



**Oceana Reveals Misrepresentation
of America's Favorite Seafood**

Despite its popularity, U.S. consumers are routinely given little information about the shrimp they purchase.

With shrimp, it is almost impossible to know what you are really getting. While shrimp is the most commonly consumed seafood in the United States, and the most highly traded seafood in the world, its high demand has led to many issues including environmental concerns and human rights abuses. Despite its popularity, U.S. consumers are routinely given little information about the shrimp they purchase, making it nearly impossible to know whether a shrimp is farmed or even tell the difference between more responsibly fished shrimp and less sustainable choices.

Oceana's previous studies have shown that species substitution, a form of seafood fraud, is common in the U.S. Last year, Oceana found that one-third of the more than 1,200 fish samples it tested nationwide were not accurately labeled, according to Food and Drug Administration guidelines. We have now turned our attention to shrimp, American's most popular seafood, to investigate the amount of misrepresentation in the marketplace as well as the extent of the information that consumers are given about the products they purchase.

Consumers may wish to choose their shrimp more carefully for many important social and ecological reasons. For instance, consumers may wish to avoid shrimp caught in fisheries that are not responsibly managed, that have high rates of waste or discards, or that are associated with human rights abuses. At the same time, consumers may wish to avoid farmed shrimp due to health and environmental impacts. Similarly, consumers may want to actively choose shrimp caught from nearby wild populations in the U.S., rather than shrimp caught overseas, or they may wish to purchase shrimp that are farmed using state-of-the-art techniques that minimize pollution and reduce ecological impacts.

Most labels on packages, signs at seafood counters and menus at restaurants do not provide consumers with enough information to make such choices. There are very few specifics provided, and in many cases, the information given about shrimp misrepresents the actual identity of the product. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, for consumers to make informed choices.

Out of 143 products tested, Oceana found that 30 percent were misrepresented

Oceana surveyed shrimp sold in grocery stores and restaurants to see what information consumers typically received and compared it to what they actually got. Oceana's investigation included surveying how shrimp were labeled on menus, at seafood counters and on packages in grocery stores. We also collected samples of shrimp at grocery stores and restaurants for genetic species identification. Oceana's study was conducted in 2013 and covered cities in the Gulf of Mexico as well as Portland, OR,

Washington, D.C. and New York City. Out of 143 products tested, Oceana found that 30 percent were misrepresented, which Oceana defined as either mislabeled (swapping out one species for another), misleading (labeling farmed species as "Gulf"), or mixed/mystery (commingling species among bagged shrimp).

Misrepresenting shrimp not only leaves consumers in the dark, but it also hurts honest fishermen who are trying to sell their products into the market. Building more transparency into the complex seafood supply chain can help deter bad actors from misrepresenting products while allowing officials to verify the identity of seafood. Requiring traceability for all seafood sold in the U.S. would help track seafood from the fishing vessel or farm to your dinner plate while providing more information to consumers about the seafood they eat. Traceability can also prevent illegally caught seafood from entering the marketplace and deter human rights violations around the world, while giving consumers the information they need to make fully informed, responsible seafood choices. Americans have a right to know more about the seafood they eat, and Oceana is working to ensure that all seafood sold in the U.S. is safe, legally caught and honestly labeled.



OVERALL 30%

OF THE SHRIMP PRODUCTS TESTED

WERE MISREPRESENTED

GULF OF MEXICO

(63 PRODUCTS) - LARGEST SHRIMP FISHERY IN U.S

PENSACOLA & FORT WALTON BEACH, FLORIDA

MOBILE & ORANGE BEACH, ALABAMA

BILOXI & OCEAN SPRINGS, MISSISSIPPI

NEW ORLEANS & LAFAYETTE, LOUISIANA

HOUSTON & GALVESTON, TEXAS

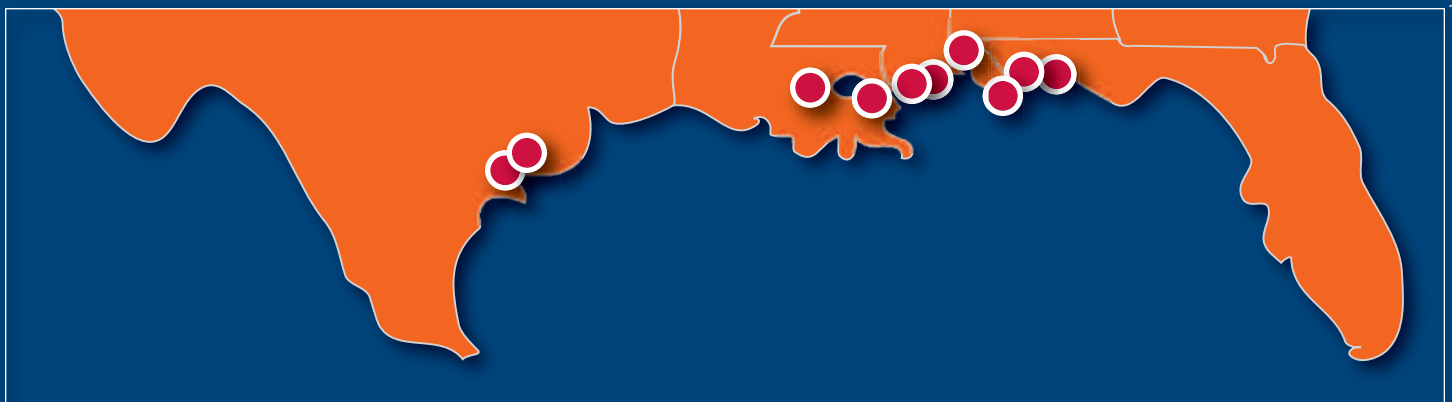
30% Misrepresented

Every Gulf royal red and rock shrimp sample was misrepresented

The "Gulf" label can be misleading; over one-third of the products labeled as "Gulf" shrimp were farmed

Nearly two-thirds of the samples simply labeled as "shrimp" were actually wild-caught Gulf shrimp, possibly a missed marketing opportunity for promoting domestically caught seafood

Gulf residents knew more about the shrimp they purchased than other areas, with only 15% of products surveyed lacking information on both where the shrimp was from and whether it was wild or farmed



PORTLAND, OREGON

(20 PRODUCTS) – SHRIMP-PRODUCING STATE

5% Misrepresented

Only one shrimp was misrepresented; a dish advertised as “wild Pacific shrimp” was actually farmed whiteleg shrimp

50% of menus surveyed listed a type of shrimp on at least one dish, the highest percentage nationwide

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

(30 PRODUCTS)

43% Misrepresented

Over 50% of misrepresented shrimp were farmed whiteleg shrimp disguised as wild-caught shrimp

67% of grocery stores visited sold misrepresented shrimp

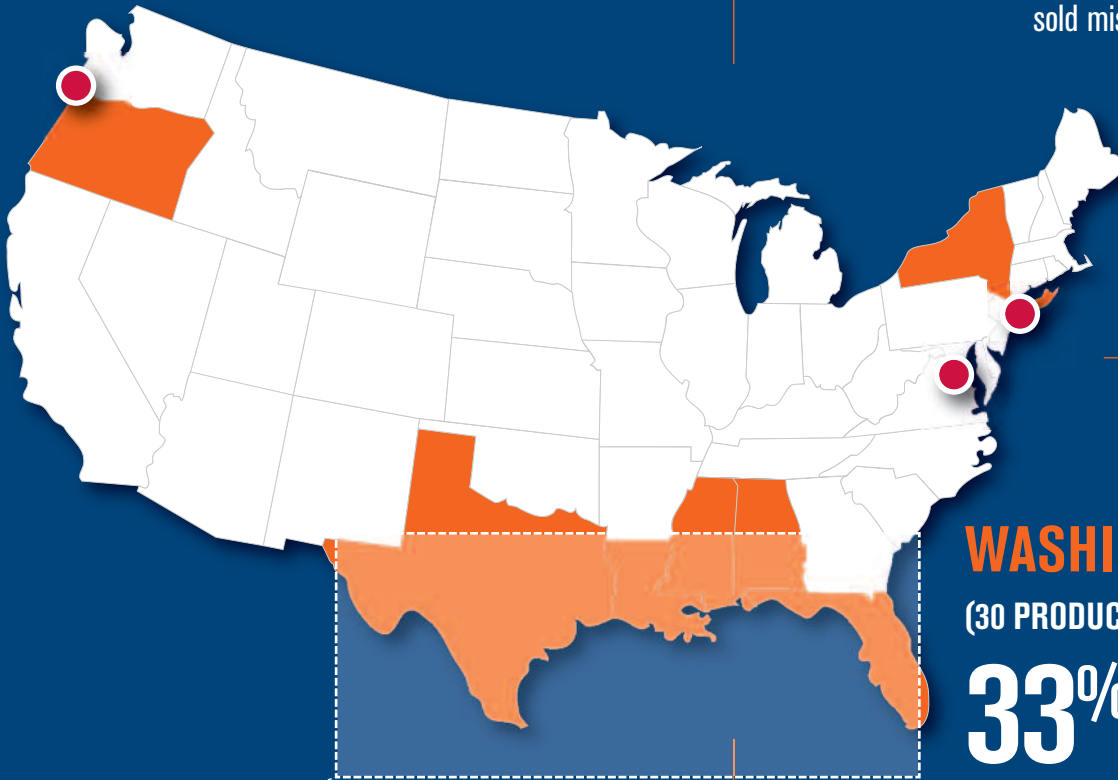
WASHINGTON, D.C.

(30 PRODUCTS)

33% Misrepresented

47% of products purchased at restaurants were misrepresented

76% of menus surveyed did not reveal where the shrimp was from, and 82% failed to list the type of shrimp on any of the dishes

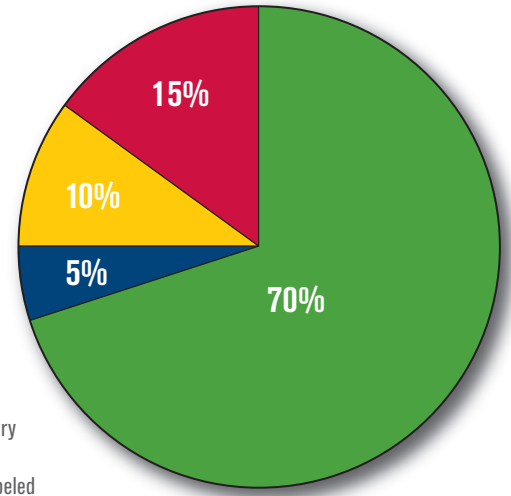


KEY RESULTS

Overall, 35 percent of the 111 vendors visited nationwide sold misrepresented shrimp. Of the 70 restaurants visited, 31 percent sold mislabeled or misleading products, and 41 percent of the 41 grocery stores and markets visited sold misrepresented products.

30% of Shrimp Products Misrepresented

- The most common species substitution was farmed whiteleg shrimp sold as “wild” shrimp and “Gulf” shrimp.
- Forty percent of the 20 shrimp species or categories collected and identified were not previously known to be sold in the U.S.
- No samples labeled as “farmed” were mislabeled, while over half of the samples labeled simply “shrimp” were actually a wild-caught shrimp.
- A banded coral “shrimp,” which is an aquarium pet not intended to be consumed as food, was found commingled with another unidentified shrimp in a bag of frozen wild salad-sized shrimp purchased in the Gulf.
- Overall, 30% of the shrimp products surveyed in grocery stores lacked information on country-of-origin, 29% lacked farmed/wild information and one in five did not provide either.
- The majority of restaurant menus surveyed did not provide the diner with any information on the type of shrimp, whether it was farmed/wild or its origin.

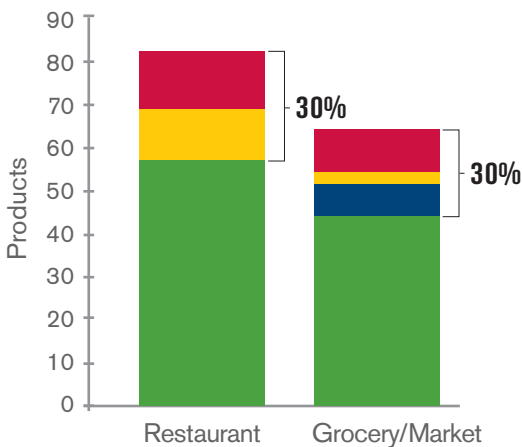


15% Mislabeled: Twenty-two of the 143 shrimp products tested (15 percent) were mislabeled, most (59 percent) of which were the wrong species, such as “rock” shrimp replaced with whiteleg shrimp. About one-third of the mislabeled shrimp products listed the wrong method of production, where a shrimp labeled as “wild” was found to be farmed.

10% Misleading: Fourteen of 143 products tested (10 percent) were misleading; they were labeled as coming from a region in the U.S. known for wild-caught shrimp, such as “Gulf” (12), Texas (1) or Carolina (1), but were identified as farmed whiteleg shrimp (*Litopenaeus vannamei*). This shrimp species is farmed worldwide, including a very small percentage in the Gulf of Mexico. Since the geographic origin of the globally farmed whiteleg shrimp cannot be verified with the DNA testing methods used, we defined these labels as *misleading* rather than *mislabeled*.

5% Mixed/Mystery: Of the seven products categorized as mixed/mystery among the 143 tested, most (57 percent) were commingled products where two samples from one bag were tested and found to be different species. Four mixed product bags yielded results for eight samples (two of which were mislabeled, but not counted among mislabeled products). The remaining samples were species that either could not be identified using our DNA methods or novel, genetically undescribed species.

Shrimp Labeling by Retail Outlet



Shrimp purchased from grocery stores and restaurants were misrepresented at the same rate.



CONCLUSION

This study shows that consumers are rarely given enough information about shrimp on the menu or in grocery stores to make sustainable choices. If consumers want to support local seafood, how can they have confidence that they are truly purchasing a local product?

The solution is traceability: tracking seafood from boat or farm to dinner plate. Traceability and providing more information to consumers will help to reduce seafood fraud, bring more accountability to the seafood supply chain and allow consumers to make more informed choices when feeding their families.

Efforts to stop seafood fraud and keep illegal seafood from entering the U.S. seafood supply have advanced. In June 2014, President Obama created a dedicated government task force to combat seafood fraud and illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. The task force is charged with providing the President with recommendations on how best to use the tools that the federal government already has to stop seafood fraud and illegal fishing. Oceana strongly encourages the task force to take a comprehensive approach to addressing these issues, including requiring traceability for all seafood sold in the U.S. to ensure that it is safe, legally caught and honestly labeled.



WHAT CONSUMERS CAN DO

- **Contact the President's task force.** Tell President Obama and his administration that you want to know more about the seafood you purchase: act.oceana.org/sign/trackmyfish
- **Ask questions.** Consumers should ask more questions, including what kind of shrimp it is, if it is wild or farm-raised, and where and how it was caught.
- **Support traceable seafood.** When possible, consumers can purchase traceable shrimp, which will tell the story of the product while helping to ensure that it is honestly labeled.

For Oceana's full shrimp report, please visit oceana.org/shrimpfraud.