

CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY LAB



PRESS FACT SHEET

THE CASE IN BRIEF

- **Plaintiffs:** Corporate Accountability Lab & Toxin Free USA, non-profits dedicated to addressing human rights abuses and advancing consumer protections
- **Defendant:** Aqua Star, one of the world's largest producers of shrimp products
- **Claim:** Aqua Star uses false and deceptive marketing representations of its shrimp products as:
 1. "responsibly sourced" despite the documented presence of exploitative labor practices in the products' supply chain,
 2. "sustainably" farmed despite the documented use of unsustainable and environmentally destructive practices at the shrimp farms from which the products are sourced, and as
 3. "pure" despite refusals of shrimp related to illegal antibiotics and possible contamination with Cesium-137, a man-made radioactive isotope.
- **Where sold:** Available throughout the United States and Washington, D.C. stores, including Target, Giant, Balducci's, Safeway, Save A Lot, Harris Teeter, and Kroger
- **Relief sought:** Non-monetary injunctive relief to enjoin Aqua Star from using the challenged marketing practices and to declare its conduct a violation DC's Consumer Protection Procedures Act (CPPA), D.C. Code §§28-3901-13
- **Next steps:** Hearing expected in DC Superior Court in the coming months

U.S. SHRIMP MARKET CONTEXT

- **Favorite Seafood.** [According to NOAA](#), the average per capita consumption of shrimp is about 5 pounds per person.
- **Import dependency.** In 2025, 93% of the U.S. shrimp market was imported and mostly farm-raised. The wild-caught U.S. shrimp industry supplied 7% of the U.S. shrimp market.
- **India's dominance.** Four countries accounted for 91.1% of the total volume of U.S. non-breaded frozen shrimp imports in 2025:
 - o India: 40.3%
 - o Ecuador: 31.1%
 - o Indonesia: 13.4%
 - o Vietnam: 6.3%
 - India accounted for 52.5% of peeled shrimp imports in 2025.
 - India exports 90% of its shrimp production, with the United States being its largest market.
- **Pervasive Problems.** Labor abuses and environmental destruction are built-in cost reductions of farm-raised shrimp production in the largest shrimp-producing countries, reported across all

company sectors and sizes. Countries like Bangladesh, China, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam have faced criticism for forced labor.

- o **U.S. Dept. of Labor:** Added Indian shrimp to its [2024 List of Goods Produced by Forced Labor](#) (September 2024)
- o **U.S. State Dept.:** [2024 Trafficking in Persons Report](#) flagged forced labor indicators in Indian shrimp facilities
- o **India inspection:** A mid-2024 government inspection in Andhra Pradesh found every processing facility in violation of applicable labor law.

LABOR ABUSES

At Nekkanti Sea Foods — a confirmed Aqua Star supplier:

- **Wages:** Female workers paid less than half a living wage; workers reported not receiving health insurance or legally required social security benefits
- **Housing:** Migrant workers housed in company-owned hostels under guard surveillance; permitted to leave only once per week or month
- **Conditions:** Workers peel frozen shrimp by hand, often without adequate cold-weather protection
- **Abuse:** Widespread verbal abuse by supervisors documented across multiple facilities
- **Debt bondage:** In some cases, workers pay recruitment fees that bind them to the job; recruiters receive ongoing payment per day worked
- **Fear of retaliation:** Workers avoid outside contact due to threats and fear of job loss

ENVIRONMENTAL HARMS

- **Coastal Pollution.** Discharge from shrimp hatcheries and farms are released into groundwater or other coastal estuaries, resulting in algae blooms and the spread of diseases that decrease local fish production and marginalize coastal fishermen.
- **Groundwater Contamination.** The seepage of salt from shrimp ponds into groundwater contaminates domestic and agricultural water supplies, leaving communities without potable water.

Additional Resources

Title	Publisher	Date
Hidden Harvest: Human Rights and Environmental Abuses in India's Shrimp Industry	Corporate Accountability Lab	March 2024
India Shrimp: A Growing Goliath	Outlaw Ocean Project	March 2024
AP reveals grueling working conditions in Indian shrimp industry that report calls 'dangerous and abusive'	Associated Press (Martha Mendoza)	March 2024
Net profits, human cost: How supermarkets shape exploitation in shrimp aquaculture	Akatiga	May 2024
When more means less: Supermarket purchasing power and the decline of producer prices and working conditions in the shrimp sector	Sustainability Incubator	August 2024

Title	Publisher	Date
<u>As big supermarkets pursue profits, new research shows growing exploitation of shrimp farmers</u>	Associated Press (David Rising)	September 2024
<u>The US is India's biggest importer of shrimp. Teenage girls and women working in the booming industry describe grueling conditions</u>	CNN (Sashikala VP)	February 2025

PRODUCT SAFETY RECALLS AND REFUSALS (2025)

Aqua Star and Nekkanti Sea Foods

- Aqua Star buys shrimp from Nekkanti Sea Foods, one of the largest suppliers of shrimp to the U.S. market.
- After finding banned antibiotics in Nekkanti shrimp, the FDA placed the company on Import Alert 16-129 (“Detention Without Physical Examination of Seafood Products Due to Nitrofurans”) as of May 3, 2022.

Aqua Star and P.T. Bahari Makmur

- In 2025, [Aqua Star issued recalls](#) of shrimp for possible contamination with *Cesium-137*, a man-made radioactive isotope, on August 27, 2025; August 28, 2025; September 20, 2025; September 23, 2025; and October 17, 2025.
- The [reported source of the radioactive shrimp](#) identified by Customs and Border Patrol was P.T. Bahari Makmur, based in Sejati, Indonesia, a large supplier to Aqua Star.

Aqua Star and P.T. Pabrik Lamongan BMI

- FDA refused entry for shrimp exported by another Indonesian Aqua Star supplier, PT Pabrik Lamongan BMI, due to shrimp contaminated with nitrofurans, antibiotics, and/or veterinary drug residues on June 30, 2025; August 28, 2025; September 25, 2025; September 29, 2025; and October 14, 2025.