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PUBLIC SUBMISSION

Mass Mail Campaign 3: Texas Shrimp Association (TSA), - Comment Submitted by Andrea Hance

Posted by the **Federal Trade Commission** on Sep 14, 2020

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As the Executive Director of the Texas Shrimp Association (TSA), I represent an industry that has arguably been affected the hardest by the "Misrepresentation of Product Origin". Since the United States opened the border to imported shrimp, our industry began to decline at the same pace as the increase in imported shrimp. During the past 25 years, approximately 70% of hard working gulf shrimpers were forced to sell their boats, giving up the only way they've known to support their families. The bleak uncertainty and lack of any Government assistance has deterred anyone from entering this industry. As the fleet owners age, we will continue the downward trend and possibly witness the demise of such an iconic American industry that many coastal communities rely upon for economic support.

Our Government continues to allow 1.5 - 2 billion pounds of shrimp to enter our country each year with little to no oversight. The FDA tests only 1-2%, with a high percent testing positive for banned U.S. chemicals, antibiotics, and other foreign - potentially harmful substances.

Yet forcing our industry to adhere to more than 13,000 regulations and overcome very costly sustainable benchmarks set by NOAA - which we've successfully met or exceeded, warranting a sustainable stamp of approval from NOAA. Unfortunately these regulations have financially ruined most fleet owners.

So here's the million dollar question: If American shrimp are considered a superior/sustainable product and sought after around the world while imports from Asian countries continue to rise, why is our industry struggling to turn a profit?

Based on an informal study conducted by TSA in 2017, we found that 85% of (non chain restaurants) who convey to the consumer the shrimp are American wild caught gulf shrimp or illustrate this information on their menus are actually serving imported shrimp (survey details available per request). Millions of dollars have been spent educating consumers on the difference between American shrimp and imported shrimp, suggesting they ask the wait staff where the shrimp are from. We noticed the wait staff typically has no idea and simply goes along with the leading question. - Answering YES to satisfy the consumer. Digging a bit deeper, we asked to see the box or bag to verify the answer and found that 85% of the time, we were not told the truth.

It's a slap in the face to the hard working fishermen, many of who've gone broke trying to pay for all the regulations imposed by our federal Government -forcing us to compete with cheap imported shrimp entering our country with virtually no oversight what so ever and left to wonder if this law had been in place (and enforced) if they would still be in business.

Misrepresentation of product origin should have repercussions and this rule would be the next step towards advocating for honest and truthful transparency. It is deceptive, and therefore unethical to mislead consumers about a product's origin. By passing and enforcing this regulation, the FTC would identify and potentially penalize those businesses, which have been engaging in these fraudulent advertisements and claims.

TSA is strongly in favor of this regulation and if passed and implemented believe would stabilize our industry. More importantly allow the consumer the option to choose what they eat - especially when 92% of restaurants serve imported shrimp - most harvested under the most deployable, unethical conditions.

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