



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Food and Drug Administration
Silver Spring, MD 20993

June 11, 2013

Mr. John Williams
Executive Director
Southern Shrimp Alliance
P.O. Box 1577
Tarpon Springs, FL 34688

Dear Mr. Williams:

Thank you for your letter expressing concerns with the safety of shrimp imported from Asian nations due to the infectious disease described as “early mortality syndrome” (EMS).

Seafood safety issues, such as the potential adverse effects from the consumption of raw or cooked seafood, are of great concern to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA or the agency) and thus a high regulatory priority. Seafood products, shrimp products in particular, are among the most internationally-traded food commodities. The vast majority of shrimp we eat in the United States is imported from aquaculture operations in Asian and Central American countries. The agency is actively engaged in inspecting, sampling, and testing products imported into the United States for human food safety pathogens and for unapproved veterinary drugs that would deem the fishery products to be unsuitable for use as human food.

Disease in shrimp is not an uncommon concern for farmers. Since commercial shrimp farming began in the 1970s, the industry has overcome a variety of diseases such as white spot, yellow head, and taura syndrome. EMS appears to be the latest challenge for the industry. However, the most current research indicates that EMS poses no human food safety risk. *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* has recently been determined as the bacterium responsible for EMS, and while some strains of the bacterium do cause gastrointestinal illness in humans, the strain found to cause EMS is not one of them.¹ EMS occurs very early in the production cycle and within 30 days of a pond being stocked, large-scale die-offs begin. Affected shrimp are less than approximately two grams in average body weight and are therefore unlikely to be harvested, frozen, and sold to buyers for importation into U. S. markets. Research additionally indicates

¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2013). Culprit *behind massive shrimp die-offs in Asia unmasked*. Retrieved May 10, 2013, from <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/175416/icode/>

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that freezing kills the bacterium.² Because imported shrimp from Asia are usually in frozen form, there appears to be no, or very low, risk of disease transmission from these products.³

For these reasons, FDA believes that human food safety concerns related to EMS are minimal, but will continue to keep apprised of this matter and work with our federal partners at the U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Commerce to ensure imported seafood is safe for consumers.

Thank you again for bringing your concerns regarding this issue to our attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "MRT", followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Michael R. Taylor
Deputy Commissioner for Foods
and Veterinary Medicine

² See footnote 1.

³ See footnote 1.