



Surefish

The Seafood Quality Specialists

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Mystery Shopper Spots Dark Haired Mystery Woman - Mark Neely

This month, I returned to my favorite Bellingham grocery store not as the Mystery Shopper, but this time under my own identity. I was there for a quick stop to pick-up some dinner ingredients, a bottle of wine, and some flowers (I've been golfing a lot and needed to appease my wife). As I entered the store I told myself, "Don't even look at the seafood; you're in a hurry."

So, I grabbed some pre-grated parmesan cheese, got some butter, went through produce for a clove of garlic, swung by the dairy for some cream and stopped in the pasta section where I found the expensive kind of fettuccini noodles. I had some really nice scallops that I saved from an inspection the day before and I was going to make fettuccini with them. All I needed now was a bottle of wine and a bouquet of flowers. I was hoping this was going to get me out of the dog house: I'm feeling a bit guilty for abandoning my lovely wife Shannon last Sunday for 27 holes of golf and a stop by the casino afterwards.

To get to the wine section, I had to walk by the seafood department. "Don't look", I said to myself again. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a dark haired woman standing in front of the shrimp. "Don't look (at the seafood)", I said to myself again. Then I heard her say it..."Those shrimp don't look like Black Tigers, they look like China Whites". I stopped in my tracks. "Don't butt in, you're in a hurry", I warned myself. I've complained so many times to the seafood department about this fraud that I've given up. They sell White shrimp as Tigers for



about \$12 per pound! Now I had heard someone else say it. I had to butt in. "You're right, those aren't Black Tigers, they're Whites, but they're probably from Ecuador!" The mysterious woman and the clerk both looked at me like I was an intruder. I remembered that I was in a hurry and scurried along to get my wine and the bouquet.

As I waited in the check-out line I wondered, "Who is this mysterious dark haired woman? How does she know about China Whites? Where did she come from? Is she visiting Bellingham or does she live here?" I had to talk to her. Where was she? I tried to stall as I paid for my groceries with my debit card. She had to still be here. Maybe I'd see her in the parking lot. "No, you can't just approach her in the lot and start talking about shrimp, she'll think you're a stalker". I never saw her again. Maybe she's reading this right now. Hello dark haired mystery shopper shrimp woman. Are you out there?

The dinner was "a hit", and my wife loves me again. I can't wait to play some more golf!

We offer customized sanitation workshops in Spanish. For more Information please contact Allison at allison@surefish.com



Surefish Quality News

The Seafood Quality Specialists

Spring 2005 Issue

Surefish Training/Workshops:

- Surefish offers FDA Required HACCP Training

• June 8 & 9, 2005

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COOL Verification Audit by Surefish

-Bart Cox

The mandatory retail Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) law became effective on April 4th. This means all firms licensed as retailers under the Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act of 1930 (PACA) must be providing country of origin and method of production information to their customers. For the past year, retailers have been scrambling to get their suppliers to set up COOL systems. Some retailers are requesting their suppliers undergo audits to determine compliance with the chain of custody and record keeping requirements of the regulation.

Under the COOL law, shoppers must be informed of the origin of fish and shellfish offered for sale and also whether they were raised on a farm or caught in the wild (method of production). The information can be presented in a variety of ways, including individual labeling on each package or on signs in the seafood display cases. For more details on the specific requirements, the regulation can be found on the USDA website at www.ams.usda.gov/cool/.

Proponents of the regulation say the labels will provide basic knowledge to consumers and distinguish U.S. products from foreign competitors on the grocery shelf. These data consumers can then use to make more informed decisions on their seafood purchases. The food industry fears costly paperwork and complex recordkeeping systems that may be required to prove the source of seafood.

The law as passed in 2002 (as part of the 2002 Farm Bill) initially called on the Agriculture Department to issue rules for mandatory country-of-origin labels on beef, lamb, pork, seafood, fruits, perishable agricultural commodities and peanuts by Sept. 30, 2004. However, Congress has delayed the requirement for two years for all of the covered commodities except for SEA-FOOD!

When the Interim Final Rules were issued last Oct. 4, they gave the industry six months to get ready for the new system and to clear out unlabeled inventory. To assist with this, it also

stipulated that the requirements do not pertain to fish or shellfish caught or harvested before December 6, 2004. While the regulation

is a retail labeling law, it does have requirements for suppliers of covered commodities to retailers, whether direct or indirect. These suppliers must provide the country of origin and method of production information to the retailer, and be able to substantiate the claims. The regulation is clear that the USDA may require a verifiable recordkeeping audit trail to substantiate such claims. Because of this, many buyers are now stipulating that their suppliers have a 3rd party COOL audit performed on their system for verification of compliance.

For compliance purposes, the USDA considers the records that would be used for this to consist of two separate parts. The first part of the records would establish the chain of custody of the product – the law specifically requires the suppliers to be able to identify the immediate previous source and immediate subsequent recipient of lots. The second record part is what establishes the country of origin and method of production claims for the product. Surefish can conduct an assessment audit of your company's COOL program to make sure that your company's recordkeeping meets both parts of the requirements and that you are fully COOL compliant. Our COOL audits contribute to the improvement of the COOL system by identifying any deficiencies and/or highlighting any areas needing improvement.

If you are interested in having your COOL system audited for compliance or if you have questions regarding the COOL regulation please contact Allison Corcoran at Allison@surefish.com.



President's Piece

- Lisa Goché, President

When Consumers are Confused, We All Lose

In *The Wave* April 19 – “A new survey by Harris interactive reveals 51 percent of U.S. adults who have ever eaten seafood say they are eating more seafood now than they did five years ago”. The industry has worked very hard over the years to increase consumer awareness and consumption of seafood products. Efforts include improved quality, value-added innovations, extolling the benefits of Omega 3s and so on. And it seems to be working.

The question is, will these efforts be undermined, and the trend reversed, as a result of confusion? Mixed messages and scary headlines seem to be increasing in number.

The average consumer may well think: “Wild versus farmed? Eat more seafood. But wait, maybe not. You have to watch out for PCBs, antibiotics, and mercury, right? What was that in shrimp again? From where? Fish farming is bad for the environment. Or is it, wild harvesting is destroying the oceans????”

All of this is bewildering enough without adding to the mix the sometimes poor quality and misinformation at some seafood counters and restaurants. (See our ongoing “Mystery Shopper” newsletter feature and “Fact vs. Fiction: What does ‘SAFE’ Seafood mean” on the following page).

And therein lies the problem. Will these factors drive consumers away from seafood? What about people considering adding it to their diet for the first time? What are they to think?

Other sectors of the food industry appear to be noticing this and are essentially marketing their products as healthy alternatives to seafood. You can not only find fish oil supplements, but also eggs, bread, and a growing list of other

foods with Omega 3s added. And so, we might just lose some real opportunities here if we don't come up with more proactive and constructive ways to inform the public. Bashing each other or rushing to press with one contradictory study after the other ultimately hurts us all. Many, far wiser persons than I, have said this before. So, what's the answer?

Some companies are already reacting. Instead of fighting it, or each other, they are addressing customer concerns by taking a few simple steps to get out in front of the issues. Some of them partner with third parties, such as Surefish, to build these programs and implement non-biased verification. These efforts are then incorporated into their marketing plan. A few examples:

- Programs for periodic product testing to verify absence of certain harmful substances
- Quality handling programs with a third party inspection, certification or training
- Eco-labeling (such as MSC)
- Third Party audits to verify: HACCP compliance, source and traceability (COOL audits), and Recall Program effectiveness.
- Periodic staff training programs – sanitation, purchasing and quality, and more.

Some may view such testing, program development and marketing strategies as unnecessary. Money down the drain. But much can be done at very little cost while yielding significant pay off. The small investments made have given such companies a way to distinguish themselves from the rest and build customer loyalty. Otherwise, when the consumer, as the final “inspector”, is confused or distrustful of seafood, our competitors are the only winners.

ACC-Dedicated to Responsible Aquaculture

- Gertrud Gastel

I am proud to be attending the ACC Certifier Training Course in Surabaya, Indonesia on May 15-19, 2005. After the five-day course I will be able to join our ACC auditor team to inspect shrimp hatcheries, farms and processing plants for Best Aquaculture Practices standards for environmental sustainability and social responsibility, and to apply HACCP regulations for food safety.

The mission of Aquaculture Certification Council, Inc. is to certify aquaculture facilities that apply best management practices to ensure social and environmental responsibility, food safety and traceability throughout the production chain.

Why have an ACC audit?

- Growing consumer demand for high quality fishery products
- Enhanced consumer demand for food safety and environmental and social issues
- Demonstrate proactive, responsible management techniques in the development of a truly sustainable food production system
- The need to comply with the legislation relating to food safety and, more recently, to the threat of bioterrorism

Aquaculture Certification Council, Inc. offers a primarily "process" rather than "product" certification, with an orientation toward seafood buyers. To execute this mission, ACC relies on a team of **independent certifiers** accredited by the council to perform site inspections for program participants. Surefish is certified by and performs audits for the Aquaculture Certification Council. For more information regarding **3rd party Aquaculture Certification Council auditing** please contact myself at gertrud@surefish.com or at 206-284-2686.



Fact vs. Fiction: What does 'SAFE' Seafood mean? -Bart Lovejoy

It's a confusing time for fish lovers. Eating fish has amazing health benefits; it may cut your odds of having a heart attack or stroke, yet recent headlines have warned of dangerous toxins. Are gill seekers facing a no-fin situation? To be safe, arm yourself with knowledge from objective sources.

Stories containing misinformation or a misrepresentation of facts have been rolled out by the news media on a regular basis over the past few years. Don't let fear overtake some facts:

Rumor: Fish can poison your brain.

Reality: Only if you wear booties.

A recent government advisory warned that pregnant or nursing women and their offspring should avoid certain fish species (the highest mercury levels are found in shark, king mackerel, swordfish, and tilefish). Mercury is a concern "in fragile, developing brains, not fully developed brains, or aging ones," says Kathleen Wilson, M.D., author of *Brain Maintenance: How to Prevent Stroke and Delay Dementia*. In fact, eating fish may help fight Alzheimer's: in a study published in 2003, people ages 65 to 94 who ate fish at least once a week had a 60 percent lower risk of Alzheimer's than those who rarely or never touched the stuff.

Also, several major newspapers and several morning news shows recently published the name of a website that calculates your risk for mercury poisoning based on the amount of fish you eat – not on whether or not you live near a coal plant, or any other environmental factor. The website only measures your risk for mercury poisoning based on your seafood intake and your body weight. The calculator uses a fixed mercury level for each species of fish on its list. So, according to the website's calculator, I would be at 150% of the EPA's exposure limit for mercury after eating one 8 ounce fresh or frozen Tuna steak. This is because the website's calculator assigns .38 ppm mercury to each ounce of fresh/frozen Tuna, regardless of the Tuna specie, origin, or age.

Rumor: Farmed Salmon Causes Cancer.

Reality: Only if that's all you eat.

A recent study found that farm-raised salmon (the type sold in most supermarkets) contain up to 10 times more of the pollutant PCB than wild salmon do. But that's still 40 to 50 times below FDA levels that raise health concerns, says Michael A.

Gallo, Ph.D., of the Cancer Institute of New Jersey. Routine intake of fatty fish like salmon has been linked to a 30 to 50 percent drop in colorectal and ovarian cancer risk and a 70 percent decrease in prostate cancer risk. Want to cut PCB levels? Peel the skin off of farmed Salmon before you cook it. "You'll take away up to 75 percent of the PCBs in a serving," says Gallo. Other considerations for lowering PCB intake includes eating wild salmon caught in areas with low PCB levels. There is an amazing amount of resource material available on the web

Rumor: Fish oil supplements are safer than fish.

Reality: Only if your doc says so.

Fish oil can help fight heart disease, but it can make blood cells less likely to stick together. If you take too much, or if you're on blood-thinning drugs, you can block your blood's ability to clot (upping your hemorrhagic stroke risk). "Fish is a terrific source of protein, vitamins, and minerals," says Gallo. "You won't get that from capsules alone."

Are your customers concerned about heavy metals and other contaminants in the seafood that you sell or broker? Consider directing them to websites that contain data from past, current, and on-going studies conducted by different research and government bodies. One example is the Fish Monitoring Project that is being administered by the ADEC (Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation) with funding from the EPA and NOAA. The study analyzes salmon (all five species), halibut, Pacific cod, sablefish, black Rockfish, sheefish, lingcod and pollock for heavy metals (methyl mercury, lead, cadmium). A subset is being analyzed for dioxins and furans, pesticides, PCB congeners, inorganic arsenic, and chromium VI. Samples in the study, which is on-going, are collected primarily in marine waters throughout the state. Results of the study, to date, are available at <http://www.state.ak.us/dec/eh/vet/fish.htm>.

In the end, seafood education is the best medicine for alleviating the misleading information that ails the seafood industry. If you need assistance in finding resources like those listed above or if you need help with seafood safety, please let us know. We can help with every aspect from testing and reference to compliance.

Did you know – Surefish is constantly building credentials? -Christine Keenan

New Credentials and Positions:

- American Society for Quality (ASQ) Certified HACCP Auditors (CHA): *Lisa Goché and Allison Corcoran*
- Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation (AFDF) Board of Directors: *Bart Cox*
- Northwest Fisheries Association (NWFA) Board of Trustees: *Bart Cox*
- Alaska Quality Seafood program (AQS) Board of Directors: *Lisa Goché*

And don't forget some of our other qualifications:

- Seafood HACCP Alliance HACCP 'Train the Trainer' certified
- Seafood HACCP Alliance HACCP Sanitation Control Procedures 'Train the Trainer' certified
- USDC/NMFS HACCP certified
- American Society for Quality (ASQ), Certified Quality Auditor (CQA)
- CHAPS Certified Auditor
- Accredited Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) Chain of Custody Certifier
- Accredited Aquaculture Certification Council (ACC) Certifier
- Competent 3rd party laboratory recognized by the FDA, USDC, YUM!, and Darden Restaurants
- Multiple Sensory Classes through FDA, NFPA and USDC
- Bioterrorism/COOL (Country Of Origin Labeling)/ Microbiological/Chemical Analyst Training