



# Asian Carp: If You Can't Beat 'em, Eat 'em

As Asian Carp Threaten to Invade Northern Lakes, Chicago Chef and Other Grocers Offer Solutions to Expanding Problem

By ERIC HORNG

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At this week's National Grocers Association convention in Las Vegas, celebrity chef Philippe Parola was touting his new favorite fish.

"[It has] 70-percent more [Omega-3](#) than in catfish and tilapia," an animated Parola told an assembled crowd at his booth. "No mercury because it's a filter fish."

Parola was talking about the [Asian carp](#) -- a slimy, boney fish that breeds quickly and is widely considered a pest. Parola's message: Eat the carp. [Save the Great Lakes](#).

"It's amazing how these [fish are taking over](#)," Parola said. "We need to do something."

After being imported from China during the 1970s to clean fish farms of algae in the southern U.S., the Asian carp steadily spread north up the Mississippi and other rivers.

The fish -- which are known for leaping out of the water when startled by boat motors -- is now just a short swim from Lake Michigan and the [Great Lakes](#), home to a \$7 billion fishing and re-creation industry.

"The problem is it has a huge appetite, and it eats food that all the other fish try to eat," said Philip Willink, a fish biologist at the Field Museum in Chicago. "My greatest fear is for the Great Lakes' yellow perch and walleye. They will be hit really hard."

To keep the carp at bay, officials have used poison and electrified fences at critical points along the Illinois River, which connects to Lake Michigan. The federal government is now considering closing part of the river altogether, but barge captains and other business owners say billions of dollars in commerce would be affected.

"You have 30-plus boat yards and marinas that go through this river system to the Great Lakes," said Eric Rentner, who runs a boat storage facility. "What's going to happen to them?"

So far, no carp have been found in the lake, but Willink fears that may be inevitable.

"To date, no plans have been put forward that are guaranteed to stop them," Willink said. "It's just a matter of time before they get into the Great Lakes."

And that's why some people, like Chef Parola, say if you can't beat them, eat them. Commercializing Asian carp, Parola says, will help reduce its population and help the economy.

## Stop Carping -- Just Make Food Out of the Fish

"Then the fisherman will make a living out of this fish," Parola said. "The processing plant is going to make a profit out of it. The grocery store is going to make a living out of it."

Parola has devised numerous carp recipes -- from carp cakes to carp gumbo. He offered samples at the grocers convention.

"Clean, smooth, very nice," said one man who sampled a carp spread.

For Parola and others, it's a tasty solution to this