

2023 CATFISH FARMERS OF THE YEAR

From their ponds to your plate.



The Catfish Institute

2023 ANNUAL REPORT





Dear Friends:

As we turn the page on another year together, I feel as though I must begin by sharing with you the level of pride we take in The Catfish Institute's promotional efforts on behalf of the entire U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish industry.

Now in its 37th year, TCI and its marketing partners have worked diligently to develop and initiate an effective, innovative and comprehensive advertising and promotional campaign. The goal of the organization is and has always been to spur demand and drive increased consumption of our industry's products. Our board of directors and staff strive toward that goal each and every day.

In terms of challenges, 2023 was certainly one for the record books. Feed prices continue to be at record highs, and consumers are clearly feeling the sting of inflation and high interest rates. Slowed consumer spending, particularly on premium proteins like ours, has led to dropping live fish prices — and stubbornly high frozen inventory levels across the industry. Nevertheless, we managed to end the year with relatively flat levels of feed sold and catfish processed.

Perhaps one of the most impactful promotional programs in recent memory, The Catfish Trail continues to expand its footprint and draws a meaningful spotlight on our all-important restaurant friends. There are now 50 eateries featured on the trail, and it is a key element of our cross-platform consumer messaging.

New for TCI this year was a sponsorship of the "True South" television show, which airs seasonally on the ESPN family of networks. The program is hosted by John T Edge, a longtime friend of the industry and a leading thinker in the culinary world, particularly across the South.

Our work with national influencers doesn't stop there. TCI has continued to expand its work with online cooks, turning their individual social media followers into new fans of U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish — one online post at a time.

During difficult times such as these, we cannot understate the importance of catfish purchases made through the federal government's various USDA programs. This year alone, we were able to secure the sale of more than 14 million pounds of catfish fillets, which are used to stock the shelves of government food distribution programs throughout the nation.

In closing, I would like to offer my heartfelt appreciation for the continued support of the member feed mills that fund The Catfish Institute, without which we would be unable to fight for our place among America's favorite foods.

Roger E. Barlow
President, The Catfish Institute

Harry Simmons, Jr.
Chairman, The Catfish Institute

The Catfish Institute Member Feed Mills

Alabama Catfish Feed Mill, LLC
Uniontown, Alabama

Delta Western
Indianola, Mississippi

Fishbelt Feeds
Moorhead, Mississippi

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Reaching consumers of U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish, existing or new, young or old, continues to be a challenging task with the plethora of media channels available in today's world.

As you will read in The Catfish Institute's 2023 Annual Report, our marketing team worked to develop a multi-platform approach for the industry's marketing and promotional campaign this year, full of fresh thoughts steered by new insights on consumer preferences and spending habits.

The mission of The Catfish Institute is to drive top-of-mind awareness and spur consumer demand for U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish. Throughout 2023, we pursued the following primary areas of focus: an all-new TCI website design for UScatfish.com; continued expansion of The Catfish Trail; National Catfish Day and National Catfish Month promotions; social media and a far reaching influencer marketing campaign; traditional TV, radio and print ads featuring our Catfish Farmers of the Year; and so much more.

We hope you will continue reading as we highlight these and many other key marketing elements from the year.

All-New Website

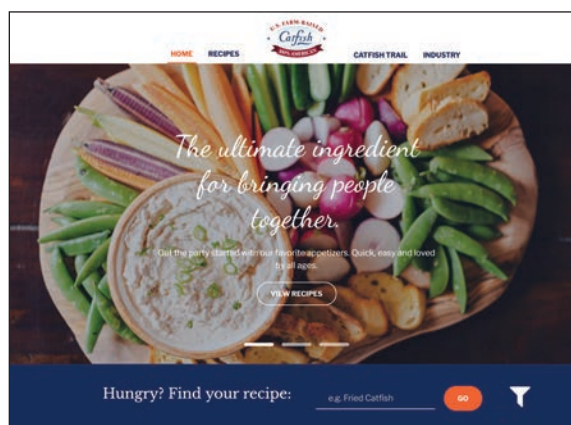
After extensive research in 2022, TCI discovered that an all-new website redesign would be critical to the growth of our digital following — and would be necessary to improve the online presence of the U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish industry as a whole.

During the first quarter of the year, our marketing team worked tirelessly to rebuild the site from the ground-up, thinking through every word and each page to ensure that consumers would have the best possible experience.

In particular, our research showed that customers wanted easier interaction with the restaurants on the Catfish Trail, with the ability to see exactly where they were located. The new site features a fully interactive map alongside our beautifully produced video elements so that users can fully immerse themselves in our restaurant trail.

The new design also improves the background processes as well, allowing our team to quickly and easily add and expand restaurants and locations as the Catfish Trail project continues to grow and evolve.

The new webpage also features a totally rebuilt recipe section. In the past, users tended to get bogged down when searching for a particular recipe of interest. No longer! The new site now utilizes vastly improved methods of navigating, searching, sharing and printing our rich library. With literally hundreds of recipes available, the new site ensures that it is easy for cooks to locate and utilize a U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish recipe in mere seconds.



Even More Growth for The Catfish Trail

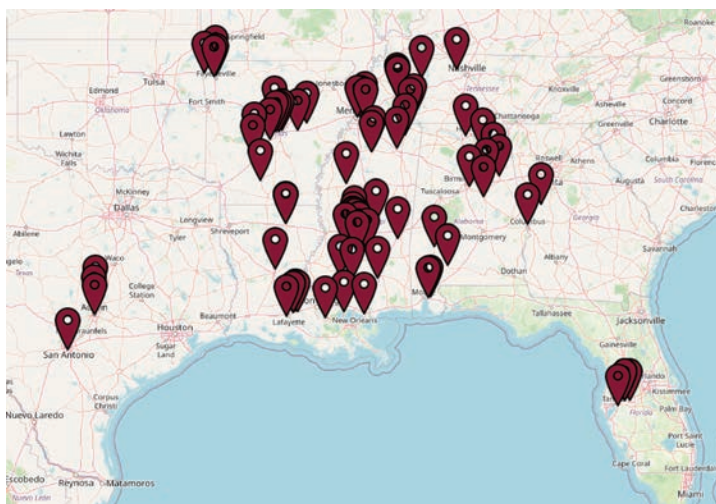
In its third year, The Catfish Trail has grown from its original 9 restaurants to over 70 restaurant locations spread across 9 different states.

As the Trail continues its expansion, it has truly been exciting to hear the passion that the featured owners and chefs have for U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish, as well as their staunch support of the industry.

Each restaurant on the Catfish Trail truly specializes in U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish dishes. It is a pleasure for our TCI marketing team to work with these restaurateurs to promote not only our industry, but also the integral roll we each play in the other's success.

The restaurants have been thrilled to partner with the industry, and they have helped promote the trail by sharing it on their social media — and by hanging the provided signs in their restaurants. A QR code at the base of each sign, when scanned with a smartphone, will lead consumers directly to UScatfish.com, where they can learn more about our industry and the Catfish Trail.

We anticipate even greater growth in 2024. See you on the Catfish Trail!



“In the more than 36 years I’ve been involved in the catfish industry, I’ve never been so excited about a program as with the Catfish Trail and the many possibilities it offers.”

– MIKE MCCALL, editor of the Catfish Journal



Social Media Influencers

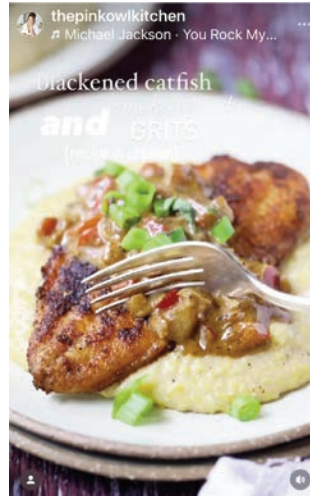
This past year saw the expansion of our already successful “Influencer” program, which has allowed us to greatly amplify our ability to share the versatility and benefits of eating U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish. Our key message this year centered around the creed that *U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish is a choice you can be proud of.*

In 2023, we focused on influencers with larger follower counts who were a natural fit for promoting U.S. Catfish, and the response was incredible. These influencer partners reached over 1.7 million followers through their social media channels. Our partners really stepped up to support the industry with their creativity and the engagement of their followers.

Patrick McMenemy of “Southern Vibin,” with his cool style, connects instantly with his audience of over a million followers between Facebook and Instagram. Based in Louisiana, he cooks everything with excitement and a Cajun flair. His Crab Stuffed Fried U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish garnered over 64,000 likes on Instagram alone.

Justin Boudreaux from “Boudreaux's Backyard” in Louisiana has almost 300,000 followers across Facebook and Instagram. Justin specializes in Cajun cuisine with a fun and approachable style. His new recipes, including Crispy U.S. Farm-Raised Buttermilk Catfish Sandwich, Catfish Couvillion, and Sautéed U.S Farm-Raised Catfish served over Sweet Roasted Corn Grits, captured the attention of thousands, garnering up to 5,000 likes and hundreds of comments on a single post.

We also partnered with Dwalette King of “Plated by Dee,” based in Mississippi, with over 170,000 Instagram followers. She focuses on comfort food, and her



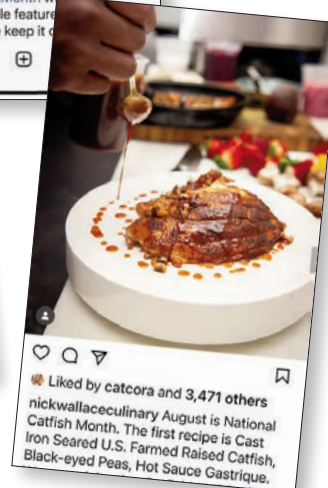
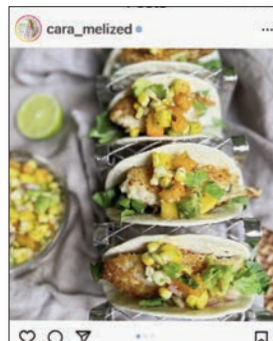
“TCI’s social media marketing throughout the holidays really highlights catfish in new and exciting ways.”

– WALLACE DRURY,
2023 Alabama Catfish Farmer of the Year

audience loves U.S. Catfish! Some of her recipes included Bourbon Glazed Catfish Skewers and Lemon Pepper Fried Catfish Strips, but the fan favorite was her Catfish PoBoy post, which received over 17,000 likes.

In addition to these, we worked with Mississippi-based influencers Chef Nick Wallace, Jay Morgan of “Friday Night Porch Party,” and Ashley Boyd of the “Pink Owl Kitchen;” and Georgia-based influencer Erica Thomas of “Eating with Erica.”

We continue to appreciate the work of our influencer partners and the way they are engaged and excited to promote U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish. Our alignment with them allows TCI to reach new and existing consumers in new and exciting ways, as we seek to continually expand our reach.





Email Campaign

We have an incredible audience of subscribers to TCI's e-mail marketing campaigns — people who love eating U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish and choose to support the industry.

Using this mailing list, our team sends monthly e-mails ensuring that U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish remains top-of-mind. Each distribution features messages

containing new recipe ideas, information about the Catfish Trail, opportunities to support the industry, or special features from the Catfish Farmers of the Year.

These emails have achieved impressive open and click-through rates, indicating that our readers truly connect with the content. If you are not already on our mailing list, please feel free to contact us!



The images above are examples of The Catfish Institute's monthly e-mail campaigns, which were sent to tens of thousands of recipients throughout 2023. Seasonal recipes ideas and beautiful photography have led to impressive click-through rates that are far above the industry average.



In 1987, President Ronald Reagan officially designated June 25th as National Catfish Day to recognize the value of U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish. We hope you join us in celebration by saluting our American farmers and preparing U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish for the whole family. Check out some of our favorite recipes below.

[VIEW ALL RECIPES](#)



Bacon Potato Catfish Casserole
Everyone will be talking (and dreaming) about this one.

[VIEW RECIPE](#)



Catfish and Orzo Stuffed Bell Peppers
A refreshing bite for these warm-weather months.

[VIEW RECIPE](#)



National Catfish Day is great time to support local restaurants serving U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish. Choose from over 30 one-of-a-kind stops on The Catfish Trail.

[FIND YOUR STOP](#)



WELCOME TO THE CATFISH TRAIL!

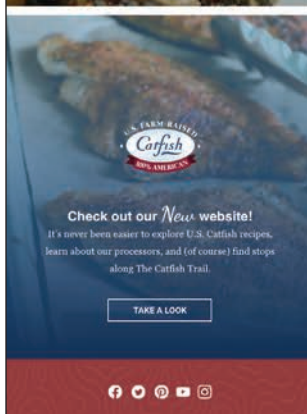
Spanning six states and hundreds of miles, these restaurants serve U.S. Catfish the way it was meant to be enjoyed – with a real story and a friendly smile. Whether you're planning a road trip or just a quick getaway, you can always eat like a local on The Catfish Trail.

[FIND YOUR STOP](#)

★★★★★

FRIED, BLACKENED, PAN-SEARED
one-of-a-kind recipes

Flavor is king on The Catfish Trail. From classic fried strips to innovative new flavors, every restaurant has their own signature dish.



Check out our New website!
It's never been easier to explore U.S. Catfish recipes, learn about our processors, and (of course) find stops along The Catfish Trail.

[TAKE A LOOK](#)



National Catfish Month

National Catfish Month (in August) and National Catfish Day (in June) are two of our favorite times of the year. These popular events provide opportunities to promote the industry and the hard working farmers who make it all possible, and our promotional calendar is filled with consumer messaging tactics that allow us to take full advantage.

Messaging in social media and OTT was focused on the quality and importance of selecting U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish. We also utilized our Catfish Farmers of the Year with special messages that were promoted through traditional TV and radio spots, the website, social media and brochures.

This year, the campaigns garnered over 6.3 million impressions through tactics like streaming/digital video spots, digital display ads, Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest. We continued to expand our email marketing campaigns, and our influencers worked overtime to garner even greater attention than normal to build impressions and to drive thousands of new users to the all-new UScatfish.com website.



“National Catfish Month is known throughout the country thanks to TCI’s advertising and public relations efforts.”

– DICK BAXTER,
2023 Arkansas Catfish Farmer of the Year

New and Traditional Media

TCI utilized an increasingly broad range of media types to target consumers in 2023— some very traditional, and some cutting edge. Throughout the year, traditional television, radio and print advertising were paired with the growing streaming media category, also known as “over the top” or OTT advertising.

Our ads were heard and seen all across the nation, but particular emphasis was placed on our core markets throughout the greater South.

The 2023 Catfish Farmers of the Year starred in a series of six 30-second TV ads, some of which were designed specifically to drive viewers to the website for The Catfish Trail, where they could be inspired to visit a nearby catfish-focused restaurant.

Another new addition for 2023, TCI partnered with famed Oxford, Mississippi-based foodie John T Edge to sponsor his TrueSouth television program, which airs seasonally on the ESPN family of networks. Each episode explores the culinary culture of a different southern city, connecting with chefs and home cooks to tell the story of how food impacts society. And of course, catfish is frequently on the menu!

U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish vs. Imported Messaging

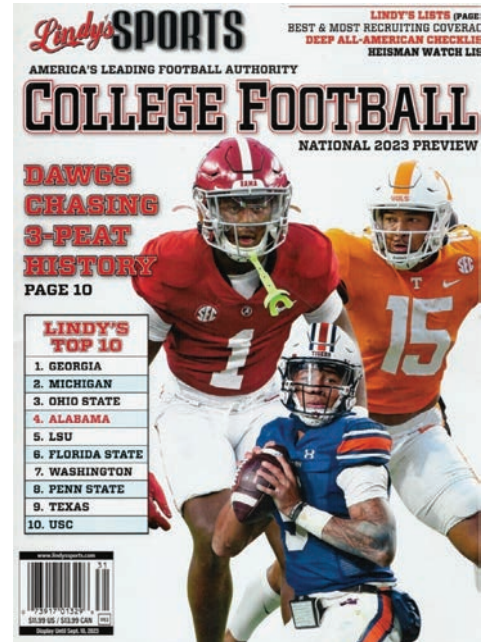
In response to concerns over better differentiating U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish from similar imported species, TCI worked to develop educational messaging to inform consumers about the importance of looking for the U.S. Catfish seal — both in the restaurant and in the grocery store.

Our messaging was developed in partnership with the aforementioned author and television host, John T Edge, along with comments directly from restaurateurs featured on the Catfish Trail.

Specific OTT advertising was created and rolled out to consumers, and our social media influencer partners utilized new talking points about buying U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish and looking for the label whenever their posted on their channels.

“The work TCI does in promoting our industry and utilizing the farmers of the year has never been more important.”

— BOBBY JONES,
2023 Mississippi Catfish Farmer of the Year



Collateral Branding

Each year, TCI works to develop new and innovative recipes for enjoying U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish, whether you are a home cook or a restaurant chef.

Beautiful recipe photography is then produced and transformed into colorful new printed collateral pieces, providing beneficial information to masses of consumers across the nation.

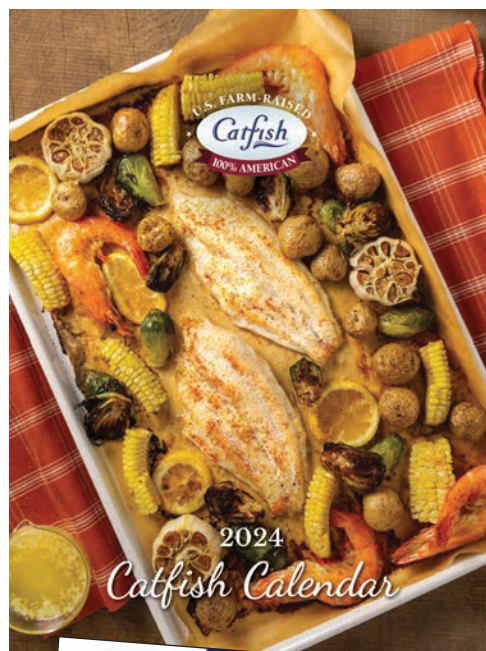
Of course, our annual U.S. Catfish Calendar is always a fan favorite. This year, it features a dozen all-new recipe ideas that are sure to inspire and delight.

In addition, we worked with the 2023 Catfish Farmers of the Year to tell their stories and share their favorite recipes through our annual "Favorite Recipes" brochure.

These brochures continue to be popular among our audience as we seek to connect the fish to the farmers. It also serves as a point of pride for those who are selected each year for this honor by their respective state organizations from Alabama, Arkansas and Mississippi.

"Our customers always enjoy receiving the beautiful collateral brochures produced each year by The Catfish Institute."

– COOPER BATTLE,
catfish farmer and processor
from Tunica, Mississippi



2023 Holiday Campaign

TCI's holiday messaging campaign continues to grow and evolve each year, as we seek to carve out a place at the table, among the venerable hams and turkeys, for our beloved U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish.

This year's message focused on the idea that U.S. Catfish is the perfect ingredient for bringing people together. Holiday-specific imagery and recipes were used to really drive that home for viewers, and we leaned into an authentic "influencer" style of content that ensures that TCI's messages feel natural and authentic.



Co-Marketing Programs

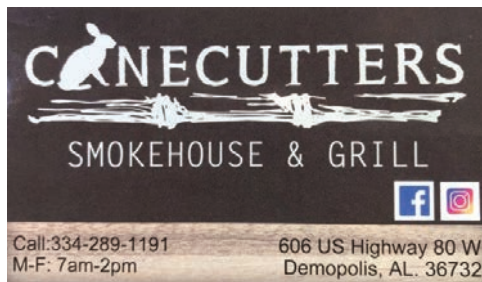
As in previous years, TCI's co-marketing programs seek to leverage industry funds by working in conjunction with processors, distributors, restaurants, grocery stores and state organizations to support increased sales and advertising campaigns for U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish.

The *Partnership Program* provides reimbursement for 50 percent of applicable marketing costs, up to a set amount approved annually by the TCI board of directors, throughout the calendar year.

These partnership dollars fund billboard, television and radio advertisements; collateral materials; website development; and many other special promotions. All funding requests are carefully reviewed to ensure validity and sound use of industry resources.

Another co-marketing initiative, the *Sales Incentive Program*, leverages processor relationships to fund valuable consumer-directed promotions in restaurant and grocery chains across the nation.

Creating these new partnerships with large restaurant groups, local catfish houses, grocery store operators and even high-end, white tablecloth establishments continues to open new doors for our industry sales teams, as they seek to drive sales and broaden markets for U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish. Examples of TCI's co-marketing programs at work in the marketplace can be seen on the pages that follow.





Cathfish Fry Sale!

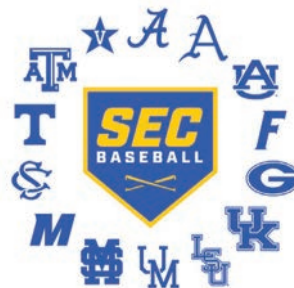
Simmons Cathfish Fillet Bites 10 to 12oz, 100% pure \$15.99 with oil	Dole Dole Classic Chopped 10 to 12oz \$1.49 with oil
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SIMMONS CATTFISH FILLET BITES

Northeast fillet steaks, perfect for the whole family. Great for salads, soups, pasta, casseroles, omelets, and more!

SLAP 100% MAPLE 10 to 12oz \$2.29 with oil	Step To Meats Step To Meats 10 to 12oz \$2.29 with oil
Red Potatoes or Yellow Potatoes 10 to 12oz \$1.99 with oil	Cheddar Cheese 10 to 12oz \$2.99 with oil
Cheddar Cheese 10 to 12oz \$3.99 with oil	Cheddar Cheese 10 to 12oz \$2.99 with oil
Cheddar Cheese 10 to 12oz \$3.99 with oil	Cheddar Cheese 10 to 12oz \$2.99 with oil

There's a covered market just around the corner!









For even more recipes, be sure to visit UScatfish.com

THE CATFISH INSTITUTE

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