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U.S. Shrimpers Applauds Alabama Ban of Chinese Catfish, Calls for Increased Testing of Imported Seafood Nationwide

Tarpon Springs, FL— The Southern Shrimp Alliance (“SSA”) applauds the action of Alabama Agriculture Commissioner Ron Sparks to protect consumers by banning the sale of catfish from China after illegal antibiotics were found in the majority of food safety tests. In light of the Food and Drug Administration’s (“FDA”) failure to sufficiently test imported seafood for contaminants, SSA is calling for state governments to increase the frequency of their testing.

“The use of banned antibiotics on certain imported, farm-raised seafood is a known problem,” stated John Williams, executive director of the SSA. “With FDA testing just over 1% of all imported seafood, it is imperative that state governments conduct food safety tests like Alabama.”

Despite limited testing, the FDA and state governments repeatedly have found harmful antibiotics and chemicals on imported farm-raised shrimp both at the retail level and in shipments destined for the United States. Shrimp imports from China, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam have had recent antibiotic violations according to the FDA.

U.S. shrimp fishermen, who harvest shrimp that grow naturally in the oceans, argue that farm-raised shrimp tainted with chemicals and antibiotics are more likely to be sold in the United States due to the infrequency of testing and forgiving policies of FDA.

“Unscrupulous companies send their contaminated shrimp to the U.S. market because there is a 99% chance that it won’t be caught,” explained Williams. “Adulterated farm-raised shrimp are much more likely to be tested and destroyed by inspectors in Japan or the EU. Japan inspects approximately 25% of shrimp imports, and the EU requires all shrimp exporters to be pre-qualified with health certifications before they are allowed even to ship shrimp to the EU.”

The poor testing of shrimp imports in the United States is not just putting consumers at risk. It is also devastating America’s most valuable fishery.

“The United States has become the market of last resort for some imported farm-raised shrimp, which is dumped in the U.S. market at low prices,” said Williams. “As a result, over half of the U.S. shrimp industry has gone out of business since 2000. Most people aren’t aware that nearly 90% of the shrimp on our menus today is imported, farm-raised shrimp and no longer U.S. shrimp harvested from the ocean. Today, consumers have to ask for U.S. wild-caught shrimp if they want the sweet flavor and crisp texture produced by nature.”

U.S. fishermen are distinguishing their shrimp through a quality certification program under the label Wild American® Shrimp and state marketing initiatives, a critical task due to the increased attention on the food safety violations affecting imported farm-raised shrimp. Wild-caught shrimp grow naturally in the oceans do not require the use of antibiotics. Whereas, antibiotics are used

abroad to treat or prevent bacterial infections that occur when there are poor sanitary conditions in shrimp ponds, such as high feces concentrations. Sometimes banned antibiotics and chemicals are used purely to increase the yield of foreign shrimp farms.

Country-of-origin labeling laws require grocery stores to display the origin and method of production of raw seafood to help inform consumers. However, the burden is still placed on consumers to ask for information on value-added seafood such as breaded or cooked shrimp, and all seafood products in restaurants.

SSA is a non-profit alliance of members of the shrimp industry in eight states committed to preventing the continued deterioration of America's domestic shrimp industry and to ensuring the industry's future viability.

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Websites:

www.shrimpalliance.com

www.agi.state.al.us

www.fda.gov

www.wildamericanshrimp.com