

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

September 4, 2024

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

Recent reporting by the Outlaw Ocean Project¹ and the Associated Press² have evidenced issues of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and forced labor in the seafood supply chain with alarming detail. We are looking closely into this matter and would like to better understand the steps your agency is taking to address these serious concerns.

Over the last few months, a series of investigative reports has brought to light serious allegations of fraud, mislabeling, and illicit use of antibiotics at Choice Canning³. This seafood company, which produces and imports shrimp from India, is alleged to have deliberately imported antibiotic-positive shrimp into the United States. The whistleblower has made the documents public.⁴ They warrant immediate attention and action.

The USDA oversees the importation and inspection of imported seafood at ports of entry. Please provide an update on how the USDA is ensuring the safety of our imported seafood by answering the following questions, as well as applicable decision memoranda, letters, emails, communications, situation summaries, discussion and evaluation documents, and briefing documents to support these responses.

- 1) **Food Safety and Inspection Service:** In 2017, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) published a study titled “Imported Seafood Safety: FDA and USDA Could Strengthen Efforts to Prevent Unsafe Drug Residues.” The report was commissioned due to concerns about farmed seafood's use of antibiotics and the two agencies’ roles in overseeing seafood safety.

¹ The Outlaw Ocean Project. *The Whistleblower / India Shrimp: A Growing Goliath*.

<https://www.theoutlawocean.com/investigations/india-shrimp-a-growing-goliath/the-whistleblower/>

² Associated Press. *AP finds grueling conditions in Indian shrimp industry that report calls ‘dangerous and abusive’*

<https://apnews.com/article/india-shrimp-seafood-industry-labor-abuses-us-imports-e5b51878eafbb6e28977710b191eb7de>

³ The Outlaw Ocean Project. *The Whistleblower / India Shrimp: A Growing Goliath*.

<https://www.theoutlawocean.com/investigations/india-shrimp-a-growing-goliath/the-whistleblower/>

⁴ Ibid.

- a. What on-site verification audits has the Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) conducted in foreign countries for seafood imports?
 - b. How are foreign sites selected for audits, and what is the timeline for the agency's response to stories like those listed above?
 - c. Despite implementing recommendation 4, which recommends coordinating with the FDA to develop drug residue testing methods and corresponding maximum residue levels for imported seafood, we see in the reporting above that seafood imports still exceed these levels entering the United States. Does the USDA have ongoing plans to strengthen its IUU work with the FDA, and what is the timeline for such actions?
- 2) Country-of-Origin Labeling: The Outlaw Ocean Choice Canning investigation reported that the company hid conflicting information about its shrimp products during an audit. One employee wrote, "postponed today's Cape Gourmet cpto. Raw material is from Indonesia and bags say India. I didn't think the FDA auditor on site would appreciate that, so I put it off until he's gone."
- a. How does USDA verify country-of-origin labeling for seafood products?
 - b. What documentation is required from a company to authenticate the country of origin and the processing location?
- 3) Purchase of IUU products: The Outlaw Ocean Project reporting⁵ states that the USDA has awarded contracts to five seafood companies with known links to Uyghur forced labor.
- a. How does the USDA ensure that it does not enter into contracts for seafood caught outside U.S. waters or processed in overseas plants that engage in forced labor?
 - b. How does the USDA ensure that the contracts it awards are not tied to IUU fishing?
 - c. What are the USDA's plans for prioritizing supporting and buying domestic seafood within their contracts?

Thank you for your continued attention to this critical issue. Should you have any questions, please contact any of our staff. We look forward to working with you as we investigate this matter further.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources



Garret Graves
Member of Congress

⁵ Outlaw Ocean Project, *U.S. Department of Agriculture*. <https://www.theoutlawocean.com/investigations/china-the-superpower-of-seafood/discussion/stakeholders/us-department-of-agriculture/>



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Melanie A. Stansbury
Member of Congress