



Arroyabe Bonito Tuna

Producer: Conservas la Gaviota

Region: Pays Basque, Spain

Employees: approximately 60

Authenticity

The product or recipe is native to the producer's region and has historically been part of the regional food culture.

The Bonito del Norte, named scientifically *Thunnus Alalunga*, or White Tuna is one of the most highly developed within the tuna family. They are warm-blooded, and flourish in the oceans of tropical, subtropical, and temperate climates. They can be found between the parallels 50° N and 40° S, of the Pacific, Indian and Atlantic Oceans.

The Atlantic White Tuna carries out two migrations in its lifetime that are easily differentiated by its stage of maturity. The young fish spend the winter in the waters near the Azores. At the end of the spring they migrate in search of food, reaching as far as the waters of the Bay of Biscay, off the coast of Spain, where they remain until the Autumn when they return towards their places of origin.

The northern White Tuna caught in the Bay of Biscay waters are known as Bonito del Norte. Of all the various tunas, Northern Bonito, smaller than its blue fin and yellow fin cousins, is considered of the highest quality, due to its extreme white meat, exquisite taste, and incomparable texture. Being a migratory fish that covers almost unimaginable distances annually in search of food, comfortable temperatures and familiar spawning grounds, it uses a great deal of energy which is built up seasonally in the fish. High energy equates to a high oil content. And when the fish are at their plumpest and oiliest is when the fishermen catch them, for they are tastiest at that point.

The Bonito has a life expectancy of 7 to 8 years and can grow up to one meter in length and weigh over 10 kilos. Fishing Bonito has historically been one of the main economic incomes for the local fishermen, who work the waters off the coast of Spain from June till October.

The Bonito is a protein-rich food with a high nutritional value, and it contains essential amino acids (lysine, methionine, tryosine, etc.). Its oils contain a large amount of polyunsaturated fatty acids, which help to lower the level of cholesterol and triglycerides. It provides liposoluble vitamins (A,D,E, and K), and those of the B group, plus iron, calcium, and sodium. It is also high in Omega 3. The mercury content, which is often a concern in tuna, is much lower in Bonito from the Bay of Biscay.

Board Feedback & Questions:

This product certainly meets authenticity requirements.

Local Ownership

The producing company is privately or worker-owned with a majority of the owners actively participating in the company.

Conservas la Gaviota, S.L. is a Limited Association, which is similar to an LLC in the U.S. It was founded in 1993 and owned and run by Victor Aguirre and José Ramon Ruiz de Azua, both originally from the area.

The company is located in Bermeo, a small well-established fishing port in the Basque Region of Northern Spain. Their canned and salted fish products are backed by more than 100 years of experience and tradition in processing fish.

Board Feedback & Questions:

Super, just the type of company that Rooted Foods stands for.

Local Sourcing

A majority of all ingredients are purchased within the region in which the company is located (region is defined as bioregion or country depending on the size and geographic make up of the area), AND is either grown directly by the producing company or is purchased direct from the farmer or a farmer organization at fair prices.

Ingredients: Bonito white meat tuna 67.5%, olive oil 32.3%, brine 0.2%

The fish are caught using rods and live bait, which is the most selective and environmentally sensitive method, and ensures the highest quality product. The boats only fish for 2 weeks at a time before returning to port, allowing them to deliver fresh fish to the canneries. The company buys directly from the fisherman when they arrive to port.

The oil is high quality refined olive oil (non-refined oil would give too strong a flavor and smell to the tuna) purchased from Aceites Toledo from the Toledo region in Spain. The Basque Region does not produce olive oil. The brine is purchased from Salinera La Noria, a local salt company who produces it from the water in which the tuna has been boiled. No additional salt is added to the bonito.

Board Feedback & Questions:

About as local as possible. Re. grades: Is there another way to assess and make the quality and process of the olive oil transparent? The refining process of the oil is done according to very high EU standards. All documentation from Aceites Toledo is on file with Rooted Foods.

Social Responsibility

The company's social and financial practices and policies are designed to ensure maximum benefit to the company's employees and to the local community and economy.

The company's mission is to encourage traditional fishing methods that are respectful of the ocean and the life it contains, as well as contributing to and supporting a rich local economy. They purchase fresh fish directly from the fisherman in their port and

employee local people who have a long tradition and much experience of working in the fishing industry.

Employees: The crew consists of approximately 60 people, 85% of whom are women. The company works a diverse line of products to be able to offer secure employment year round to their employees. Because of the changing demographic in the area, there are less native workers, and legal immigrants now make up 30% of the company's workforce. But these immigrants have become a part of the local community, residing there year round. Wages are set using a local collective agreement, and depend on the type of job, yet the lowest paying job has a salary that is double the minimum wage set by the government. There is no profit-sharing program in place.

All employees are covered by the Spanish Public Health System that provides health, medicines, and a pension plan. The company also has a private insurance policy to cover accidents and worker's compensation.

The company continually reinvests in the production process to improve the machinery to reduce the risk of injury and the need for repetitive motions. All employees work 8 hours a day Monday through Thursday, and only mornings on Friday. Training courses are available for all employees in relation to their jobs, such as food handling, HACCP, etc.

Community: The company tries to support local businesses whenever feasible, such as local banks and machine maintenance. They support local festivals, events and town food shows, and several charity projects, through the donation of free product.

Board Feedback & Questions:

Meets/Exceeds criteria.

Environmental Stewardship

The company's environmental practices and policies are designed to minimize environmental impact through the elimination of chemicals and waste, and the reduction of resource use.

Cultivation: During the summer months, when warm weather moves in to the eastern part of the Bay of Biscay, the Bonito begins to appear in these waters in tightly packed shoals. It is here, along the so-called "Bonito Coast" that the year's most fruitful campaigns takes place. The fish are caught using rods and live bait, which is the most selective and environmentally sensitive method, and the one that brings in the highest quality fish. This method is known as the traditional way, which became well established by the beginning of the 20th century. The method is dolphin-safe.

The company is located in the fishing port of Bermeo, which has the largest tuna fleet on the Cantabric Sea, allowing the company to obtain the best and freshest tuna available.

Production & Facility Management: Once the fish is caught it must be cleaned, cooked and packed within 24 hours to retain freshness. Upon arrival, every fish receives a lot number to be able to trace its origin, date purchased, boat, etc. The production process has six steps: (1) remove the head and cut into smaller pieces by hand; (2) boil

or fry; (3) clean and can or bottle by hand ;(4) add preserving oil, marinade or brine; (5) sterilize; (6) final lab test for quality assurance.

Traditionally in Spain, the Bonito is packed in olive oil. It is best to allow the tuna to "age" in the tin to allow the tuna to fully absorb the olive oil. Some are aged for upwards of five years. No chemical preservatives, coloring, or other additives are used at any point during the process.

The production process uses water, electricity and natural gas. The company works with an independent research center that monitors the company's resource use and works with them to reduce waste. The company adopts their guidelines and is audited on a regular basis to ensure compliance. The company complies with all government health certificates, is HACCP compliant, and has ISO 9001:2000 for quality control. They also are often audited by their large customers who purchase their products under private brands.

All organic waste material is used by another company to produce fishmeal. The company is a member of IHOBE, an environmental protection association that works alongside the Environmental Ministry to execute the environmental policy of the Basque Regional Government. (www.ihobe.net)

Packaging: Most of the company's products are packed in tin or glass jars, and use water-based inks. All packaging is 100% recyclable.

Board Feedback & Questions:

Assessing seafood products is difficult. It is hard to maintain environmental responsibility in the open waters. Seems promising. Based on their season, it appears they do not disrupt spawning or young fish. Nice work.

Overall Board Assessment

This company is a good example of good Sea stewards and socially responsible company. The bonito tuna is delicious. Hard to go back to any other tuna after tasting this.