Why the Name *Zeeuwse Creuse* Is Misleading

The name *Zeeuwse Creuse* sounds like an authentic regional product from Zeeland. In reality, it refers to the Japanese oyster (*Crassostrea gigas*), an exotic species farmed worldwide that has only been present in Zeeland's waters since the 1960s. What's more, a so-called *Zeeuwse Creuse* bought in the Netherlands is often not fully cultivated in Zeeland but imported and later processed there.

A Zeeland Name for a Japanese Species

- **Creuse** = French for "hollow" or "deep", a reference to the cupped shape of the Japanese/Pacific oyster shell.
- **Zeeuws** = refers to Zeeland, but gives the impression of being a traditional, native product.

In truth, the Japanese oyster was introduced into Zeeland in the 1960s, after diseases had decimated the native flat oyster population.

Production in Zeeland: The Hard Numbers

- **Total production:** on average 20–25 million oysters per year (sometimes 40 million is cited, but 20–25 million is more realistic). This equals around 2.3 million kilos.
- **Zeeuwse Creuse (Japanese oyster):** 15–20 million oysters annually → by far the majority.
- **Zeeuwse Flat oyster (*Ostrea edulis*):** only 1.5–2 million oysters annually → rare and exclusive.

The *Zeeuwse Creuse* is therefore the workhorse of the industry, while the flat oyster is a niche product.

Why a *Zeeuwse Creuse* Is Often Not Truly from Zeeland

- **The name as a type designation**
  - *Creuse* simply means hollow oyster (*Crassostrea gigas*).
  - *Zeeuws* may be little more than marketing: the oyster might only have been traded in the Netherlands or briefly “relayed” in Zeeland (Oosterschelde, Grevelingen).
- **International trade and import**
  - Yerseke is the centre of Europe’s oyster trade.
  - Every year, large quantities of oysters are imported from France and Ireland.
  - These imported oysters are relaid in Zeeland waters and then sold as *Zeeuwse Creuse*. → Entirely legal, but misleading to anyone expecting a purely local product.
- **Cultivation elsewhere in the Netherlands**
  - Besides Zeeland, creuses are also farmed in the Wadden Sea and Grevelingen Lake.
  - These too often fall under the umbrella term *Zeeuwse Creuse*.

- **The difference from the *Zeeuwse Plat***
    - *Zeeuwse Flat oyster*: produced almost exclusively in Zeeland, small volumes, high prices → almost always genuinely Zeeland.
    - *Zeeuwse Creuse*: mass-produced, with extensive import and re-export → provenance often mixed or unclear.

The Share in the Dutch Market

1. Zeeland produces approx. 2.3 million kilos of oysters per year (20–25 million pieces).
2. Imports: around 1.4–1.5 million kilos annually, mainly from France and Ireland.
3. The Dutch oyster market is therefore a mix of domestic production and imports. Zeeland forms the backbone, but its production alone cannot meet demand.
4. It is therefore likely that a significant share of the *Zeeuwse Creuses* in shops and restaurants are in fact imported oysters that have merely been relaid and traded in Zeeland.

No Protected Status, but Some Labels

- **No EU protection:** Unlike French oysters with PGI/PGO status (e.g. *Huître de Normandie*), the *Zeeuwse Creuse* has no protected designation of origin.
- **Some labels:** Often MSC (wild) or ASC (farmed), but these are not always explained clearly to consumers.

Conclusion

The name *Zeeuwse Creuse* conceals more than it reveals. It is a Japanese oyster, often imported and only relaid in Zeeland, sold under a name that suggests tradition, locality, and authenticity.

The figures show that Zeeland is indeed the backbone of Dutch oyster production (20–25 million pieces annually), but millions of kilos of imports are essential to meet demand.

👉 A more honest label – for example *Japanese oyster from Zeeland* or *relayed creuse* – would better inform consumers and safeguard the unique status of the *Zeeuwse Flat oyster.*

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