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## Tiny sardines offer a cheap, nutritious, guilt-free food choice

By [David Suzuki - Victoria News](#)

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Last month, renowned UBC fisheries scientist Daniel Pauly and his colleagues released a study in National Geographic magazine that looked at the global “seafoodprint,” a measure of all the plant matter required to sustain seafood production. The higher up the food chain a seafood product occupies, the more photosynthetic energy is required to produce it and, therefore, the larger its seafoodprint.

For example, eating a pound of tuna represents roughly 100 times the seafoodprint of eating a pound of sardines, according to Pauly.

As long as harvests are tightly controlled to ensure that only a small portion of the total mass of living organisms is taken, eating species lower on the food chain takes much less of the world’s ecosystem energy and is therefore more sustainable.

Species such as sardines, anchovies, herring and mackerels – collectively categorized as small pelagic fish – already make up about 37 per cent of all fish landed from the ocean. The data are varied, but it appears that only about 10 to 25 per cent of small pelagic fish caught in the world are directly consumed by humans. The remaining 75 to 90 per cent are ground up into fish meal and oils to feed pigs, cattle, farmed salmon and chicken, or are used as bait to catch larger fish – an inefficient use of perfectly edible protein.

Aside from their merits as a sustainable food source, small fish are inexpensive, typically caught without using a lot of fossil fuels, and among the healthiest foods a person can eat.

Health Canada recommends pregnant women eat sardines and similar seafoods because they are valuable sources of omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins, calcium and protein.

Because these fish are found in tight schools, capturing them requires little energy, so their carbon footprint is low. Some research suggests small pelagic fish may be the most efficient protein system in the world in terms of the energy used to capture them.

You’d think that any food that is tasty, healthy, sustainable and cheap would be a preferred consumer choice, but direct per capita consumption of these types of fish in North America has dropped steadily since about 1985, and last year, the only remaining sardine and herring canning plant in the U.S. shut down. The trend in the U.K. and Europe is the opposite.

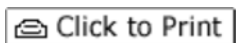
Sardines are a true rarity – a guilt-free food item. Every serving is one less used as bait or feed. Given their nutritional value, it’s possible eating them is one of the secrets to the success of the Sedin brothers. After all, they’re from Sweden, where small fish have always been a popular food choice.

Learn more at [www.davidsuzuki.org](http://www.davidsuzuki.org).

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