



CATFISH FARMERS OF AMERICA
1100 HIGHWAY 82 E. SUITE 202
INDIANOLA, MISSISSIPPI 38751
(662) 887-2699 · (662) 887-6857 FAX

Walk into any supermarket in America, and you'll find a large part of the seafood section stocked with imported frozen fish. Chances are that few – if any – of those imported fish were ever inspected by the U.S. government to ensure they met health and safety standards.

Last year 5.2 billion pounds of seafood were imported into the United States. One of the best kept secrets in Washington is that only 2 percent of that imported seafood was actually inspected.

Congress approved a law on June 18, 2008 that would have helped fix the problem by ultimately subjecting all imported catfish and related species to the same tough standards and protections as beef and poultry.

One year and five months later, American consumers are still waiting for that protection.

While we're waiting, thousands of pounds of contaminated, imported catfish and related fish are slipping through the Food and Drug Administration's weak safety net.

Just last month, the Alabama Department of Agriculture & Industries examined catfish and related fish imported from five Asian countries and discovered that one out of every three of those imported fish tested positive for harmful Fluoroquinolones drugs that are banned for use in fish in the United States because of health and safety dangers to consumers.

Those imported fish from China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand would have landed on Alabama dinner plates if state authorities had not intervened.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is responsible for inspecting all imported seafood. But, fully 98 percent of all foreign seafood imported into the United States makes it to the grocery shelves and restaurant tables with no FDA inspections, according to the Government Accountability Office.

Concerns over the FDA's low inspection rates prompted the U.S. Congress last year to approve a provision in 2008 Farm Bill shifting regulation of catfish from the FDA to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) which inspects and oversees the quality of all beef, poultry and pork sold in America. The USDA has stronger legal authority, more thorough inspections systems and tougher health and safety requirements over the food it oversees.

“The legislative language in the 2008 Farm Bill leaves no ambiguity in its intent that all catfish, domestic and imported, meet the highest USDA standards – at least equal to the guarantees already accorded to beef and poultry,” Sens. Blanche L. Lincoln (D-Ark.) and Thad Cochran (R-Miss.)

wrote in a letter to USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack in October. “Like you, we feel strongly about ensuring the health and safety of American consumers.”

The implementation of that law shifting catfish regulation to the USDA has been stuck in the Washington federal bureaucracy for the past 18 months. The USDA has debated whether to inspect all catfish and catfish-like products or just catfish from certain countries. The government bean counters – the Office of Management and Budget – is now debating how much it will cost to inspect all, or just some of the imported catfish and catfish products.

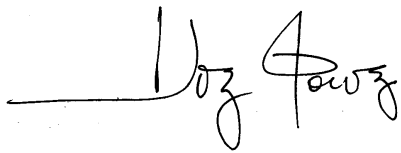
While all this has been going on in Washington, Alabama isn’t the only government that has stopped the sale of contaminated imports. Countries in Europe and the Middle East have banned Vietnamese catfish-like products because of health and safety concerns that they are raised in the Mekong River, which is polluted with raw sewage and toxic chemicals.

Even the Vietnamese government has sounded alarm bells over the conditions of its fast-growing catfish farming industry. In just the last few weeks, Vietnam’s Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development admitted difficulties in monitoring and managing the quality of feed, water environment and fish products and called for better systems to detect disease outbreaks.

The Catfish Farmers of America is urging the Washington bureaucracy to cut through the red tape and impose rigorous USDA inspections and regulations on all catfish – domestic and imported. U.S. Farm-Raised Catfish is already rated one of the safest, nutritious and environmentally-friendly fish in the world by organizations such as the Audubon Society, Environmental Defense Fund and Food and Water Watch.

Americans are trying to eat healthier and are more safety-conscious than ever before about what they feed their families. We encourage our federal government to ensure that American consumers are getting the healthiest and safest catfish possible when they go to their grocery shelves or sit down to dinner at a restaurant.

Why should American families be at risk one more day?

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joey Lowery". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style. The first name "Joey" is written in a larger, more prominent script, and "Lowery" follows in a similar but slightly smaller script. There is a horizontal line under the "Joey" part of the signature.

Joey Lowery
President
Catfish Farmers of America

1-501-454-1810
jlowery@wildblue.net
www.uscatfish.com