



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

JUN 12 2013

Mr. John Williams
Executive Director
Southern Shrimp Alliance
Post Office Box 1577
Tarpon Springs, Florida 34688

Dear Mr. Williams:

Thank you for your letter of April 24, 2013, expressing multiple concerns about early mortality syndrome (EMS). I apologize for the delayed response.

I recognize the importance of shrimp production and resources to the United States and America's Gulf region in particular. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is aware of the impact that a disease such as EMS could have if it were to become established in the United States. USDA officials are in communication with various Federal collaborators who have a role in this issue, including the Departments of Commerce, Health and Human Services, the Interior, and the Environmental Protection Agency. Although EMS, also called acute hepatopancreatic necrosis syndrome, was first reported in 2009 in Asia, relatively little was known about the exact cause until recently.

Professor Donald Lightner, an internationally recognized aquaculture expert at the University of Arizona's Aquaculture Pathology Laboratory—a World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) aquaculture reference laboratory, has recently identified a strain of bacteria (*Vibrio parahaemolyticus*) as the cause of the disease. The bacteria is commonly found in brackish coastal waters around the world and carries a genetic factor that is likely responsible for its virulence in shrimp. Dr. Lightner's findings also indicate that the strain does not carry genes known to cause human disease, and does not appear to survive freezing and thawing. This is fortunate, since a vast majority of trade involves frozen shrimp.

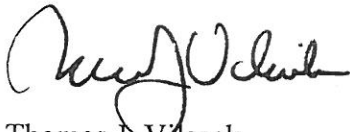
With respect to your concerns about transmissibility of the disease between shrimp farms, following best management practices including biosecurity greatly reduces the risk of this or any number of water-borne aquaculture diseases spreading between farms, or from farms to wild shrimp resources. USDA strongly stresses the importance of maintaining effective biosecurity and educating U.S. shrimp producers about these practices.

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USDA will continue to monitor new scientific findings about EMS as they emerge, and we will take these into account when determining what actions may be warranted to ensure that U.S. shrimp is protected.

Thank you again for writing. USDA is committed to collaborating with our Federal partners to protect U.S. aquaculture and resources.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Vilsack". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "T" and "V".

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary