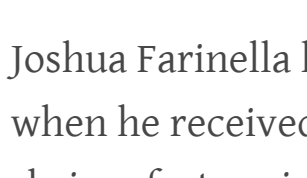
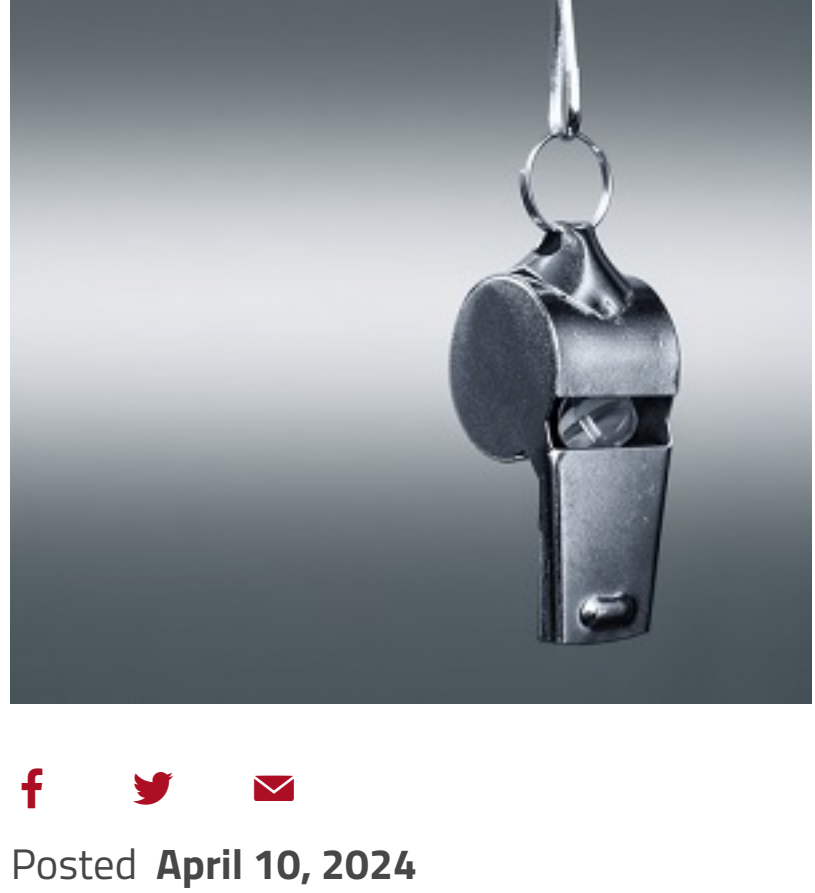




Whistleblower Spotlight: Joshua Farinella



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Joshua Farinella had been working in the seafood industry for eight years when he received a lucrative job offer at Choice Canning, managing its shrimp factory in southern India for \$300,000 a year. According to a joint investigation by [NBC News](#) and nonprofit [The Outlaw Ocean Project](#), however, Farinella quickly learned that the position came with unethical strings attached. And although his past was not pristine—having his own string of felony and misdemeanor convictions—after four short months he blew the whistle on Choice Canning’s rampant environmental and human rights violations.

Upon resigning his position in protest, Farinella broadcast his concerns by filing a whistleblower complaint with the FDA, sharing the complaint with other regulators and members of Congress, and retaining a raft of documents evidencing Choice Canning’s nefarious activities. According to [Time Magazine](#), Farinella shared thousands of pages of internal documents, invoices, emails, recorded Zoom calls, security footage and WhatsApp exchanges. The materials supported Farinella’s assertions of food safety concerns and serious humanitarian offenses.

A new [report](#) by the Corporate Accountability Lab (CAL), a Chicago-based advocacy group, found that Farinella’s allegations are part of a larger, systemic problem in the Indian shrimp industry. Historically, Thailand was the largest exporter of shrimp to the U.S., but when its industry was exposed for its high rates of shrimp disease and repeated reports of forced labor, Thailand’s shrimp business declined. India in response boosted crustacean production to meet the global demand for lower prices. Almost [forty percent](#) of the shrimp imported to the U.S. now comes from India. Choice Canning is a major supplier of shrimp to several national grocery chains including Price Chopper, ShopRite, Aldi, and H-E-B.

Despite the geographical change, the harmful practices identified in Thailand were now being deployed in India. Choice Canning’s marketing literature shrouds itself with claims of its [state-of-the-art](#) processing plant and commitment to international standards of quality. Farinella soon discovered the opposite: Choice Canning operated unsanitary, off-site, illegal “peeling sheds,” and knowingly approved the export of shrimp tainted with antibiotics in violation of U.S. food safety law—a law designed to reduce the spread of disease because human consumption of these shrimp has been shown to increase the consumer’s resistance to antibiotics.

In addition to the food safety violations, Farinella detailed grave [human rights violations](#). Migrant workers, mostly women from the poorest villages, were lured there with promises of a minimum wage job plus room and board. Instead, they became prisoners under constant surveillance of company guards, rarely having a day off, succumbing to long, arduous workdays, and trapped inside a walled-off compound in Amalapuram. Their “room and board” consisted of living in overcrowded, bug-infested dorms and not receiving their promised salaries. Choice Canning defeated international inspectors’ health and safety examinations by covering up their myriad violations, including sending hundreds of workers offsite to evade proper counting and meet their required ratios, and concealing the offsite peeling sheds from detection and inspection.

U.S. lawmakers are looking into Farinella’s allegations as part of its ongoing efforts to reduce human rights violations and increase transparency in the seafood supply chain. Lawyers for Choice Canning categorically denied any wrongdoing, stating that they strive to exceed industry standards and ensure that their products meet all certifications. They labeled Farinella (predictably) as a convict and a disgruntled former employee. Aldi said that they were reviewing Farinella’s claims and expected their suppliers to treat workers fairly. Meanwhile, Farinella hasn’t wavered: “The consumers need to understand that they’ve been purchasing a contaminated product that was made by people who don’t have the luxury of going home.”

[Section 402](#) of the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) prohibits entities engaged in manufacturing, processing, packing, transporting, distributing, receiving, holding, or importing food from retaliating against employees for engaging in certain protected activities. The act encourages employees to speak out when they see issues. We applaud Joshua Farinella for speaking up and exposing human rights and environmental violations in the global seafood chain and for encouraging others in the distribution and retail global supply chain to investigate as well. Whistleblowers like Joshua Farinella play a vital role in holding companies accountable.

If you would like to learn more about what it means to be a whistleblower, please don’t hesitate to [contact us](#) for a free and confidential consult with an experienced member of Constantine Cannon’s whistleblower lawyer [team](#).

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