

Aquacultured Seahorses

How is it that aquaculture is not doing more harm than good to the seahorse populations in the wild?

By Carol Cozzi-Schmarr

Q. How is it that aquaculture is not doing more harm than good to the seahorse populations in the wild? I have heard that aquaculture operations take so many pregnant males from the wild that they can deplete the wild seahorses faster than any collectors.

Thanks, Kao

A. This is a concern that many people had a few years ago when the first farmed seahorses became available on the market. It is a legitimate question that deserves a good answer. Before the seahorse became an endangered species it was possible for anyone to buy or collect as many wild-caught seahorses as they could find. A breeder could collect wild gravid (pregnant males) and simply rear the offspring without ever having to set up a breeding program, especially if they were located in a place where it was easy to collect the adults from the wild. This kind of a practice is not considered to be a good aquaculture practice and I would never endorse the practice. If an aquaculture operation does undertake this kind of practice they are causing harm to the wild population and this should not be allowed. Of course now that the seahorse is listed as an endangered species and protected by the international CITES act, I doubt any operation would dare to do such a thing. If they are doing this I would suggest that you not buy from them.

But even before the seahorse was protected by CITES it was simply not a good aquaculture practice to repeatedly take pregnant males from the wild. Any decent aquaculture operation will invest a lot of money and time into a modern breeding program that only allows collection from the wild once. If you are concerned about the origin of the broodstock (breeding adults) that are the parents of your seahorses, ask your supplier. They should be happy to explain!