

## **U.S. Commercial Blue Crab Landings, Dockside Values, and Wholesale Prices**

In this issue, Dr. Posadas describes the long-term trends in blue crab commercial landings, dockside prices, and wholesale prices in the U.S. Special considerations are placed on the softshell blue crab landings, dockside values, dockside prices, and wholesale prices in the domestic markets. This price and market analysis provides the price and size benchmarks for the ongoing research on the economic feasibility of pond grow-out production of blue softshell crabs.

### **Suggested Citation:**

Posadas, Benedict C. Commercial blue crab landings, dockside values, and wholesale prices. Mississippi MarketMaker Newsletter, Vol. 10, No. 4. April 30, 2020.  
<http://extension.msstate.edu/newsletters/mississippi-marke.tmaker>.

The blue crab (*Callinectes sapidus*) is also known as the blue claw, soft shell crab, blue swimming crab. Named for the light-blue tint on its claws, they have a thick shell that turns orange when cooked. If you are interested, several Mississippi Gulf blue crab recipes are available for download from <https://msseafood.com/cook/>.

I love boiling or steaming blue crabs in a huge pot with all the spices that enhance its flavor. We gather as a family and friends during holidays in front of dozens of boiled blue crabs harvested from the Mississippi growing waters. Lately, the retail prices have become prohibitive, and the supply a bit unstable.

## Blue Crab Commercial Landings

The long-term commercial landings of blue crabs harvested in the U.S. since 1950 exhibited different peaks in various decades. In the 1950s, landings hovered above 100 million pounds per year. From 1960 to 1980, landings fluctuated around 150 million pounds per year. Between 1980 and 2000, landings swung around 200 million pounds per year.

During the past eight years after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010, an average of more than 157 million pounds of blue crabs were landed in the U.S. per year. About 97.8 percent of these annual landings consisted of hard blue crabs with the rest comprising of soft and peeler blue crabs. The total dockside values of blue crabs harvested in the U.S. grew to more than \$200 million annually during the past eight years.

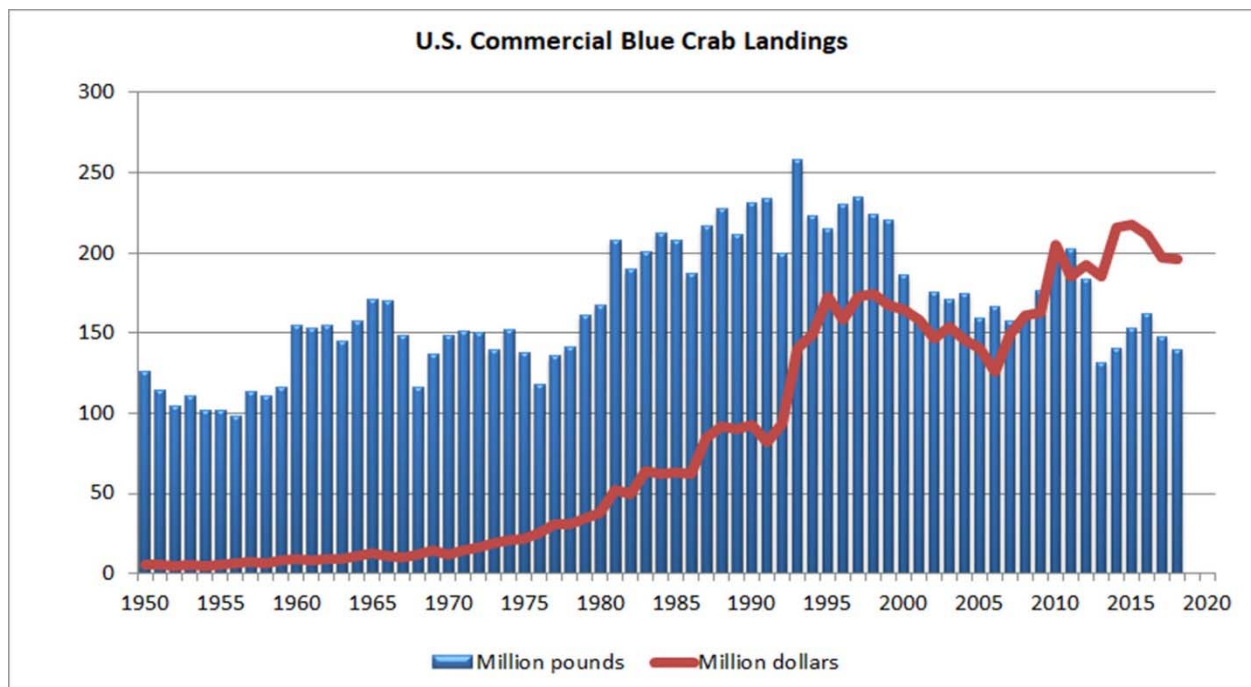


Figure 1. The primary vertical axis of this chart shows the yearly commercial landings of blue crabs in the entire United States, in millions of pounds. The dockside values are shown in the secondary vertical axis, in millions of dollars. The source of raw data is the NOAA Fisheries at <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/>.

The top four states which landed more than 78 percent of all the blue crabs in 2018 were as follows:

1. Louisiana (30.6%),
2. Maryland (19.9%),
3. Virginia (15.3%), and
4. North Carolina (12.2%).

The next six lower blue crab producing states included the following states:

1. Florida-West Coast (3.9%),
2. New Jersey (3.9%),
3. Georgia (3.2%),
4. South Carolina (2.8%),
5. Delaware (2.8%),
6. Texas (2.5%), and
7. Florida-East Coast (1.4%).

The least blue crab producing states were as follows:

1. Alabama (0.7%),
2. Mississippi (0.4%), and
3. New York (0.4%).

The average ex-vessel or dockside prices of blue crabs were imputed from commercial landings and dockside values. Dockside prices continued to increase from 1950 to 2000. They leveled off at or below one dollar per pound in the decade starting in 2000. During the past six years, dockside prices hovered around \$1.40 per pound.

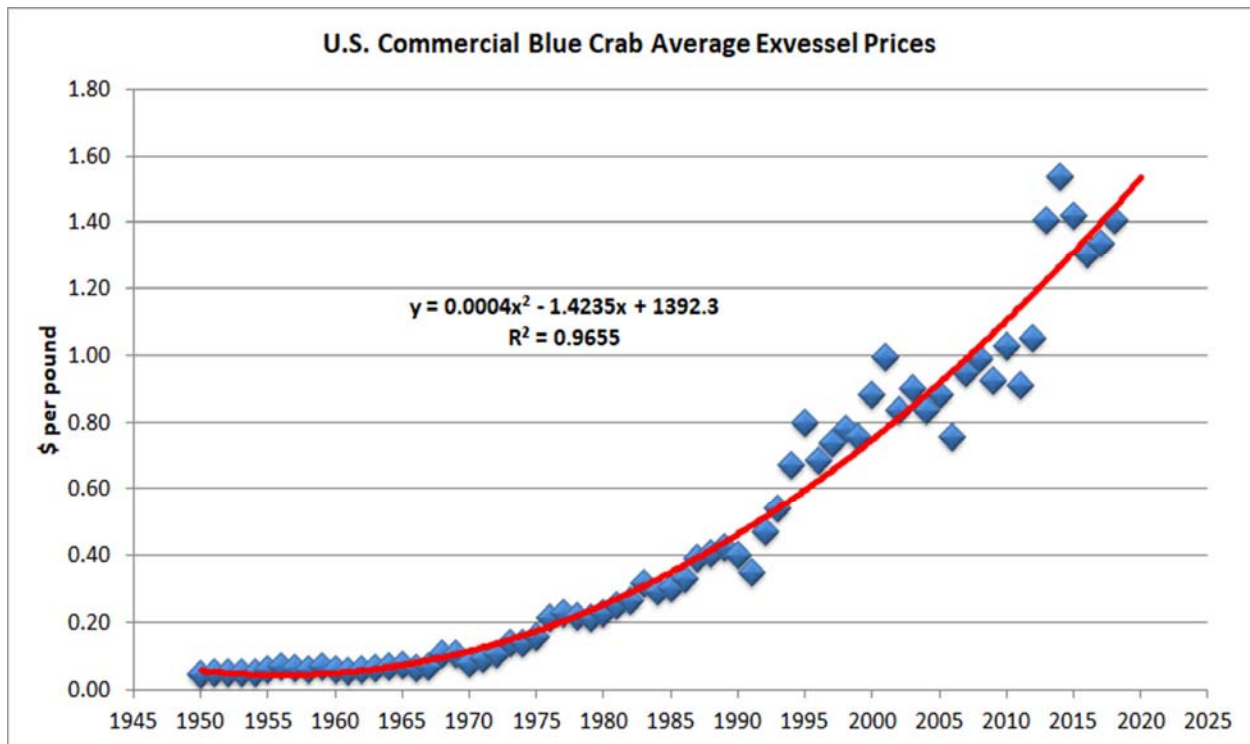


Figure 2 shows the average dockside prices of blue crabs harvested in the U.S. in dollars per pound. The source of raw data is the NOAA Fisheries at <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/>.

### Softshell Blue Crab Commercial Landings

The commercial landings of blue softshell crabs went downhill from more than four million pounds per year in 1950 to about two million pounds per year in 1980. Landings started to climb back up to six million pounds until early 2000 but fell to nearly five million pounds during the succeeding four years. From 2005 up to the present, landings dramatically declined to about two million pounds per year.

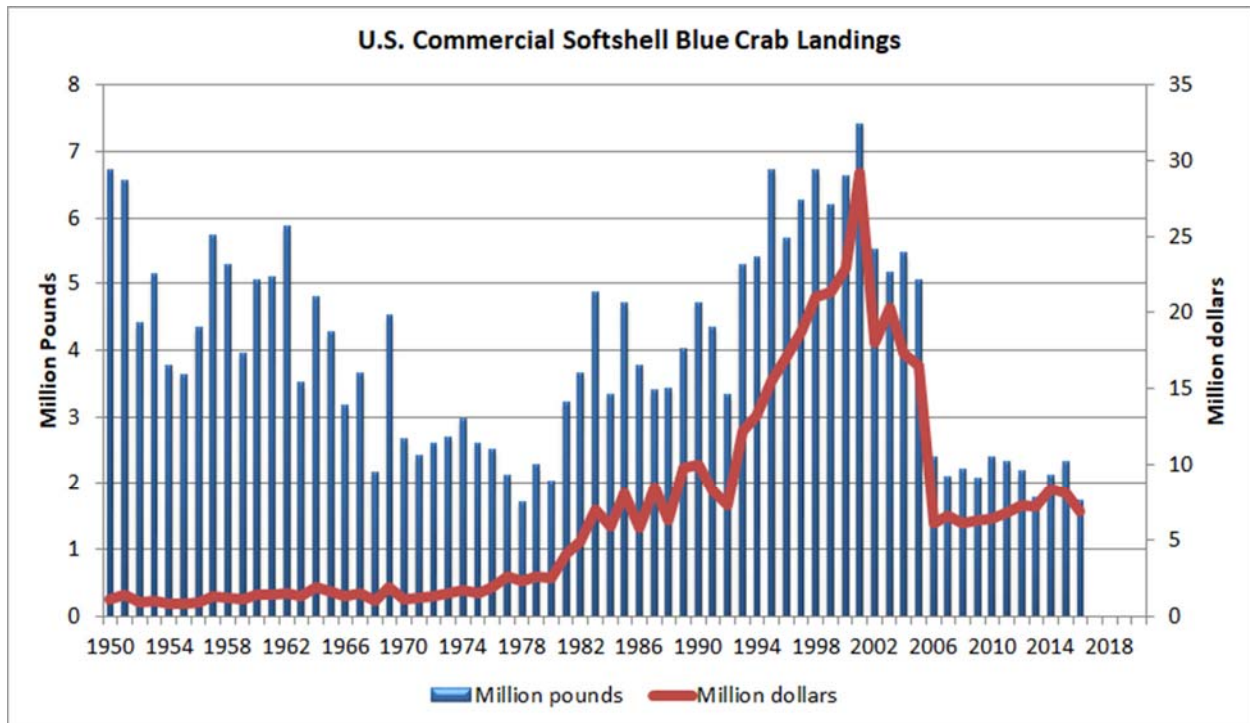


Figure 3. The primary vertical axis of this chart shows the yearly commercial landings of blue softshell crabs in the entire United States, in millions of pounds. The dockside values are shown in the secondary vertical axis, in millions of dollars. The source of raw data is the NOAA Fisheries at <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/>.

The top suppliers of soft and peeler blue crabs in 2016 were the following states:

1. Virginia (75%),
2. Louisiana (16%), and
3. Florida (6%).

Some landings of blue softshell crabs were reported in Maryland (1.3%), New Jersey (1.2%), and Mississippi (0.6%).

The average ex-vessel or dockside prices of blue crabs were estimated from commercial landings and dockside values. Dockside prices persistently rose from 1950 to 2000. They fell to \$2.50-3.50 per pound in the decade starting in 2000. During the past five years, dockside prices lingered between \$3.50 and \$4.00 per pound.

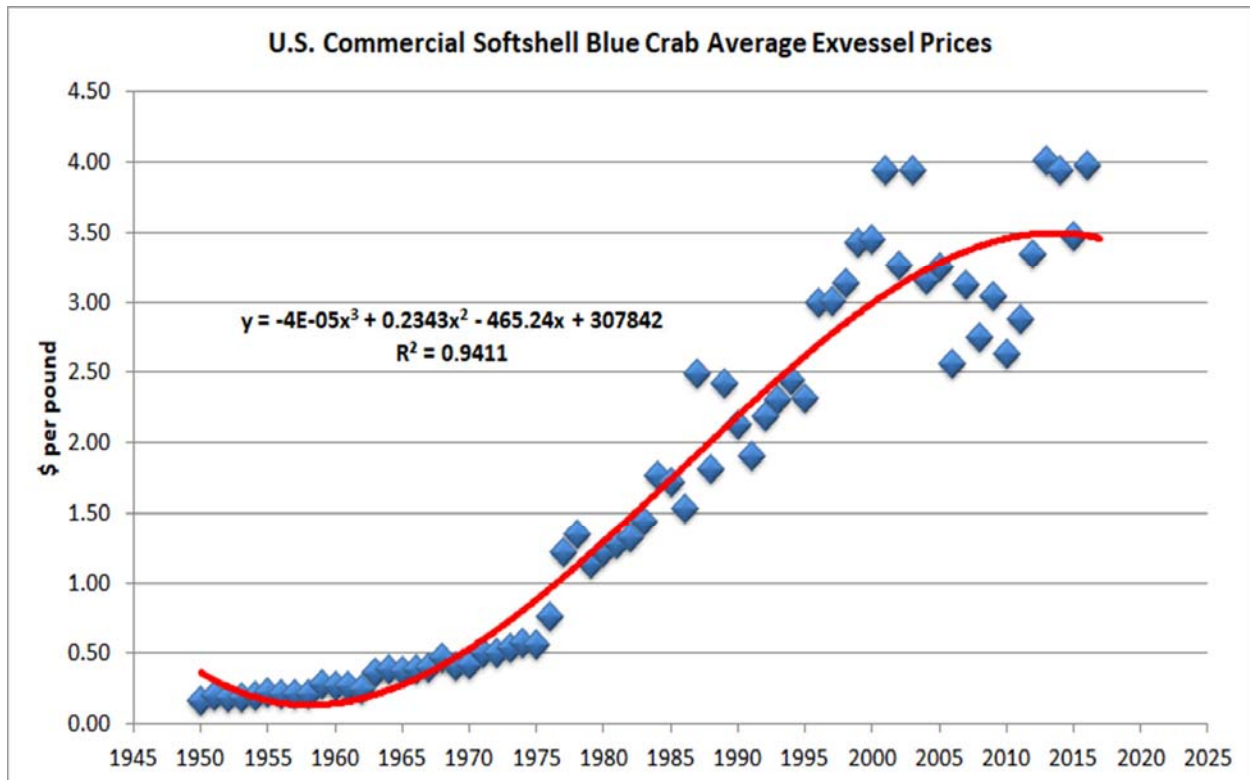


Figure 4 shows the average dockside prices of blue softshell crabs harvested in the U.S. in dollars per pound. The source of raw data is the NOAA Fisheries at <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/>.

### Wholesale Clue Crab Prices

The wholesale selling prices of blue softshell crabs were compiled from proprietary data reported by Uner Barry Comtell. Only summaries of the wholesale prices were presented in this report. Four sizes of blue softshell crabs are traded in the Mid-Atlantic wholesale markets generally from April to October.

Clear-cut differences were observed in the four different crab sizes sold in the wholesale markets. The traded blue softshell crabs included the following:

1. The smallest blue softshell crab, medium, 3.5 inches, or 1.8 ounces, were not currently traded in the wholesale markets.
2. Hotel blue softshell crab size, 4.0 inches, or 2.5 ounces, the average wholesale price was \$15.45 per dozen.
3. Prime blue softshell crabs, 4.5 inches, or 3.3 ounces, the average wholesale price was \$29.11 per dozen.

4. Jumbo blue softshell crabs, 5.0 inches, or 3.5 ounces, the average wholesale price was \$41.06 per dozen.
5. Whale blue softshell blue crabs, 5.5 inches, or 5.9 ounces, the average wholesale price was \$44.23 per dozen.

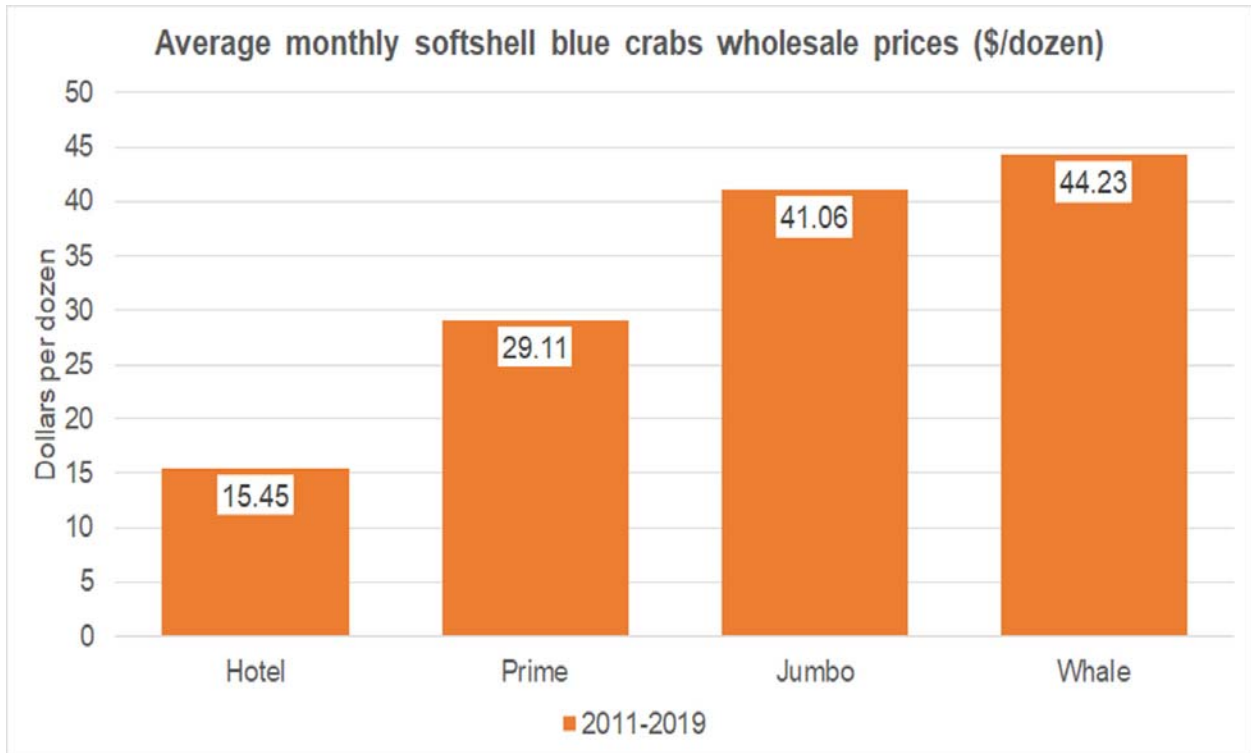


Figure 5 shows the average monthly wholesale prices of blue softshell crabs in the Mid-Atlantic wholesale markets. The source of raw data is Urner Barry Comtell at <https://www.ubcomtell.com/>.



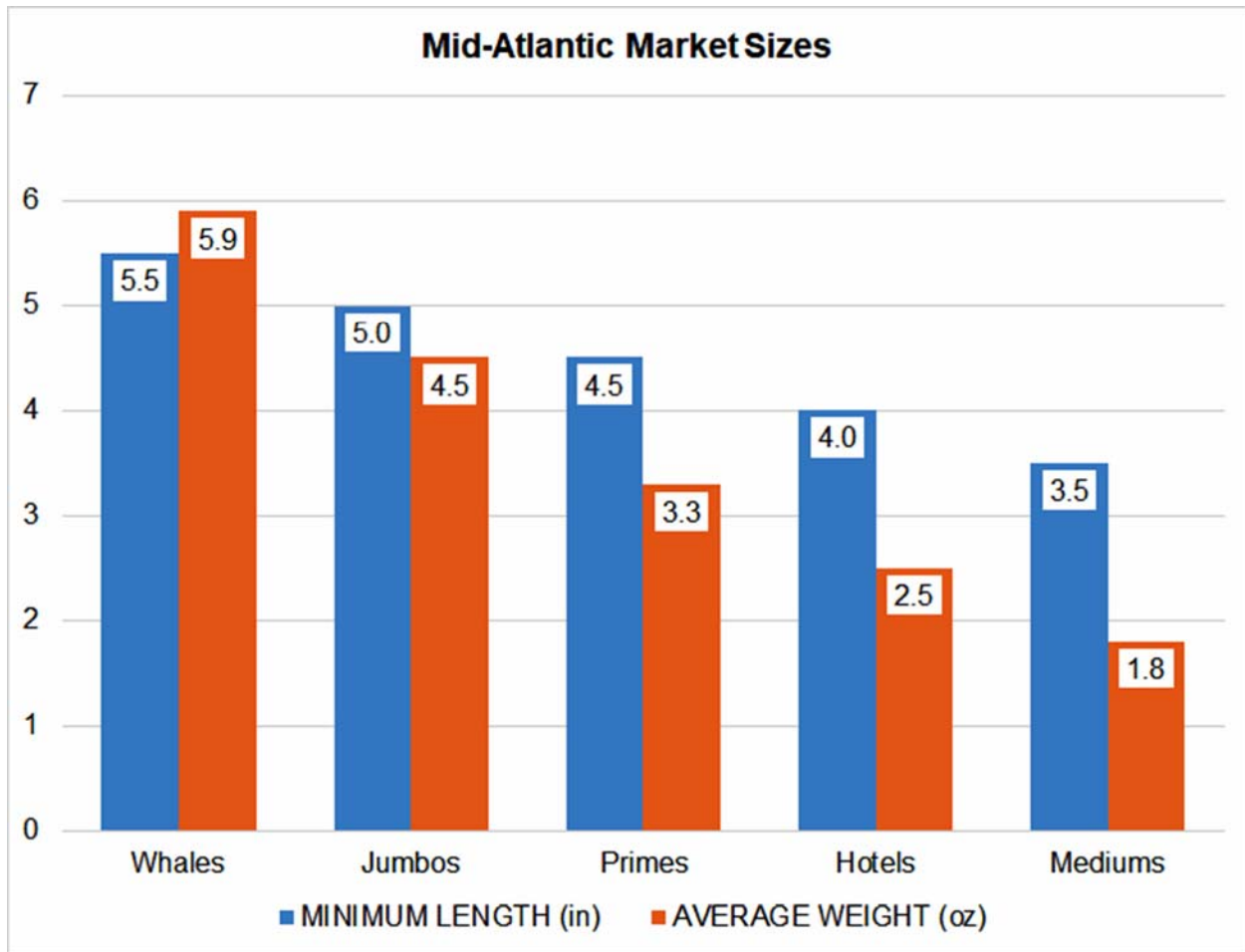


Figure 6 shows the market sizes of blue softshell crabs in the Mid-Atlantic wholesale markets. The source of the different sizes of softshell crabs is <https://fultonfishmarket.com/blog/soft-shell-crabs>.

### MarketMaker Seafood Businesses

In 2016, the Gulf-wide commercial landings of blue crabs reached 51.3 million pounds, with dockside values about \$64.6 million. Blue crab harvesting is regulated in the Gulf of Mexico states. Monthly landings data in 2015-16 showed that blue crabs are available year-round with peaks between May to August.



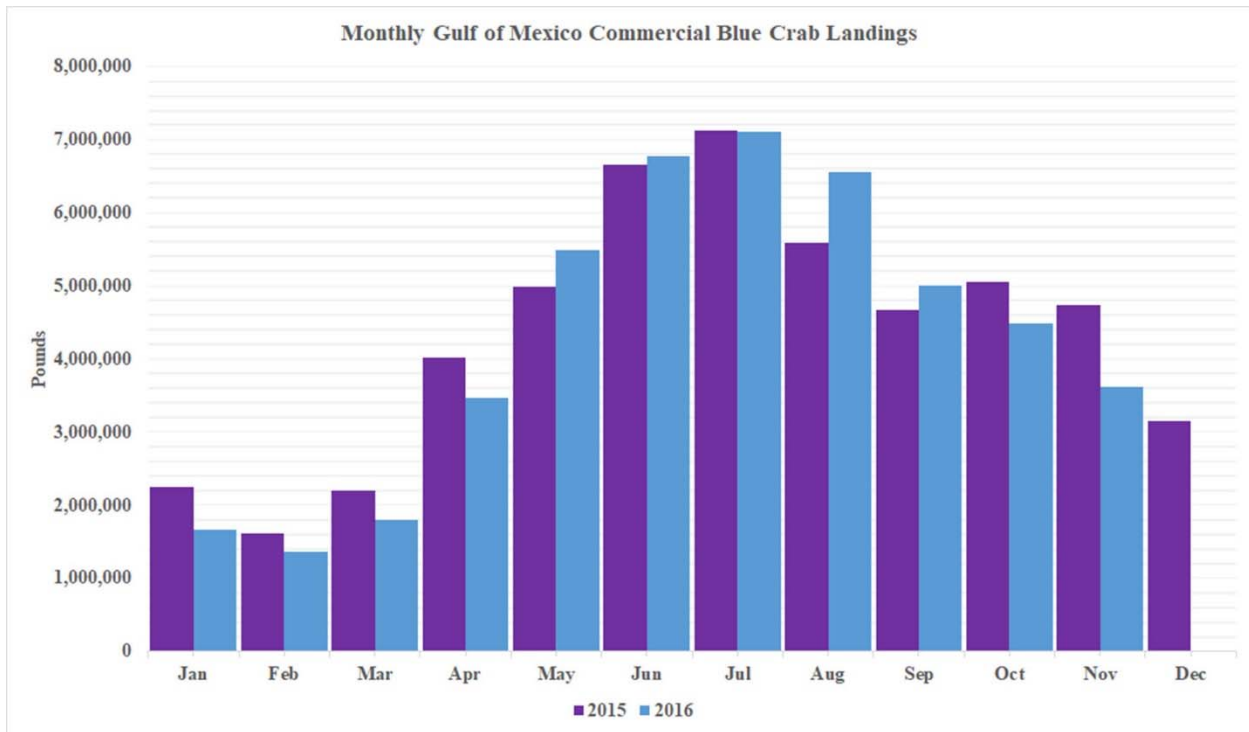


Figure 8. The primary vertical axis shows the monthly commercial blue crab landings in 2015-16 in pounds. The source of raw data is the NOAA Fisheries website at <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/>.

More than 12,000 businesses that catch, process, and sell seafood products are registered in MarketMaker nationwide. There are more than 200 businesses that promote their seafood products and services in Mississippi MarketMaker. To search for seafood businesses in MarketMaker, perform the following procedures:

1. Go to <https://ms.foodmarketmaker.com/main/mmsearch/>
2. Click “search” and type “**Fish/Seafood/Shellfish**” in the product box.
3. You can sort the search results by relevance and name.
4. You can also limit online searches by state and type of business

## **Price and Market Benchmarks**

Local landings and imports from foreign countries determine the size and trends in the domestic markets for blue softshell markets. The wholesale markets in the Mid-Atlantic are constrained by rapidly declining supply from wild sources and wildly fluctuating seasonality in availability. According to the Fulton Fish Market, “softshell crab is in season spring through fall along the Gulf Coast, with slightly shorter seasons along the Chesapeake and East Coast. Softshell crabs are not in season during the winter months when the water temperature drops.”