

Aldi probes Portugal supply chain after North Korean labor in China report

Aldi is looking at supply from one Chinese plant accused of using illegal North Korean labor to its Portuguese operation and has made a local processor suspend dealing with another

By [Tom Seaman](#) | Feb. 27, 2024 11:14 GMT



□ Aldi Nord logo. Credit: Aldi

Germany's Aldi Nord discounter chain is investigating links between its Portuguese suppliers and factories in China accused of illegally employing North Korean workers, according to a recent report from the Outlaw Ocean Project.

The German discount grocery chain has asked one local processor to halt dealings with the Chinese plant mentioned in the report until an audit can be conducted.

The use of North Korean labor has been deemed illegal since 2017 by both the United Nations (UN) and the US after Kim Jong Un launched a series of nuclear and ballistic missile tests that year. In an explosive report on Feb. 25 in [The New Yorker](#), Outlaw Ocean director Ian Urbina presented evidence of the alleged use of North Korean labor by multiple Chinese plants based close to the border.

Two of the plants, Donggang Haimeng Foodstuff and Donggang Jinhui Foodstuff, are named in [open-sourced conversations](#) by Outlaw Ocean as suppliers to processors in Portugal, who in turn supplied Aldi Nord in the country.

Haimeng and Jinhui are both based in Dandong, right on the Chinese border with North Korea. The two companies have used North Korean labor after the December 2019 deadline for the repatriation of overseas North Korean workers required under UN Security Council sanctions, according to Outlaw Ocean.

Aldi Nord is looking at whether its suppliers in Portugal bought from Haimeng, which Outlaw Ocean said was employing hundreds of North Korean workers "as recently" as October 2023.

"We are currently conducting a data enquiry [sic] with our suppliers to get more detailed information and evaluate whether products have been sourced from the mentioned production facility. As this evaluation is still ongoing, we are unable to provide any detailed information at this time," Aldi Nord's Marina Fuhrmann told Outlaw Ocean on Feb. 5, 2024.

Unlike many of the other Chinese processors contacted by Outlaw Ocean, Haimeng replied on Feb. 7. "Good morning: We, Donggang Haimeng Foodstuff Co. Ltd., state that we didn't hire practices of North Korean workers. Our employment is in full compliance with SEMATA [sic, presumably SMETA, or the Sedex Members Ethical Trade Audit] standards," it said.

According to an Outlaw Ocean email from Jan. 30, Brasmar Comercio de Produtos Alimentares, was the consignee for shipments of seafood from Haimeng back in 2021.

Brasmar has supplied seafood to Aldi's brands Golden Seafood and Tesouros do Mar, according to labels on the product packaging, said Outlaw Ocean staff. Several emails to Brasmar from Outlaw Ocean asking for comment went unanswered.

Jinhui was using North Korean labor "as recently as 2023," Outlaw Ocean staff told Aldi Nord on Nov. 30, 2023.

The Chinese firm was then supplying Ribervalves, a Portuguese whitefish processor and Aldi supplier, Outlaw Ocean stated. Ribervalves did not respond directly to questions from Outlaw Ocean.

On Dec. 6, Aldi Nord's Fuhrmann told Outlaw Ocean that supply from Jinhui to Ribervalves had ceased.

"Consultation with our supplier has shown that the production facility in question has not been delivering goods to ALDI Portugal for several weeks," she wrote. "There is no longer any relationship with this production facility and the named supplier does not supply any other ALDI Nord countries with pollock articles."

On Feb. 5, 2024, Fuhrmann wrote that Ribervalves "confirmed that they won't be purchasing any products from Donggang Jinhui until further notice."

Jinhui did not respond to Outlaw Ocean.

Two days later, Outlaw Ocean asked Aldi Nord if Dalian Haiqing Food Co., a large processor based around 150 kilometers west of the North Korean border, was a supplier via Trident Seafoods' Pickenpack Seafoods plant. Haiqing is also accused of using North Korean labor in the Outlaw Ocean article.

Trident, High Liner Foods and Sysco have all stopped working with Haiqing pending further investigation, as [Undercurrent News](#) reported on Feb. 26.

On Feb. 12, Aldi Nord replied: "Thanks for informing us. In reference to Dalian Haiqing: we can confirm that our supplier Pickenpack did not deliver any product from this site to Aldi Nord. Thank you."

Haiqing denied using North Korean labor when asked by Outlaw Ocean.

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