



---

For Immediate Release  
February 26, 2008

Contact: Deborah Long  
785.539.5218

### **Testimony to Congress Denounces FDA Reliance on Self-Policing Instead of Testing**

*Tarpon Springs, FL*—John Williams, a member of the U.S. shrimp industry for 37 years and executive director of the Southern Shrimp Alliance (SSA), testified today before the House Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations of the Commerce and Energy Committee that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) relies too heavily on U.S. importers to protect the U.S. food supply. Williams recommended legislative solutions to the FDA's documented food safety enforcement problems.

"Due to the repeated findings of banned antibiotics and pesticides in aquaculture products from developing countries, the EU, Canada, and Japan have increased measures to protect their consumers," explained Williams. "However, the FDA continues to rely on the unverified representations of importers instead of testing, except for one percent of seafood imports. The lax FDA food safety enforcement makes the United States the most attractive market for contaminated seafood."

Concerns about the FDA's inability to assure the safety of imported seafood have risen to the point that a number of states are doing their own testing of seafood imports. These states have repeatedly found harmful, banned substances in the imported seafood they test—seafood allowed by the FDA and the private sector to enter the U.S. market.

#### ***State testing programs***

Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma and Tennessee administer their own testing programs of imported seafood. Alabama, Florida and Louisiana have been testing imported seafood since 2002; Georgia since 2003; Mississippi since 2005; Tennessee since 2006; and Oklahoma and Arkansas since 2007.

State testing has repeatedly resulted in the finding of banned, dangerous antibiotics and antifungal chemicals in imported seafood. For example, Florida started its testing program in 2002 by analyzing 323 shrimp and crab samples for chloramphenicol, a powerful drug that can cause a fatal form of anemia. Ten percent of the seafood tested positive for the banned antibiotic.

"While we are pleased that state governments have attempted to address FDA's failures, there is no substitute for a strong federal food safety system," stated Williams. "The FDA needs to have a food safety enforcement system that is comparable to other major markets. Otherwise, rejected and inferior seafood products will continue to be shipped to the United States."

### ***The impact of FDA's failures***

The FDA's failure to prevent the importation of massive amounts of contaminated shrimp has a number of negative effects on the U.S. market, the U.S. shrimp industry and U.S. consumers. First and foremost, farmed-shrimp imports contaminated with banned antibiotics, pesticides and other dangerous contaminants put the health of U.S. consumers at serious risk according to sound medical science that is recognized and applied worldwide.

Second, U.S. consumers are quite often unable to distinguish between safe and unsafe shrimp in retail markets and restaurants. Their fear of buying or being served contaminated imported shrimp depresses the overall consumption and demand for all shrimp including healthful, wild-caught shrimp produced in the United States.

Finally, the FDA's lax inspection system allows volumes of low-value contaminated shrimp into the U.S. market. These illegal shipments depress the price for U.S. shrimp fishermen.

### ***Recommended legislative reforms***

The numerous health benefits of a diet that includes high quality seafood are well documented. However, actions must be taken to reassure consumers that the seafood supply in the United States is safe. The Southern Shrimp Alliance presented Congress with specific legislative measures that could be taken to bring the FDA in line with the international community. For example, the FDA should require a condition of importation that the countries supplying food products administer a food safety system that is equivalent to that of the United States. Also, the FDA should take note of the detection by other major importing countries of contaminants in food so that the FDA can focus its enforcement efforts.

SSA is an alliance of the U.S. warmwater wild shrimp fishery from eight states: North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas. For more information on the SSA, please visit [www.shrimpalliance.com](http://www.shrimpalliance.com).

-30-

#### **Editor's Note:**

A copy of the SSA's written testimony can be found at:

<http://shrimpalliance.com/Press%20Releases/2-26-08%20EC%20Written%20Testimony.pdf>

More information, including primary resources, on the state seafood testing programs can be found at: [http://www.shrimpalliance.com/State\\_Testing.htm](http://www.shrimpalliance.com/State_Testing.htm)

More information on how FDA's food safety enforcement compares to international food safety enforcement programs can be found at:

<http://shrimpalliance.com/Press%20Releases/10-16-07%20FDA%20Reform%20Proposals.pdf>