

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 22, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden:

We are writing you with serious health and safety concerns about shrimp imported into the U.S. market from India. Members of Congress have previously written Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo and United States Trade Representative Katherine Tai about the devastating impacts of imports on the domestic shrimping industry along America's Gulf Coast. We also expressed our fears about the highly contagious White Spot Syndrome Virus (WSSV) entering the United States through Indian shrimp imports to the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and devastating shrimp, crab, and crawfish stock. Now, a slew of recent stories verified what our shrimpers know to be true: that cheap shrimp imported from India regularly do not meet domestic health standards¹ and are produced using abusive labor practices,² including child labor.³ We are asking your Administration to halt these imports until you can make a coordinated, whole-of-government effort to protect the American seafood supply.

According to the Associated Press, Indian shrimp accounts for 40% of the shrimp consumed in the United States.⁴ Despite our efforts to fund the Food and Drug Administration and bolster their testing capacity, the FDA is not currently testing a sufficient sample of seafood imports. While the European Union samples 50% of shrimp, the FDA routinely tests a fraction of one percent.⁵ As a result, the American market is uniquely hospitable for Indian shrimp, despite frequent reports of contamination with banned antibiotics and veterinary drugs, salmonella, or filth. Even with the limited resources at our ports of entry, Indian shipments still account for 60% of all rejected shrimp.⁶

However, even when bulk imports are tested, Indian suppliers use calculated tactics to evade detection. They scoot through our ports by dumping massive amounts of supply at one time, fronting the "clean" cargo, or shopping around for more favorable ports. The sheer volume of imports is enough to overwhelm the FDA's limited resources. Notably, a 2020 study conducted by the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center detected contamination in 2/3 of tested samples of imports available on the market.⁷

¹ <https://theoutlawocean.com/investigations/india-shrimp-a-growing-goliath/>

² <https://apnews.com/article/india-shrimp-seafood-industry-labor-abuses-us-imports-ef5fbf245c86dca16565ff429bf22028>

³ <https://corpaccountabilitylab.org/hidden-harvest>

⁴ <https://apnews.com/article/india-shrimp-seafood-industry-labor-abuses-us-imports-ef5fbf245c86dca16565ff429bf22028>

⁵ <https://corpaccountabilitylab.org/hidden-harvest>

⁶ <https://shrimpalliance.com/the-outlaw-ocean-project-investigation-confirms-what-every-shrimper-knows/>

⁷ <https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/37360>

Now, damning evidence from someone in the industry has revealed strong concerns of severe food safety issues and labor violations at an Indian shrimp processing plant. The whistleblower alleged that the company was deliberately exporting shrimp contaminated with antibiotics and engaging in forced labor practices.⁸ These foreign producers are deliberately using government subsidies and shortcuts – like packing the supply with banned antibiotics or using feed caught through illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing practices – to undercut domestic shrimp suppliers and flood the American market with cheap and unsafe shrimp. In fact, the Indian facilities highlighted in the report accounted for a combined 12% of all Indian shrimp shipped to the U.S. in 2023.⁹ As a result, domestic shrimp prices are dropping dramatically.

Reports like these are why Congress is considering legislative proposals like H.R. 4547, the Laws Ensuring Safe Shrimp (LESS) Act, which provides additional resources to the FDA to ensure that imported shrimp are safe for human consumption and not supplied using illegal fishing practices. Without a massive increase in testing, oversight, and enforcement, tainted imports will keep finding their way into the U.S. market. As it stands, the FDA simply does not have the resources to keep up with the volume of imports.

It is imperative that your Administration take swift action to protect American consumers. We urge you to implement a ban on the import of Indian shrimp until the situation can be further analyzed. Our shrimpers here at home that can help fill the void and provide safe and healthy shrimp to the American market while we work to ensure the safety of our seafood supply.

Sincerely,



Garret Graves
Member of Congress



Mary Sattler Peltola
Member of Congress

⁸ <https://www.theoutlawocean.com/investigations/india-shrimp-a-growing-goliath/indian-shrimp-rife-with-bondage-hazards-and-stolen-wages/>

⁹ <https://www.theoutlawocean.com/investigations/india-shrimp-a-growing-goliath/indian-shrimp-rife-with-bondage-hazards-and-stolen-wages/>