave fodder.) To a great extent, this trend has been shoved along by falling food input costs leading to falling real consumer consumer prices — for chicken, and beef and turkey, but NOT canned tuna.

So here's a hypothesis: increasing supply of subsidized grain have led to increased supply and falling prices for poultry and beef and pork, as well as any other food products that use grains as an input, hence the prices for food products that don't use subsidized grains as an input such as canned tuna are, relatively, increasing leading to decreasing consumption.

Or perhaps people have finally just become tired of the smell.

— Posted by David

74. August
30th,
2007
12:18 pm

I am sure most of the answers given have played some part in the rise in shrimp consumption as well as the decline in canned tuna consumption. So I find it hard to think that an economist would think it is only supply or only demand. It has been my impression from your book that you are inclined to search for determining factors in every corner of the box and outside it as well. And that is what makes your book so refreshing, because it seems that most people tend to just look for one answer, and confine their answers to within the box.

I am led to believe that the separation of answers is more complex than economists think one way, and non-economists think another. I think it has to do with what side of the dollar you most identify with. If you identify with suppliers, your initial response is going to be more about supply. If you see yourself more as a consumer, then you will think about what motivates you to consume the product, and therefore will come up with an answer weighted more toward demand.

While major may have a factor in what you identify with, profession might be a larger factor. If you run a business, then you might give a supply answer, where as if you are a worker-bee, then you may give a demand answer.

According to your data, economists were more inclined to give answers for both sides, which is what I expected. The fact that there was a separation, that some economists gave only supply or only demand answers, I think may have to do with what they are doing in their lives now.

The fact that a larger percentage gave demand answers for both economists and non-economists fits with the idea that there are many more consumers than suppliers, more workers than bosses, etc.

As for the curriculum of econ classes not teaching econ majors the supply answers well enough, I don't think that is the case either. Econ classes teach a lot about both supply and demand. It just so happens that econ professors keep those principles fresh in their minds because they teach it every few days, while undergraduate econ majors won't necessarily go on to be in a profession that continuously reminds them of the lessons they learned in their econ classes, and they therefore won't necessarily give answers that mirror their professors'.

But why do econ professors give supply answers? Well in my case, a lot of my econ classes were aimed at teaching me how to use economics to make decisions. Not decisions of consumption, but decisions of supply. How can this business lower its cost? How much capital should they invest in? And in public policy, what outcome or cost will come with this policy change? And I think that for this reason, our econ professors are going to be more likely to give supply answers to the shrimp question.

Bryce
26
Management Economics

— Posted by Bryce

75. August
30th,
2007

If there were a supply shift, unless there was also an accompanying demand shift, prices would've gone up. I think there was just a demand shift as prices seem lower than they used to be. Maybe there

12:33 pm are more substitutes now: say tuna used to primarily be used as cat food and as a sandwich topping. there are certainly more substitutes in the field of cat food now, and I think there probably are in the field of sandwich spreads as well. Maybe it's also because canned tuna is an inferior good: as people's incomes rise, they can afford better fish to eat, so they consume less tuna.

To the extent that supply has changed, I'd expect it to have shifted to the right, making tuna cheaper and pushing *up* quantity consumed. Demand has risen for good cuts of tuna as sushi has gained popularity, so tuna fishing is a more profitable field to get into. the good cuts get used for sushi, and the not as good cuts get put into cans.

— Posted by sasha

76. August
30th,
2007
12:36 pm

As for why women had higher demand answers than men, when I was younger, I learned that advertising was more expensive for TV shows where women were the target audience, or a large portion of the audience because women made most of the decisions regarding consumption in a household. That women decide whether this or that is needed, or how much of something is needed, or whether the household can afford this or that. Whether this is still true or ever was true, I can't say. I don't remember exactly where I learned this, only that at the time I felt like it came from a credible source.

But based on this information (if it is true), it leads me to believe that women would be more likely to identify with consumers than suppliers, and would therefore give demand answers.

Bryce

— Posted by Bryce

77. August
30th,
2007
12:41 pm

Fascinating that after reading the article the responses are still overwhelmingly Demand. From the supply perspective I'd say that the increased sushi consumption and prevalence of tuna steaks in reataurants is coopting a much larger portion of the higher quality tuna (even though it has the same mercury as the canned stuff) therefore less is available to be canned, and what is canned is lower quality.

— Posted by Tom

•
78. August
30th,
2007
12:41 pm

Canned tuna is an inferior good, in fact, it's the ultimate inferior good. As we as a world get richer, we demand less canned tuna because canned tuna may be the nastiest thing that man has ever chosen to eat. In fact, other people's eating canned tuna has a serious negative externality on others. It smells so disgusting, it makes me want to throw up. I seriously hope this is a demand issue, and not a supply issue, if only to show that humans are developing more sensical palates.

— Posted by Willy

•
79. August
30th,
2007
12:44 pm

Id say that the amount of canned tuna eaten has fallen for three reasons:

- 1) Fear of mercury poisoning, which has reoccurring reports throughout the year. Tuna is the biggest offender whenever this topic is brought up and therefore scares canned tunafish eaters from eating it (at least for awhile... until the next report tells you that you must just be careful whilst eating it)
- 2) Quality of tuna in said cans. I have eaten canned tuna for as long as I can remember (im 24) and I must say that (give or take) 7 out of 10 cans have poor quality tuna which deters me from eating it. I end up giving it to my cats.
- 3) Price. Which, perhaps, leads me to a supply answer... The price for tuna seems to be rising slowly. As I have already said, I have eaten canned tuna for quite some time, and although the quality seems to be going down, the price seems to be going up...

Perhaps people are straying from Tuna and going for Shrimp. It is one of the options on many restaurant menus offering additional toppings on, say, salads...

— Posted by Candice

•
80. August
30th,
2007

How long has canned tuna consumption been falling?
Are those bags of tuna that are sold next to the cans counted as

12:47 pm canned tuna?

— Posted by Eamonn Murray

•
81. August
30th,
2007
12:49 pm

I think it's a positive reinforcement cycle from other seafood—shrimp goes on the rise, producers become aware, switch tuna boats to shrimp boats, cost goes up a little, and the cycle repeats itself. Then of course there are the fishing laws perhaps reducing supply as well as the general nastiness of canned tuna.

Future Physics Major (in High School)

— Posted by Theo

•
82. August
30th,
2007
12:50 pm

In addition to what i have already said, writer Sasha has made a good point: The rise in Sushi consumption has called for the better cuts of Tuna to go to that while the rest goes to canned tuna...

It seems the answer to this riddle may be that the rise in Sushi (and fresher prepared food perhaps?) consumption is taking away from canned food products demand.

— Posted by Candice

•
83. August
30th,
2007
12:52 pm

This one's easy. It's demand. Once Jessica Simpson made a fool out of herself by asking if "Chicken of the Sea" is chicken or fish, tuna became closely associated with idiocy in the minds of Americans. Hence the drop in demand.

I also like the mercury answers. Your next poll should be on the rise in paranoia.

-Bill

(Non-econ major, but at Chicago, so you can count me for econ as well).

— Posted by Bill

84. August
30th,
2007
12:55 pm

In the supply area: The industry has to use more expensive (relative to 20 years ago) fishing techniques in order to avoid the dolphins. Also, it seems there is a lot of concern about sustainable fishing. Limiting the amount of fish each ship can catch means raises the marginal cost of each unit of fish.

Demand: Canned tuna has many substitutes, so any increase in price will lead to an increase in demand. This, combined with the health worries, lower demand

— Posted by Sticky

85. August
30th,
2007
12:55 pm

I used to eat Tuna all the time. Then the media started talking about how there was Mercury in the tuna. After that, my tuna consumption slowed dramatically.

— Posted by Josh

86. August
30th,
2007
1:03 pm

in economist terms:

changes in supply, but not in the supply of canned tuna.

there is a greater supply of fresh fish (shrimp, fresh tuna, fresh whitefish, etc), in my mind due to improved transportation methods. the increased availability/lower cost of the fresh fish leads to an increased demand. the substitute good (canned fish) thus has a resulting decreased demand.

in psychologist terms:

there is better fish out there than canned tuna, and folks are trading up. who wants canned fish in this age of food tv? of course, it all depends on the fresh fish being available and cheap.

— Posted by luke

87. August
30th,
2007
1:03 pm

Pretty clearly a supply issue. When I was growing up shrimp was an aspirational food. Like lobster, it was fabulously expensive and I counted myself lucky if I could have shrimp once or twice a year.

Fast forward to 2007 and shrimp is often cheaper than steak. I can fix dinner for two with five dollars worth of shrimp. My consumption of shrimp has probably increased 10X.

A big part of the price break is due to shrimp raised tidal pools in southeast Asia. It is less expensive but just doesn't taste as good as wild caught Gulf Shrimp. It would be interesting to see how the consumption of Gulf shrimp has changed over the same period.

— Posted by Steve

•
88. August
30th,
2007
1:05 pm

I totally agree with what #74 said. I agree with most everyone's theories on tuna, too.

The one that interests me is the women-gave-more-demand-only-answers factoid. My theory would have several points. Women tend to think more intuitively (there are a number of studies and resources that explain why), drawing more from personal experience. Even in this modern world, women tend to be the shoppers of the household more so than men. Most people do approach problems as consumers rather than as suppliers, but I think it's more ingrained in the minds of women, who I think simply just have more practice at being a consumer.

BTW, I'm a female with an undergrad econ degree from a state school, working on the demand side of business (I just find it more interesting!), who is the primary shopper in the household. ;)

— Posted by econ2econ

•
89. August
30th,
2007
1:10 pm

I eat tuna all the time! I went to the doctor a while back, and he said there was something that was high in my blood- I don't remember what... but , anyway, yes- I eat alot of tuna

— Posted by frankenduf

•
90. August
30th,
2007

I believe it is because of the supply of fresh alternatives/substitutes.

— Posted by aaronc

1:20 pm

- - 91. August 30th, 2007 1:27 pm Both, I think. Canned tuna is known to be mercury contaminated, and there's the dolphin business as well. I also think increased demand for fresh tuna is taxing the supply, making a formerly frugal choice more expensive and thus less attractive.
— Posted by Jennifer Emick
-

- - 92. August 30th, 2007 1:38 pm Demand. I think there are too many other options available. Refrigeration, availability of other seafood options at comparable prices, and lack of variation when cooked all come in to play.
— Posted by JohnWB
-

- - 93. August 30th, 2007 1:41 pm Mercury, definitely. Also, I'd be interested to know if all types of tuna have dropped in popularity or if it's just albacore, which accumulates higher levels of mercury than other types of tuna.
— Posted by Joyce
-

-
- 94. August 30th, 2007 1:52 pm A combination of factors. starting principally with a substitution factor. If we looked at total fish or total tuna consumption I bet that it has remained constant or increased over the same period of time.
Earlier in time canning fish was the only way to get it to many markets for much of the year at affordable price points.
Now, with better supply networks etc. it is much easier to bring fresh fish/tuna to market at a price that is not prohibitively more expensive than canned fish. Also people's incomes have been rising in real terms over the same time.
Thus, people are now substituting other, fresher kinds of fish for canned tuna.

Also, the demand for fresh tuna (sushi/sashimi) has greatly increased globally and thus suppliers have a greater incentive to invest in the methods needed to supply fresh tuna and a greater percentage of tuna goes to “fresh” sources. This leads to a relative scarcity of canned tuna which therefore has to increase in price.

I bet that relative to shrimp over the same period of time Shrimp prices dropped drastically while canned tuna prices were relatively stable.

— Posted by Kevin

95. August
30th,
2007
1:59 pm

I think it's both.

Demand for canned tuna is probably dropping due to FDA warning about mercury poisoning.

Supply for canned tuna is dropping due the increase of the popularity of Sushi grade tuna. More fish man are probably selling tuna for Sushi at a higher premium than canned tuna.

— Posted by ZY

96. August
30th,
2007
1:59 pm

- College drop-out project manager (I also don't like tuna)

1.) The relative cost of food has fallen as compared to income.

Fresher food is preferred.

2.) 'fridges are bigger also contributing to reduction in shelf-stable food demand.

Probably the most likely reason:

3.) Societal shift to more risk tolerant lifestyles.

Coming out of the great depression the first generation (and boomers to an extent) lived in a fear of famine and stocked piled shelf stable foods as a means of preparing for lean times. This is also a favorite past time of people with agricultural roots. A basement pantry full of canned foods (store bought or home canned) could tide a family over in case of hard times(winter for the farmer folks). A convenient comparison would be the effects on the great depression and investment. The generations around the depression had little faith in the stock market and the economy after comming out of a decade long depression. This had effected attitudes towards a great many

things. It is not uncommon to find a stockpile of shelf stable food in the houses of the elderly who are still living with the fear of another depression. People with this kind of mindset are dying. The children of boomers have more faith in the stock market, and the economy and are more risk tolerant than previous generations. This risk tolerance and confidence in the economy is also indicated by their lack of a shelf stable food stock pile.

— Posted by Jacob

•
97. August
30th,
2007
2:06 pm

Wait, I'd think English majors would be ridiculous supply-siders. Have you seen the volume of new fiction at Borders? No way we have that many Great American Writers...

— Posted by Chris

•
98. August
30th,
2007
2:22 pm

Demand. Tuna overfishing is certainly a problem, but it doesn't seem to have affected the price of canned tuna yet. Since canned tuna is no longer the only cheap, easy to prepare seafood available to people away from the coasts, we can now substitute shrimp, salmon, fresh tuna or a number of other choices.

— Posted by Marty

•
99. August
30th,
2007
2:23 pm

Well, personally I've stopped eating so much Tuna because of all the articles I've read that discuss the rise in mercury contamination in Tuna.

— Posted by Stephanie

•
100. August
30th,
2007
2:23 pm

Professor
Biology
Male
39

I think this is a harder question than the shrimp one. If a sample of

one is relevant, I stopped eating tuna in 6th grade because of dolphin entrapment, started again about 15 years later, and have stopped now because of mercury (I use alaska salmon or mackerel). Price has stayed the same, or gone down.

— Posted by M Baker

•
101. August
30th,
2007
2:33 pm

Supply - tuna have been massively over-fished and more heroic efforts have to undertaken to catch the same amount of fish.

After Prof. Levitt's explanation of the shrimp matter, isn't this all an example of Say's Law? I mean, labor and capital (like fishermen and shrimping boats) are relatively inelastic; people who have decided to be fishermen will usually accept a lot of decline in real income before retraining, and shrimping boats probably don't get re-habbed into touring ships easily. So if it becomes easier to catch shrimp, more shrimp will be caught, and prices will decline until demand equals supply.

If shrimp were an inferior good, the increased supply might get used for fertilizer instead of eaten, but I think reducing the shrimping fleet to keep supply constant is not generally a natural outcome.

— Posted by Basho

•
102. August
30th,
2007
3:31 pm

Mercury in tuna has been widely publicized. That was my first thought.

26
Finance
Econ Major
Male

(The comments were so busy on the Shrimp post, my comment didn't even make it...FWIW)

— Posted by CT

•
103. August

I think it is demand based. Tuna was on a no-no list due to dolphins

30th,
2007
3:35 pm

being caught in nets and then if you are a woman who is or has been pregnant it is a no-no because of the high mercury content.

Those two factors dropped my consumption to practically nothing.

The other factor- and this, as one of my other factors was, is probably due to being a woman and would not influence as many men, is that I used to order tuna fish out but now that I am watching my calorie and fat intake I cannot order it out as it is always made with regular mayo and is generally the chunk light tuna which is not as good for you as the white tuna.

— Posted by Kate

104. August
30th,
2007
3:41 pm

I was one of the non-econ majors who said supply in the shrimp questions. But I should also have added the disclaimer that I did take econ 200 at the esteemed U of C. So Prof. Levitt and his colleagues are doing their job.

As for tuna, mercury & dolphins have not stopped me from buying canned tuna (add a little dijon mustard or a dab of relish to the mayo, plus some chopped sweet onion & celery. On a sandwich include a slice of cheddar and toast the whole wheat. It's all good.) So I'll have to go with supply again and say overfishing.

— Posted by tina

105. August
30th,
2007
4:02 pm

Has to be demand. Tastes change and canned tuna has been under sustained scrutiny for a long time. Before mercury concerns were du jour, the scuttlebutt was about Flipper being caught in the nets and processed right along with Charlie. Yea, that dates me.

Your English major,

— Posted by Steve B.

106. August
30th,
2007
4:35 pm

Wouldn't the fact that only readers of Freakonomics blogs were asked make the sample nearly worthless? I mean, where else would you find a population made up of 20% economics majors?

— Posted by Geoff

•

107. August 30th, 2007 4:43 pm

Overall consumption has decreased due to misguided concern over the level of mercury found in canned tuna.

FWIW - Three days every month, I only eat tuna. No Joke. 3 Days. Tuna. Water. Only.

— Posted by Matthew J. Marshall

•

108. August 30th, 2007 4:50 pm

Even though the supply of tuna has been going down, the price of canned tuna is still pretty low. Since the price is low on canned tuna, and yet consumption is down, I would guess that there are several demand-side explanations. 1) Some people have been frightened off from news reports on mercury levels; 2) many people boycotted tuna for a while over the dolphin controversy, and haven't gone back; 3) we have a much wider variety of seafood choices, many if not most preferable to canned tuna.

What about canned salmon? I would guess that it, too, has seen a decrease in sales — for the same reason as tuna sales have dropped, if 3 is right.

B.S. in recombinant gene technology, chemistry
M.A. in English
Ph.D. in Humanities
Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at UTA
Male, 36

— Posted by Dr. Troy Camplin

•

109. August 30th, 2007 5:12 pm

I say supply has gone down because of all the pressure to not kill the dolphins: they have to buy more expensive nets that don't catch as many tuna. But I know absolutely nothing about fishing for tuna.

Computer Programmer - Computer Science - 25 - Male

— Posted by Kip

110. August 30th, 2007 5:19 pm
Tuna has risen in price due to overfishing and supply is dwindling as tuna cannot reproduce as fast as we are fishing them. So is the answer just supply or demand? It's both.
— Posted by john

111. August 30th, 2007 5:26 pm
Tuna has a reputation for containing mercury, and being particularly risky for children.
— Posted by Twodles

112. August 30th, 2007 5:26 pm
I'm going with 'demand' since it doesn't seem that it's harder to find canned tuna at a reasonable price. Also, tuna has become popular in another form, sushi, and once you try it that way, it's hard to go back.
MG, male, age 40, lapsed mathematician.
— Posted by Mike G

113. August 30th, 2007 5:32 pm
Is the supply of oil inversely correlated to the supply of shrimp?
<http://www.shrimp-petrofest.org/>
— Posted by Craig

114. August 30th, 2007 5:33 pm
Demand explanation: Need for protein consumption is satisfied with more appealing products: greater availability of other cheap protein sources (comparatively speaking) make canned tuna less appealing. In addition, people's increased income allows them to get proteins from somewhere else.
Supply explanation: More profitable output for product: Maybe the increase in demand for fresh tuna to fill the increased orders in restaurants and sushi bars has created more profitable venues for producers to sell their output.

Ignacio
attorney

— Posted by Ignacio

•
115. August
30th,
2007
6:11 pm

Niether, it is a food that has fallen out of “vogue” and the mercury scare has turned people off to it.

— Posted by Rachel Gross

•
116. August
30th,
2007
6:25 pm

Is it even possible to separate supply and demand? Aren't they entangled in a constant feedback loop?

— Posted by Penny

•
117. August
30th,
2007
6:42 pm

wikipedia says about tuna: “Other populations seem to support fairly healthy fisheries (for example, the central and western Pacific skipjack tuna, *Katsuwonus pelamis*), but there is mounting evidence that overcapitalization threatens tuna fisheries world-wide.”

On the demand side, tuna has become somewhat stigmatized (is it dolphin safe? Does it come from a sustainable fishery? et cetera).

— Posted by funkyj

•
118. August
30th,
2007
6:46 pm

I'm sticking with a demand explanation for a fall in canned tuna consumption. A ridiculous number of sushi restaurants seem to be opening, which must surely result in a demand switch from canned to fresh tuna.

I would now like to hedge my answer with some other options, but don't want to risk being left out of the next analysis as a mixed-answerer.

— Posted by Jonathan

119. August
30th,
2007
7:14 pm

Ten to fifteen years ago tuna-mayo sandwiches were very popular, especially mom's having to pack lunches for kids and husbands. Easy to do, no mess no fuss. As things go these easy sandwich methods got quite repetitive and the eaters of these easy lunches got quite fed up and bored. Now that hey have to do the grocery shopping, and in some cases they pack lunches themselves for their brood, I guess the thought of putting their loved ones through the same ordeal they went through is just too much.

— Posted by Wayne

120. August
30th,
2007
7:23 pm

On Shrimp

$P \downarrow$ and $Q \uparrow$ Then S went \uparrow

Perhaps $D \uparrow$ hard to tell (increase in price of substitutes, change in taste)

Most likely - Increased market penetration i.e as price fell people who like shrimp buy more

On Tuna

$P \downarrow$ or steady and $Q \downarrow$ Then $D \downarrow$

Tuna is perceived as less safe (mercury) and cost of substitutes \downarrow (shrimp other fish)

— Posted by DanC

121. August
30th,
2007
7:40 pm

Supply; fresh tuna and other fish are so much more available and at better prices. Why eat canned?

— Posted by ellen

122. August
30th,
2007
7:50 pm

Without reading the prior comments, I'll say it's a demand issue but because of a technicality rather than a tuna supply/deman issue:
Tuna is now widely available in plastic pouches and consumers may prefer these to cans. We may be eating as much tuna as ever, just not canned tuna.

It's entirely possible that the adjective "canned" was unnecessary and Steven meant to refer to all tuna, not just the kind that comes in cans. In that case I probably sound like a nerd, but it's okay, I'm a computer programmer and accuracy is very important in my line of work. :)

— Posted by Nathan

•
123. August
30th,
2007
8:02 pm

Must be a change in demand. If the drop were due to a change in supply, then it would mean prices would have risen. They haven't, and tuna is still reasonably inexpensive. Thus I'd guess demand.

— Posted by kim

•
124. August
30th,
2007
8:06 pm

Aquaculture is the answer on the shrimp. If you want more details, contact me (nweaver@gmail.com) and I'll put you in touch with my father who can provide a lot more information, and how to see the points when aquaculture started being significant.

I suspect on Tuna that it is a mix of both. It is still a wild caught product, so you can have some exhaustion/overfishing effects (albacore especially), plus there is the mercury scare business.

I'd see what the stats are for Salmon however. (Another aquaculture-revolution product)

As I said, although I'm CS, I wasn't a useful datapoint because I already knew the real answer. :)

— Posted by Nicholas Weaver

•
125. August
30th,
2007
9:14 pm

As prices dropped for seafood in general (thanks to many of the reasons listed above for shrimp), "wild" fish like tuna are relatively more expensive. Additionally, the media has done a pretty good job convincing people that their tuna contains mercury and isn't safe to eat.

— Posted by Mitch

126. August 30th, 2007 10:02 pm
Hold on a sec. I'm not convinced. Average shrimp consumption quadruples. Duh, supply has increased, there is four times as much shrimp being eaten. And obviously some supply innovation must be necessary. But how come people eat it? There IS a demand component. I quadruple in the supply of octopus, I submit, would not lead to a commensurate rise in actual consumption. It's icky!
— Posted by Jaret

127. August 30th, 2007 10:12 pm
The quality of canned tuna has fallen.
— Posted by David Pinto

128. August 30th, 2007 10:39 pm
Demand - why would you buy canned tuna when you get canned salmon for only 20-40% more money.
— Posted by Tracey

129. August 30th, 2007 11:47 pm
demand, 'canned' doesn't mean quick and easy but solely 'unhealthy' nowadays.
people are going raw and fresh, plus with good supply and choice... why still 'canned'?
— Posted by Dennis

130. August 31st, 2007 12:19 am
In my opinion canned tuna is an inferior good. Therefore, with the steady rise in living standards and income, canned tuna consumption has gone down- because more people can afford shrimp now!
— Posted by Ebaa

133. August 31st, The combination of demand and supply.

2007

1:41 am

It seems to me that supply of tuna has declined. The quality is getting worse and the prices have gone up three-four times (at least in Finland) during the last 5-10 years. Must be something to do with getting the fish out of the sea as transportation has become cheaper. You still can get good tuna too, but that is almost as expensive as salmon, but has nowhere near the reputation of quality fish.

With the reasons above, the demand has also declined. But I also think that variety of seafood that is easily and cheaply available has decreased the demand for tuna. Diversity decreases the demand for the biggest articles, but increases (especially in percentages) in manifolds the demand for the previously marginal articles.

You must remember, though, that I come from Finland. I have lived four years in NY and the supply in these two places is nowhere near the same. Finland is still periphery, sadly. My parents had not heard of shrimp before the 80s, for example. The laws of demand and supply are the same in here, however, they work bit differently. At least what have I noticed.

— Posted by MKL

134. August 31st, Cant just look at canned tunas. Fresh tunas fetch a higher price in

2007

2:29 am

Japan. Canned tunas are from rotting tunas.

Re: shrimps, any stark changes over a relatively short period of time has to be of both demand and supply reasons.

— Posted by EH

135. August 31st, by the article i read in wikipedia it seems to a more specific part of

2007

3:16 am

supply which is production. there are variety or tuna being produced and poor quality control.

— Posted by vaibhav kadian

136. August 31st, 2007 3:26 am Is this in the United States exclusively? If so, demand forces. Canned Tuna must be an inferior good. It's nasty.

Or, similarly, dolphin-loving is a sophistication only the wealthy can afford, and so not buying tuna is a normal or luxurious behavior.

— Posted by Walter

137. August 31st, 2007 3:47 am I'm quite familiar with the tuna industry as I had a client with a fishing fleet before here in San Diego. There are so many factors that contributed to its decline. First, the well-publicized damages to marine life like dolphins. Second, production cost went uncontrolled with oil and labor components beyond the producer's control. Third, this lead to lower product quality in order to maximize revenues. Lastly, the major producers were taken over by foreign companies who did not pay enough attention to marketing. They ignored the health warnings and did not have an effective campaign to counter those claims.

Tuna is still a commodity in high demand in Japan where prime catches command premium prices. In fact, they have poured millions into artificial breeding of tuna to counter scarcity. In sharp contrast, the image of tuna and its consumption have been associated with low income and cat food.

— Posted by Lee

138. August 31st, 2007 4:47 am Demand

Although we are facing a looming tuna shortage it is only hitting sushi grade tuna so far. You couldn't possibly argue that the price of canned tuna has gone up significantly or that there have been shortages.

Canned tuna had to weather to PR crisis of being called canned dolphin a decade ago and since then has become increasingly uncool. Supplies of fresh fish are more abundant and cheaper and of higher quality for the inland population not to mention all the shrimp that's being eaten! So, people are choosing those options rather than plain tuna.

— Posted by Avery

•

139. August 31st, Shrimps are yummy. Simple.
2007
4:52 am — Posted by Charles Edward Frith

•

140. August 31st, Demand. We eat a lot more fresh seafood than we used to, namely
2007
5:30 am because the price has fallen and it has become more accessible to non-coastal areas. Why eat canned fish when you can make a meal of FRESH shrimp or tilapia for only a dollar or two more?
— Posted by Tirade

•

141. August 31st, Your answer on this is extremely unsatisfying! “I don’t know???”
2007
6:49 am Come on.
At least investigate whether Dunkin Donuts added shrimp as an ingredient in the glaze in 1980!
— Posted by Julie

•

142. August 31st, The decline in tuna consumption is definitely a supply issue. The
2007
8:30 am proliferation of sushi restaurants throughout the U.S. has given everyone across the country a new perception of tuna. Good tuna does not taste like the cat food you get from a can, but is light and delicate. Once people know this, they usually only eat the canned garbage at the end of the month (before pay day).
— Posted by Dan

•

143. August 31st, What happened to canned Tuna based on the comments of others
2007
9:19 am here:

Demand fell because of dolphin and mercury concerns (also since my impression is that young women ate most of the canned tuna these concerns had a large impact on this group) You might want to check demographic changes to explain change in demand i.e. past target market shrinking without an ability to grow new customers. Another factors might be as incomes increase tuna consumption declines (you substitute other products.) Price of substitutes decline, demand for tuna falls.

So you see Price ↓ and Quantity consumed ↓ means drop in demand curve.

But then, according to some comments, you see a shift in the supply curve. Fishermen try to overcome some of the concerns of consumers but that increases costs. The quality of the product declines i.e. the supply of good tuna falls. The supply curve shifts to the left. You see Prices ↑ and Quantity consumed ↓.

You could end up with price pretty steady but a big drop in consumption.

— Posted by DanC

144. August 31st, 2007 9:56 am Good grief, I could only read so many “What happened to the good ol’ tuna?” comments before I went crazy. If this has been answered already, my apologies...

People, there are several varieties of tuna you can buy at the store. Even at a big box store, you’ll probably at least have a selection of “light” and “albacore/white.”

Or you could pick up the canned salmon or canned crab, which make great sandwiches of their own. Or you could use them in your tuna casserole, tuna helper, etc

Here’s what the Feds say about mercury in seafood:
<http://www.epa.gov/waterscience/fishadvice/advice.html>

— Posted by Andy

145. August 31st, 2007 9:56 am I majored in econ, but that was in 1974.

I do not understand the canned tuna question. Are we supposed to

suggest which came first, the demand factor or the supply factor, or just say whether its supply or demand driven?

I do not know which came first.

There are demand side factors, such as perception that canned tuna is not a “high-end” product, or maybe is not quite healthy enough (mercury), or is just cat food, those sort of things.

On the supply side there are the possibility that the demand for other ways to sell tuna (sushi, seared, seared tuna salad) diverts product from the cannery to the fish monger. There are declining numbers of fish in the sea, and I do not know whether tuna can be raised on a farm, but if it cannot be farm raised then those two factors would contribute to a decline in the tuna available for canning, raising the price of those cans which are produced.

I was not a very good student, by the way.

— Posted by Gary Philip Nelson

•

146. August 31st, 2007 10:24 am I can't believe only one person mentioned—and then only in passing—the tuna in pouches. Only slightly more expensive than cans, located in the same part of the grocery (no searching needed), lighter to carry, easier to store—and the tuna tastes much better! Why wouldn't they be replacing cans?

— Posted by cindy

•

147. August 31st, 2007 11:10 am There is definitely a supply component. I have been eating canned tuna since I was a kid, not that long ago but long enough. Then mainly because it was cheap and I was poor. I can tell you that not only now is it more expensive but it has declined in quality.

The stuff that used to come in a can for a quarter now comes in a pouch for almost \$2. The stuff they put in a can and label “chunk light” today would have been discarded 12 years ago.

— Posted by Karl Smith

148. August 31st, 2007 11:30 am
Definitely demand - consumers don't like the canned aspect and the pouch hasn't caught on. Perhaps the dolphins getting caught in nets hurt the image.

Demand for "toro" and other sushi continues to increase.

— Posted by John DeVita

149. August 31st, 2007 12:08 pm
Toxic waste in the ocean has had a unique side-effect, which has been to spur hyper-evolution in tuna. The majority of tuna are now highly intelligent creatures who not only easily evade capture but are now plotting their own sneak attack on humanity. I, for one, welcome our soon-to-be tuna overlords.

— Posted by Doug

150. August 31st, 2007 12:34 pm
I think this is probably a demand issue. First off, virtually everything canned has declined in sales as a lot of flavor gets lost in the canning process. Fresh and frozen products are becoming less expensive and in a lot of cases are cheaper than the canned counter parts. There was a lot of bad publicity a few years back because of dolphins getting caught in tuna nets, and currently there are a lot of stories about mercury in the tuna. I also think that canned tuna alternatives are becoming less expensive (like farm raised Salmon, fresh tuna, and tuna pouches).

— Posted by severin

151. August 31st, 2007 12:48 pm
I'd say its a supply issue forced by a demand one. Due to health reasons, people have started to demand higher quality tuna as to avoid high levels of toxins. It is difficult to fish for these quality tuna in large numbers, and as a result supply has dropped for the desired tuna.

— Posted by Visish

152. August 31st, 2007 1:11 pm
It seems like the negative effects of mercury has seeped into the public consciousness more in the recent years, discouraging people from eating fish. So that counts into the demand aspect. But I've also read how fishing in general has driven many species population to dwindle, and that's obviously the supply aspect. If I had to give weight to one or the other, it would be the demand. A comparison betw prices of tuna vs. other popular fish would be interesting.

— Posted by lange

153. August 31st, 2007 2:50 pm
Steve, there is something disingenuous in your explanation of the shrimp story above. You cited evidence that shrimp price fell. But then your next sentence starts: "When quantity rises and prices are falling..." Excuse me - where is your proof that quantity has risen? Aren't there other reasons for why the price of a good may fall?

Just because economists are trained to think on the supply side doesn't mean that the supply side always provides the right answer. In this case, you didn't prove increased quantity any more than you disproved all our demand conjectures.

— Posted by Fiona

154. August 31st, 2007 2:51 pm
Both supply and demand issues are probably at play. Many people point to the health issues (e.g. mercury) that may be driving demand for tuna down. The statistic that started the question, however, was about the decline in demand for canned tuna (as opposed to all tuna). It is possible that the decline in canned tuna is attributable to changes in the allocation of tuna among the marketplace.

Anecdotally, it seems like the amount of tuna consumed in non-canned form (e.g. seared ahi, spicy tuna roll sushi, etc.) may have increased in the last 10-20 years. Presumably, this usage is a higher value proposition for tuna suppliers than selling to canneries for canned tuna, which is likely at the bottom of the scale of return to the supplier. Additionally, if costs have increased in tuna fishing, such as through the use of dolphin-safe fishing technology, this higher cost structure may have driven more suppliers to seek higher return outlets (sushi bars) for their catch in order to maintain or increase return on investment.

— Posted by Brian

•

155. August 31st, 2007 2:57 pm Demand. I'm pretty sure tuna supplies are dwindling - the Japanese are at a panic over tuna being unavailable for sushi. And canned tuna is for cats and crappy cafeteria lunches.

— Posted by iratecat

•

156. August 31st, 2007 2:59 pm Many stocks of tuna are overexploited so supply is short while demand for fresh tuna continues to be strong. This scarcity issues is why Japan is experimenting with deer meat sushi. The demand for *canned* products in general is likely decreasing, though, as this globalized food market brings us ever-increasing options for fresh food.

— Posted by Jennifer Jacquet

•

157. August 31st, 2007 3:22 pm > the real price of shrimp fell by about > 50 percent between 1980 and 2002.

And even more, if “time to peel and devein each individual shrimp” is included in your calculation.

— Posted by HTB

•

158. August 31st, 2007 3:44 pm In Japan do you see a shortage of tuna or a price increase in tuna? (is it a movement along the demand curve or a shift in the demand curve?) And is the demand for all tuna changing or just the demand for higher quality tuna? Perhaps you have less high quality tuna because of supply troubles. And perhaps low quality tuna does not have supply problems but has seen a decrease in demand.

BTW a quick research shows that the EU did have price supports for tuna i.e. Europe subsidized tuna consumption in Japan by keeping european fishermen in business.

— Posted by DanC

•

159. August 31st, 2007 5:35 pm I think the first question is whether tuna consumption is even going down significantly. Yes, shrimp has overtaken it as number one, but I've seen only very modest declines in tuna consumption itself, suggesting that even those most vulnerable to mercury's effects haven't reduced their tuna consumption enough to alleviate the effects of mercury. (FDA says kids and women of child-bearing age should cut back to 6 oz/week.)

Yes, the tuna industry has been complaining about demand going down and blaming the well-intentioned FDA, but tuna's popularity isn't declining just because the tuna industry says it is — presumably to argue for government support. Nor do the benefits of tuna justify the risks to kids neurological development - even if the tuna industry says so. :)

— Posted by s_jackets

•

160. September 1st, 2007 6:54 am Demand: Tuna was the easiest most convenient form of seafood. As seafood now ships easier everywhere, tuna is one of many choices for seafood...

And canned stuff is not as popular as it was. BTW, are those pouches of tuna selling??

— Posted by austin shaw

•

161. September 1st, 2007 11:01 am Sociology major Demand. Tuna has been lambasted in the press for years now. I think in the growing "environmental movement" people have started avoiding it. Also, people are raising their food standards above the canned variety and are probably switching to more fresh tuna as it is now easier to distribute.

— Posted by lls

162. September 1st, 2007 7:51 pm People don't buy as much canned tuna because canned anything does not taste as good. If you want tuna that tastes good, fresh tuna is now more available than 20 years ago.
— Posted by C. Lewin

163. September 1st, 2007 10:12 pm Supply! I've read numerous article recently (including one in the NY Times) about a tuna shortage. The tuna shortage is so widespread in Japan that they are farming deer and horses to make sushi with. A shortage will naturally increase the cost of tuna, whether it is in a can or not, and higher prices may lower amount of sales. There are many more low cost sea food options other than tuna these days.
29
Missions
Biblical Counseling
Male
— Posted by Wes

164. September 2nd, 2007 1:54 am Supply
The population of tuna has seen a dramatic decrease in the last few decades. It has been harder and harder to find fully matured adult tuna in the wild. Although there are new farming techniques out there, the dramatic over fishing have made such a big impact that it has been hard to make up. So, the increases in prices have discouraged consumption while other alternatives to tuna have become more readily available. Like the shrimp, other seafood items are becoming cheaper and are taking their share of the seafood market.
— Posted by Charles

165. September 2nd, 2007 I'd say canned tuna has both supply and demand factors.
Supply side, it seems like the quality and price of "fresh" fish is now

1:44 pm way better for consumers, so fresh is being substituted for canned. Thank you technology.

Demand side, I don't know how big a hit tuna took from dolphins, but it seems like it never shook it off.

— Posted by rkt88edmo

•

166. September 2nd, 2007 8:08 pm I say demand, but only because of a lack of marketing. When I was younger, I ate tuna all the time. But back in the 80's, Chicken of the Sea ads were running on T.V. all the time, with an animated Charlie Tuna catering to kids. I continued to eat tuna in college and after graduating, but since then, I've moved on to other foods, only buying tuna every now and then. If tuna consumption is to increase, then the Tuna Council (if there is one) needs to increase advertising, just like the pork people have done.

— Posted by Eric

•

167. September 3rd, 2007 8:13 am I live in Russia and tuna isn't a big thing here, but I, as a non-economist, I think it's on the demand side. Personally, I don't like tuna - it just isn't tasty, if you ask me, so with plenty of other fish products comparable in price but tasting better - it's not my favourite choice at a shop. But, probably, the above-mentioned lack of marketing is a substantial factor, too.. Maybe we just need some "tuna awareness" campaign, lol..-)))

— Posted by Alexander, Moscow

•

168. September 4th, 2007 1:01 am having bombed the shrimp test, let me offer another fuzzy, feminine english-major supply-based perspective on tuna:
no one makes tuna casserole any more

— Posted by Laura McClure

169. September 4th, 2007 8:53 am My guess is:
Increased demand for other uses of the raw material (fresh fish, japanese food etc).
Increased cost of tuna fishing to reduce environmental impact (dolphin protection). Increased costs associated with the unbalanced tuna ecology created by overfishing.
No compensating improvements in the sea to shelf costs of the can of tuna. Other viable substitutes have become relatively cheaper - shrip sandwich anyone?
— Posted by Mark, London

170. September 4th, 2007 6:01 pm The decrease in tuna consumption seems like it would be supply driven. My understanding is that tuna are over-fished. Supposedly it is nearly impossible to find sushi-grade tuna in Japan. Perhaps the turtle-safe nets used to catch tuna these days are also less efficient. Although, I feel like we've been setup for an exception where the decrease in consumption is actually demand driven (i.e. mercury).
— Posted by Mike

171. September 4th, 2007 7:41 pm Low in fat, high in protein, and the cholesterol is the good kind. However, be sure you eat wild-caught, not the pond raised stuff with the antibiotics ingested.
— Posted by Wright Gore

172. September 5th, 2007 1:22 am -Management Major
It is supply and demand. Canned tuna prices are going up compared to other increasingly more desirable alternative foods. Factors affecting canned tuna sales from the supply side include smaller yields (more and more lesser grade tuna used as "fresh" instead of "canned") and increasing fuel prices. From the demand side, alternative products' prices are getting cheaper or staying the same, so canned tuna is purchased less frequently. The quality of canned

tuna seems to be in question for some potential consumers while the price increase is running off others who are more concerned with price. I'm glad I'm not involved with Bumblebee marketing.

— Posted by Frank Kelly

•

173. September 5th, 2007 10:10 am

Im sure there is a supply side answer, but like everything else i think that there are factors on both sides. Recently the FDA has warrened about increased levels of mercury in albacor (and some other fish.) High levels of mercury can cause infertility and birth defects. Therefore many woman have cut back on their albacor consumption. Im sure this FDA warning has caused men to cut back as well, but since the effects of mercury are not as previlent in men i doubt it has caused the same drop as it has with women.

— Posted by Caroline

•

174. September 5th, 2007 3:24 pm

I think my reasoning is more demand-based, although it is dependent on the supply. Canned tuna has long been konwn to contain high amounts of mercury and as awoman of child bearing age, I'd like to restrict my consumption to "once in a while." status. That said, it's hard to beat a tuna on toasted rye with mustard and lettuce.

— Posted by J

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Naked Self-Promotion

Entourage star Adrian Grenier is also pursuing a career in music these days, playing the drums in a New York City folk band called The Honey Brothers. The self-described group of "Appalachian glam rockers" (perhaps they're fans of [Appalachian State](#)?) told the *Globe and Mail* that they "are influenced by myriad subjects, including the bestselling book, *Freakonomics*."

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Recent Posts

September 5
18 comments

Prostitution, Prostitution Everywhere

As a big fan of prostitution — er, I mean, as someone who's very interested in the social, economic, legal, and psychological elements of prostitution — it's always good to see interesting articles about what's always called “the world's oldest profession.” (If I recall correctly, this premise was once countered on an episode of Barney Miller. [...])

September 5
24 comments

A Little Math Puzzle to Ponder

My good friend Dave Eldan sends me interesting tidbits on a regular basis. More often than not, they are pulled from obituaries. Everyone needs a hobby, I guess.

I found his latest missive very interesting. It is from an obituary by Morton White for the great philosopher and mathematician Willard Van Orman

September 5
17 comments

Quine. (Unless I [...]

Bring Your Questions for the President of Ford Models

In honor of New York Fashion Week, which begins today, our new Q&A subject is John Caplan, the president of Ford Models. In the comments section below, feel free to ask him anything you like, except for personal phone numbers. (See here, here, and here for earlier reader-generated Q&A's.) Ford is one of the largest modeling [...]

September 5
4 comments

When Dubner Talks, People Listen

Well, at least the folks at the PopSci Predictions Exchange listen. Last week Dubner blogged about Jatrophia, a weed that could spearhead a biofuel revolution. At the end of his post, he urged the PopSci Predictions Exchange to launch a contract on Jatrophia. Voila. So far there are only sellers — people betting against Jatrophia — [...]

September 5
3 comments

And Today Is...

September 5 is the day in 1997 when Mother Teresa died at age 87. No word on what she'd have thought of our quorum on street charity.

Archive

Stuff We Weren't Paid to Endorse

If you happen to need a haircut in Cambridge, M.A., try The Hair Connection. You will definitely get a great cut, and perhaps even [find a spouse](#). (SDL)

[Hire a Hero](#) is a not-for-profit organization that helps connect returning soldiers to military-friendly employers. Sounds like a great idea to me. (SDL)

Dr. Alfredo Quiñones-Hinojosa, director of the brain-tumor stem-cell laboratory at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, has a [great first-person article](#) in the current *New England Journal of Medicine*. No doubt we'll soon [see the story in bookstores](#). (SJD)

From the Opinion Blogs

The Opinionator

[Those Arrests in Germany](#)

Well, no sooner do I bring up concerns over Muslim assimilation in Europe than, as if on cue, the German authorities say they ...

Mixed Emotions

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