

FDA detains “farm raised” Chinese Seafood

On June 28, 2007, the FDA announced an import detainment order for the following farm-raised seafood products imported from China:

1. farm-raised catfish
2. farm-raised basa
3. farm-raised dace
4. farm-raised eel
5. farm-raised shrimp.

The FDA officials issued the detainment order in response to the possible presence of unapproved drug residues; the FDA indicated that this **is not an immediate** public health issue. The levels found in some samples were just above detectable levels and the FDA is not advising consumers to destroy or return “farm-raised” seafood that they have already purchased and have in their homes. Additionally the FDA has not initiated a recall on any of the above products that are already in the marketplace. National Fish & Seafood will continue to maintain the stringent quality control standards on all of our seafood products. National Fish & Seafood fully supports the FDA ruling and we routinely test all of our products to assure it meets FDA requirements. National Fish & Seafood is 100 % COMMITTED TO OFFERING SAFE AND QUALITY SEAFOOD to our customers throughout the United States that is produced in clean, wholesome environments from farm to plate, which we would confidently serve to our own families.

The following FAQ’s are answered by the National Fisheries Institute (NFI).

Is there a ban on seafood from China?

No, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is placing an import alert on farm-raised catfish, a related fish called “basa”, shrimp, dace, and eel from China. This is not a ban, but puts these five products on detention without physical examination (DWPE) status, meaning they cannot enter the U.S. without first being shown to be safe. **Wild caught** seafood from China is not impacted by the alert.

Why is seafood from China still at the grocery store and in restaurants? Is it safe to eat?

If fish is for sale in the grocery store or at a restaurant, it has met FDA standards and is approved for consumption. The agency does not believe it is necessary to recall any products without evidence that specific products are contaminated. The agency’s import alert will prevent future, chronic exposure to tainted products.

What should I do with the seafood in my freezer?

Consumers can continue to consume the seafood they have already purchased. They should have no concern about eating seafood.

What unapproved drugs or food additives have been detected in seafood imported from China?

Malachite green, fluoroquinolones, nitofurans, and gentian violet have all been detected. These drugs are used to inhibit the growth of bacteria and fungus on fish or to prevent parasite infestation. However, they are not approved for use in farm-raised seafood in the United States. No unapproved drugs have been found in any domestic aquacultured products.

What is the risk posed by the seafood covered by the import alert?

The FDA emphasizes that seafood from China does not pose a direct public health risk, and the import alert is precautionary. Unapproved chemical residues have only been detected at extremely low levels, most often at or near the minimum level of detection. Nitrofurans, malachite green, and gentian violet have been shown to be carcinogenic in study animals, while the use of fluoroquinolones in food animals may increase antibiotic resistance to human pathogens. As a result of the trace levels found, the health risk posed by the detected drugs is minimal and primarily from long-term exposure.

How do I know if my seafood is from China?

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) requires fish and shellfish be labeled with country of origin and method of catch (farmed or wild). Consumers can find this information at retail; however, FDA believes that consumers need not be concerned about whether or not the seafood they purchase is from China. The agency's import alert will prohibit the entry into U.S. commerce of seafood products from China that do not meet U.S. standards.

How much of the seafood consumed in the U.S. comes from China?

Shrimp: Of shrimp consumed in the U.S., more than 80 percent is imported, of which only around 7 percent is from China (2005).

Catfish: Of catfish consumed in the U.S., about 10 percent comes from China (2005).

Basa: Of basa consumed in the U.S., 8 percent comes from China.

How does the FDA regulate seafood?

FDA testing of import entries is one of several tools used by FDA to combat violations of U.S. law. The agency has combined these efforts with site visits to several major exporting countries to review exporting country regulations and examine resources.

Several NFI member companies have also visited suppliers overseas. These efforts are encouraged as they provide a unique opportunity to assure clarity and transparency of U.S. policies.

More details on the FDA seafood regulation process can be found in the consumer-friendly article at the following address: <http://www.fda.gov/consumer/updates/seafood062807.html>.

Why is FDA taking this action now?

The National Fisheries Institute (NFI) continually works with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and international governments to supply Americans with healthy and sustainable sources of seafood - including fish from global sources such as China. NFI commends the FDA's standards for wholesomeness and "zero tolerance" policy for unapproved antibiotics for imported seafood products.

We apologize for any trouble this publicity has caused you, but we remain confident that the seafood from China, which we sell you, is of the highest quality and either meets or exceeds FDA specifications.

Kathy Scanlon
Director of Quality Assurance

Richard Pandolfo
Executive Vice President