Public Health Issues Related to Consumption of Imported Shrim

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David Veal, Ph.D. Executive Director
AMERICAN SHRIMP PROCESSORS ASSOCIATION

director@americanshrimp.com

Americans are consuming more seafood than ever before. US per capita seafood consumption reached 16 pounds in 2017, the highest level since 2009.[1] Increased seafood consumption is warranted as long as the seafood being consumed is safe. Unfortunately, increased seafood consumption is predominantly satisfied by imported seafood that very often does not comply with US health and safety standards and pose a significant health risk.

Imported seafood accounts for over 90% of US consumption. Shrimp is the largest consumed seafood and imports satisfy 90-94% of US shrimp demand. Imported seafood is largely grown in aquaculture ponds where veterinary drug use is necessary to prevent mortality and maximize yields. The widespread use of antibiotics and

[1] *See* National Marine Fisheries Service, *Fisheries of the United States 2017*.

other illegal veterinary drugs in foreign food production has created a serious threat to global public health. Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) prevents common drugs from treating microorganisms (bacteria, fungus, virus or parasite). AMR kills 29,500 Americans each year and is projected to kill 1 million Americans by 2050.[2] According to the World Health Organization, "[t]he problem is so serious that it threatens the achievements of modern medicine. A post-antibiotic era—in which common infections and minor injuries can kill – is a very real possibility for the 21st century." [3] Many of these antimicrobial drugs are also known carcinogens with wide ranging consequences. In 2009, the US Department of

[2] *See* US Centers for Disease Control, *Antibiotic Resistance Threats in the United States, 2013* & Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Stemming the Superbug Tide*, OECD Health Policy Series (November 2018).
[3] *See* World Health Organization, Antimicrobial Resistance, Global Report on Surveillance (2014 Summary).

Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) conducted a risk assessment of the dangers associated with drugs in imported catfish. FSIS modeled catfish consumption and hazard concentrations over the course of one year and concluded that applying a more robust inspection program to catfish yielded "a reduction of roughly 175,000 lifetime cancers."[4] Three of the veterinary drugs examined in the FSIS study, gentian violet, malachite green and nitrofurans, are commonly used in shrimp aquaculture.

Louisiana consumers deserve the right to know where their seafood originates. The United States International Trade Commission found that 80% of shrimp consumption occurs at the restaurant level.[5] Seafood country of origin

[4] *See* Department of Agriculture, Foods Safety and Inspection Service, Mandatory Inspection of Catfish and Catfish Products (Draft Rule Feb. 10, 2009).
[5] *See* Certain Frozen Warmwater Shrimp from Brazil, China, India, Thailand, and Vietnam, Inv. Nos. 731-TA-1063, 1064, 1066-1068 (Second Review), Final Staff Report (April 12, 2017).

labeling (COOL) exists at the retail level but is conspicuously absent at the restaurant level where most shrimp consumption occurs. Unfortunately, even the very narrow consumer protection afforded by COOL at the retail level is unreliable as numerous studies have shown that seafood mislabeling, and fraud, are commonplace throughout retail outlets in the US.

In 2014 an LSU graduate student published her graduate thesis on veterinary drug residues found in aquaculture-raised, commercially-available frozen shrimp. The student purchased 27 samples of imported, farm-raised shrimp from five retail grocery stores in Baton Rouge. Screening was conducted on the samples for chloramphenicol, fluoroquinolones, malachite green, and nitrofurans. 25 out of the 27 samples contained detectable

levels of these veterinary drug residues, with 20 samples containing more than one detectable residue. In sum, 92% of the shrimp samples purchased in Baton Rouge tested positive for illegal drug residues.[6]

A 2018 report by the New York State Attorney General's Office uncovered widespread seafood fraud and mislabeling at the retail level. The investigation found that more than one in four (26.92%) seafood purchases was mislabeled and that many samples (27.59%) labelled as wild were in fact farm-raised.[7] Another 2018 study of seafood samples from 287 restaurants, grocery stores and seafood

[6] *See* Jessica Danielle Johnson, A Thesis: *Detection and Confirmation of Veterinary Drug Residues in Commercially Available Frozen Shrimp*, May 2014.
[7] *See* Office of the New York State Attorney General, *Fishy Business: Seafood Fraud and Mislabeling in New York State Supermarkets*, (December 2018).

markets in 27 cities across the United States found that 21 percent were mislabeled.[8]

As these studies proved, country of origin labeling at the retail level is ineffective. More importantly, however, it fails to scratch the surface of seafood consumption. 80% of shrimp in the U.S. is consumed at the restaurant level where country of origin is not required. To adequately protect consumers from the health risks associated with imported shrimp, restaurants must provide country of origin information either in writing on their menus or verbally to the customer.

[8] *See* Oceana, *Casting a Wider Net: More Action Needed to Stop Seafood Fraud in the United States*, March 2019.

House Bill No. 335 requires Louisiana restaurants to make seafood origin information available, either by printing the information on menus or orally providing it to customers. This legislation is a critical step to ensure that Louisiana consumers have information necessary to make informed choices about seafood consumption in a market dominated by imports that pose serious health risks.

If the chairman allows I would like to submit the full text of my written comments along with supporting documents to the committee for the record. I will also be happy to try and answer any questions you might have.

Thank you.