

## **Catfish Farmers of America support USDA inspections of all catfish products.**

The Catfish Farmers of America are urging Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack to enact provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill approved by Congress which would ensure that all catfish products –domestic and imported --meet the health and safety standards that Americans have come to expect from USDA regulations and inspections of meat, poultry, eggs and dairy products.

The USDA currently inspects and imposes some of the world's toughest health and safety regulations on imported meat, poultry, eggs and dairy products sold in the United States. It does not inspect seafood.

The inspection of imported seafood is left to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Last year 5.2 billion pounds of seafood were imported into the United States from foreign countries. (NOAA website at [http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/fishwatch/trade\\_and\\_aquaculture.htm](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/fishwatch/trade_and_aquaculture.htm))

However, the FDA inspected only two percent of all imported seafood in 2008, including catfish products. (Government Accountability Office report at <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-09-258>)

How can we be sure these imports are safe?

Congress voted to fix this problem in the 2008 Farm Bill which shifts regulation of catfish products from the FDA to the USDA. Now it's up to USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack to enact the provisions of the law. The Catfish Farmers of America is urging Secretary Vilsack to put all catfish products and catfish-like fish under USDA jurisdiction.

However, seafood importing and processing lobbyists are recommending that only domestic and Chinese "channel" catfish be shifted to the USDA. That would leave Vietnamese "catfish," called "tra" and "basa" under FDA regulation. Vietnamese "catfish," which are raised in the muddy and polluted Mekong River Delta, have been some of the most problematic imports. Among the small percentage of fish imports inspected, the FDA refused entry to 14 shipments of Vietnamese "tra" and "basa" for contamination and other safety concerns during the one-year period ending in May 2009.

Who knows how many more slipped through the FDA's thin safety net?

Greece, Russia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates have all banned the importation of Vietnamese basa and tra at various times in the last two years because of health and safety concerns ranging from shiploads of the Vietnamese fish which were infected by listeria monocytogenes (one of the most virulent foodborne pathogens which can lead to death) to fish found to be contaminated with harmful bacteria and reports of the fish being raised in water treated with malachite green, a carcinogenic chemical. Consumer groups have launched campaigns across Europe to ban the Vietnamese imports. (Source: News reports from each country mentioned)

The campaign launched by the Catfish Farmers of America today (Thursday) is all about the healthy, safety and quality of the catfish on American grocery shelves and restaurant tables. We want all catfish imported into America to meet the same rigorous standards for quality and safety as our farm-raised catfish.

U.S. farm-raised catfish are rated as one of the cleanest, healthiest and most environmentally friendly fish products in the world by various consumer, seafood and environmental groups, including World Wildlife Fund and Environmental Defense Fund.

The USDA needs to implement the provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill. The rules need to be broad and comprehensive to cover all catfish. USDA needs to give the same peace of mind to American consumers of catfish and related fish as it gives consumers of imported meat or poultry.

Consumers shouldn't have to play roulette when it comes to the safety of our food.