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Southern Shrimp Alliance Condemns Mislabeling on U.S. Shrimp Packages

Tarpon Springs, Fla.- As the result of a four-week investigation organized by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, government officials in 17 states reported finding that ice was fraudulently included as part of the labeled weight of seafood sold to consumers, including U.S. wild-caught shrimp. The Southern Shrimp Alliance commends the responsible state officials for investigating this deceptive commercial practice that cheats consumers and the honest members of the seafood industry. The news of widespread “short-weighting” follow extensive reports on other forms of economic fraud that appears to be rampant in the seafood industry, including the federal government’s well-publicized findings that shrimp labeled as “U.S. wild-caught” actually contained cheap farm-raised imported shrimp as well as recent criminal convictions for seafood importers for the false labeling of the species of seafood sold to consumers. These examples show how mislabeled products are increasing the revenue of a few dishonest companies at the expense of U.S. consumers and the U.S. domestic fishing industry as a whole.

John Williams, the Executive Director of the Southern Shrimp Alliance, issued the following statement in reaction to mislabeled U.S. shrimp packages:

“It is intolerable for a company to rip-off customers by adding water or ice to the weight of its product or by disguising the true origin of seafood on packages of U.S. shrimp or by falsely identifying the species of seafood sold. These practices blatantly steal money from consumers. Mislabeling undermines the premium price for U.S. wild-caught shrimp - all for the economic benefit of a few dishonest companies. Any company guilty of mislabeling seafood should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Individuals that knowingly mislabel shrimp to make an extra buck at the expense of consumers and thousands of honest, family businesses in the U.S. shrimp industry should not remain part of the industry.

Fraud is not just an economic issue. There are significant health-related consequences for consumers that result from the mislabeling of the country of origin because of the prevalent use of antibiotics and other banned substances in aquaculture overseas. The intentional mislabeling of imported shrimp gives consumers false confidence that they are receiving safe, wholesome, natural domestic shrimp.”

The SSA has a long, successful history of working with government officials to identify economically-motivated adulteration of seafood and evasion of U.S. trade and food safety laws. It encourages members of the shrimp industry to report mislabeling to the appropriate authorities.

The SSA is an alliance of the U.S. warmwater wild shrimp fishery from eight states: North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas. For more information on the SSA, please visit www.shrimpalliance.com.

Editors Note: The SSA's comments to the FDA on economically-motivated adulteration of seafood can be found on its Web site at: <http://tinyurl.com/MDAFoodComments>.