

## **Industrialized Shrimp Production: Is it Really Worth It?**

It's hard to imagine that shrimp – the most popular seafood in the U.S. today – was once a delicacy reserved for Asian royalty. What was once a luxury item can now be consumed all-you-can-eat style at chain restaurants. A billion pounds of “white gold” worth about \$6 billion is produced each year.

How did this happen? Until recently, shrimp were caught in the open ocean, but today most shrimp are “farmed” in tropical coastal areas where saltwater is available and waste can be flushed into the ocean. Industrialized shrimp aquaculture is causing environmental, economic and social disasters in many nations. It is devastating the U.S. shrimp industry, and it is creating potential health hazards for the consuming public.

While the price of shrimp has fallen to less than \$10 a pound, when all things are considered, how low is the cost?

### **At The Environment's Expense**

Mangroves - tropical coastal forests - are hacked down to make room for shrimp farms. Mangroves are one of the most important ecosystems on earth. They serve as spawning and nursery grounds for thousands of marine organisms, as well as protect the coastline.

Shrimp farms depend on staggering amounts of antibiotics, fungicides, algacides and pesticides, which pollute waters and harm other sea life. What's worse, local communities are robbed of drinking water sources by farms that pump in fresh water and pump out wastewater – a wretched cocktail of chemicals, fishmeal and shrimp feces.

### **Consumer Health Risks**

Disease can run amuck in shrimp farms. The industry's solution is to dump ton after ton of antibiotics to prevent the spread of bacteria and viruses. This continual, long-term use of antibiotics breeds bacteria that are resistant, and makes these important drugs less effective for treating disease.

One widely used antibiotic – chloramphenicol – is banned in the U.S. but is used by many countries that export shrimp. Unfortunately, the U.S. does not have a rigorous inspection program for imported shrimp. The FDA only inspects 1.2% of all seafood entering the U.S.

### **Cost to Local Communities**

Local communities throughout the world depend on mangroves for their survival. Women gather shellfish, mussels, crabs and other seafood to feed their families and sell in local markets. Fishermen gain access to the sea through mangroves – access that is destroyed when shrimp farms are built.

Further, rice paddies, which are needed to produce food for local consumption, are commonly converted to shrimp farms. In Thailand, half of shrimp farms are believed to have once been rice fields. Once salinated, the land cannot revert to rice growing.

Coastal communities in the U.S. also suffer. American shrimpers cannot compete with the flood of cheap shrimp imports. Every year, droves of shrimpers are forced to sell their boats and look for land-based jobs, when all they know is the sea. From 2000 to 2002, U.S. shrimp production fell by more than 50 percent. Nearly 90 percent of the shrimp consumed in the U.S. is imported.

### **The Global Shrimp Industry**

The march of the global shrimp aquaculture industry is following the path of the greater food industry. International development institutions such as the World Bank are bankrolling the conversion and privatization of coastal areas to the detriment of the environment and citizens. Dozens of countries are taking the bait, mainly the Asian countries of Thailand, Vietnam, China, India, Indonesia and the Latin American countries of Ecuador, Brazil Honduras and Mexico.

Most of the benefits accrue to the multi-national companies that profit from the industry. For instance, corporate giant Cargill has patented shrimp feed and is gaining control over its production and distribution. Family restaurants, such as Red Lobster and Long John Silver's, are the pioneers of farm raised, cheap shrimp to the mid lands of the United States.

### **What you can do!**

Do not eat imported farm raised shrimp!

Educate your friends and family.

Contact your seafood grocer about farm-raised shrimp.

Ask for local or U.S. wild shrimp.

Go to [www.shrimpactivist.org](http://www.shrimpactivist.org) to find out more!