



News

March 20, 2024

The Outlaw Ocean Project Investigation Confirms What Every Shrimper Knows:

Imported Shrimp Supply Chains Are Built on Lies

On the same day that Corporate Accountability Lab (CAL) publicly released the results of its three-year investigation into forced labor practices in the Indian shrimp industry, *Hidden Harvest: Human Rights and Environmental Abuses in India's Shrimp Industry*, and the Associated Press published an article and video news story by investigative journalists Martha Mendoza, Mahesh Kumar, and Piyush Nagpal confirming CAL's findings, *The Outlaw Ocean Project* has provided a rare view into the inner workings of a major Indian shrimp exporter to the United States, Choice Trading Corporation Private Limited.

Through the disclosures of a whistleblower, *The Outlaw Ocean Project* documents the abhorrent conditions maintained in company-owned living quarters for migrant workers who peeled shrimp for export. Its publicly released documents highlight active, intentional steps taken by officials at the processor to prevent workers from leaving dormitories and company grounds. These communications describe continual, relentless labor without breaks and grotesque abusive behavior.

Falsified Documents

The treasure trove of internal company communications also includes extensive discussion of the actual sourcing of shrimp brought into the factory as feedstock, as well as food safety issues within the exporter's processing plant. In their conversations with each other, company officials explain that despite carrying *Best Aquaculture Practices* (BAP) certifications, shrimp processed in the plant does not originate from BAP-certified farms and that documents are falsified to make it appear as if they are. Because the shrimp sourced for the plant largely originate from unregulated smallholder farms, the company appears to have frequently found banned antibiotics contaminating the shrimp. Disturbingly, *The Outlaw Ocean Project's* reporting highlights the exporter's knowledge of the contamination of shrimp with banned antibiotics and antifungals and the intentional decisions made by company officials to ship these contaminated products to unwitting American consumers.

Most Open Market

Since 2016, all aquacultured seafood products exported from India to the European Union have been subject to a 50 percent testing requirement for banned veterinary drug residues. Nevertheless, despite the fact that Indian shrimp has accounted for nearly sixty percent of all entry lines of shrimp refused from entry into the United States by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration ("FDA") since 2022, the FDA has taken no additional action to monitor contaminated shrimp imports, with testing rates remaining below 0.1 percent.

The difference in treatment has led the United States to become India's most important export market for shrimp. According to data published by UN Comtrade, in 2022, 45.5 percent of the total value and 39.7 percent of the total volume of India's shrimp exports to the world were shipped to the United States. China was a distant second, accounting for 16.3 percent of the total value and 19.9 percent of the total volume of India's shrimp exports in 2022.

Just as the United States has become India's most important export market, India has become this country's dominant supplier of peeled shrimp. In 2023, the United States imported over 463 million pounds of peeled shrimp from India worth roughly \$1.6 billion. Imports from this single country accounted for well over half (56 percent) of the total volume of the United States' imports of peeled shrimp worldwide.

And the Indian industry's questionable practices have allowed it to maintain its market position while chasing prices downward. Last year, the volume of peeled shrimp imported by the United States from every other country in the world other than India fell by 3 percent compared to 2022. But Indian peeled shrimp volumes actually increased, as the per pound value of this Indian shrimp fell by 15 percent, from \$3.97 in 2022 to \$3.36 in 2023.

Seafood Import Monitoring Program

Imports of shrimp are among the seafood products subject to NOAA Fisheries' *Seafood Import Monitoring Program* (SIMP), which requires importers to provide traceability information at import entry to bring foreign seafood into the United States. *The Outlaw Ocean Project's* reporting raises serious questions as to the reliability of the documents that have been supplied to the federal agency by importers to date. Nevertheless, NOAA Fisheries recently announced that it was abandoning proposed amendments to SIMP that would have strengthened the program and has, instead, informed the public that it will be conducting a "comprehensive program review" of SIMP to determine its future. Earlier, NOAA Fisheries also announced that it would further delay enforcement of provisions under the *Marine Mammal Protection Act* that would prohibit the importation of foreign seafood harvested in a manner that harms marine mammals.

"*The Outlaw Ocean Project* has confirmed what every American shrimper knows in their bones," said John Williams, Executive Director of the Southern Shrimp Alliance. "While we have gone to work for the last forty years with the federal government on our shoulders watching our every move, our government rolled out the red carpet to foreign industries to sell into this market. Rather than hold us to the same standard, the U.S. shrimp industry is stunned to see federal agencies propose backtracking on the minimal requirements that have been demanded on foreign seafood suppliers."

Read *The Outlaw Ocean Project's The Whistleblower* (Mar. 20, 2024):

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

Review Corporate Accountability Lab's *Hidden Harvest: Human Rights and Environmental Abuses in India's Shrimp Industry* (Mar. 2024) here: <https://corpaccountabilitylab.org/hidden-harvest>

Read the Associated Press story by Martha Mendoza, Mahesh Kumar, and Piyush Nagpal, *AP Finds Grueling Conditions in Indian Shrimp Industry that Report Calls "Dangerous and Abusive"* (Mar. 20, 2024) here: <https://apnews.com/article/india-shrimp-seafood-industry-labor-abuses-us-imports-e5b51878eafb6e28977710b191eb7de>

Watch the eight-minute video story accompanying the Associated Press article by Martha Mendoza, Mahesh Kumar, and Piyush Nagpal, *AP Finds Grueling Conditions in Indian Shrimp Industry that Report Calls "Dangerous and Abusive"* (Mar. 20, 2024) here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVC4_yK0hr8

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