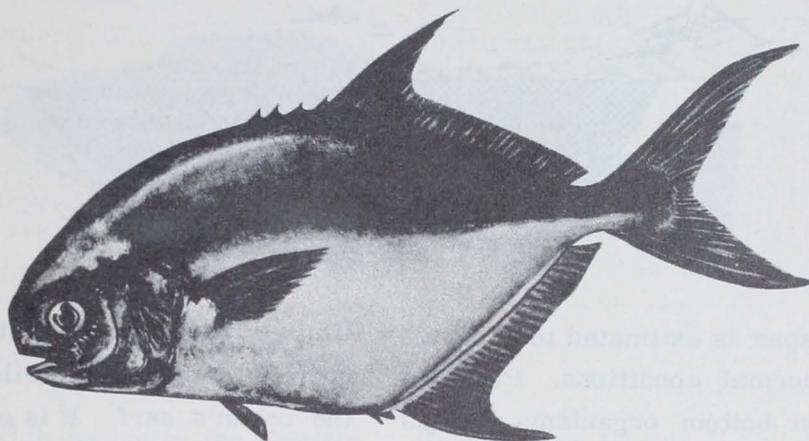


FOOD FISH FACTS



Pompano
(*Trachinotus carolinus*)

Florida pompano, also known as cobblerfish, butterfish, and palmenta, are generally considered one of the most delicious of marine fishes. Most pompano are caught in the waters of the South Atlantic and Gulf coasts of the United States where local demand usually exceeds supply. Some fish are shipped north to gourmet restaurants.

Description

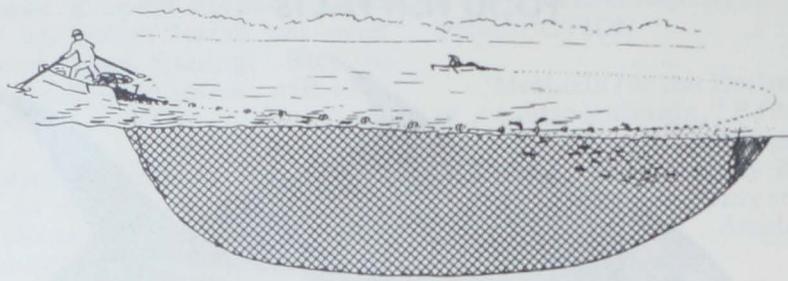
The Florida pompano, one of three species of the *Trachinotus* family, is the only commercially important species. It is a thin, deep-bodied fish with deeply forked caudal and dorsal fins having a silvery body shading to metallic blue above and to a golden yellow ventrally. A blue line appears above and in front of the eyes. The upper fins are dark while the lower fins are yellow, shaded with blue. Pompano have the ability to change color in different surroundings from silvery to very dusky with an intermediate "peppery" stage. Spines and soft rays are found in the dorsal and anal fins. Florida pompano are

not to be confused with the Pacific or California pompano. The latter fish is a member of the butterfish family rather than the pompano family. The true pompano, a relatively small fish, range in weight from $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 pounds commercially, although some fish exceed 6 pounds in weight.

Habitat

The complete life history of this fish is still relatively unknown. Males generally reach maturity in their first year and females in their second year. Spawning is thought to occur offshore in areas where the current will carry the young back to shore. Peak spawning is in the spring although some fish spawn throughout the year. Young pompano, about a month old and less than an inch long, first appear on the Florida beaches in April or May. After a six-week growing period, they migrate northward to New England where they appear in July and remain till October or until cold weather starts them on their journey south to warmer temperatures and

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Runaround gill net

waters. Life span is estimated to be 3 to 4 years under normal conditions. Pompano feed mainly on bottom organisms such as crabs, shrimp, and mussels.

Fishing

Commercial landing of Pompano are made from Virginia to Texas but most of the catch in the United States is from Florida waters. To increase the "never sufficient" supply, airplane spotters have been employed in the Florida Keys to assist fishermen in locating schools of fish. Pompano are caught all year but the major fishery occurs in March, April, and May. Adult pompano are generally netted with commercial trammel or gill nets but haul seines, runarounds, hand lines, and otter trawls are also used.

Farming

Florida pompano have great potential for fish farming because of their high market value, consumer demand, and research progress. Since knowledge of induced spawning and hatching of captive pompano is still

limited to experimental studies, fish farmers have to depend upon wild stock taken from the ocean's surf. It is estimated that some fish have between 400,000 to 600,000 eggs, and once a technique for controlled spawning is perfected, a few fish maintained as brood stock could supply a large number of young for hatchery operations. Farm-raised pompano grow about one inch a month and can reach commercial size of 10 inches in less than a year.

Uses

Florida pompano are excellent for broiling, baking, and planking, and are recommended for pan and deep-fat frying. One of the more exotic, epicurean preparation methods for this delicacy is Pompano en papilote -- seasoned fish baked in oiled paper "envelopes." Pompano are sold "in-the-round" or gutted. Preferred market size is usually 1 to 1½ pounds. (Source: National Marketing Services Office, NMFS, U.S. Department of Commerce, 100 E. Ohio Street, Room 526, Chicago, Illinois 60611).