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Follow-Up Genetic Testing Shows Limited Progress in Shrimp Transparency at Charleston Restaurants; Advocates Call for Legislative Action

CHARLESTON, S.C. — New genetic retesting conducted February 10–11, 2026, at 22 Charleston-area restaurants—a random selection of half those previously tested—shows only modest improvement in transparency regarding whether shrimp served is American wild-caught or imported, according to SeaD Consulting and partners in the U.S. shrimping industry.

The follow-up testing builds on last year's analysis of 44 randomly selected restaurants serving shrimp in the Charleston area, which found that only **9% (4 of 44)** served authentic American wild-caught shrimp, while **91% (40 of 44)** served farm-raised imports. Among those serving imports, only **15 of 40** restaurants verbally acknowledged using imported shrimp when asked—an honesty rate of **38%** for consumers who inquire rather than assume.

In February 2026, researchers found:

- **23% (5 of 22)** restaurants retested were serving American wild-caught shrimp.
    - **3 of those 5** served American wild-caught shrimp in both testing periods:
        - Acme Lowcountry Kitchen, 31 J C Long Blvd, Isle of Palms, SC 29451
        - Grace & Grit, 320 Wingo Way, Mt Pleasant, SC 29464
        - Rappahannock Oyster Bar, 701 E Bay St No. 110, Charleston, SC 29403
    - **2 of 5** newly transitioned to American wild-caught shrimp:

- Amen Street Fish & Raw Bar, 205 E Bay St, Charleston, SC 29401
- Mt. Pleasant Seafood, 1402 Shrimp Boat Ln Mt. Pleasant, SC 29464

However, **17 of 22** restaurants tested were **serving farm-raised imported** shrimp, WHILE IMPLYING IT WAS U.S. WILD CAUGHT (77% inauthentic vs. 90% last year). Among those:

- **53% (9 of 17)** verbally claimed to sell American wild-caught shrimp when genetic testing showed they were not.
    - Of the 9 restaurants verbally making false claims, **6 previously misrepresented their sourcing**, while **1 previously sold American wild-caught shrimp** but no longer did, and **2 had been transparent previously** but were not this time.
- **47% (8 of 17)** honestly disclosed they were not selling American wild-caught shrimp when asked, representing an **improvement in verbal transparency** of **9 percentage points** from the previous testing period.
    - Of the **8 restaurants now verbally transparent**, **6 had previously misrepresented** their sourcing, while **2 were transparent in both testing periods**.

The eight-state study commissioned by the Southern Shrimp Alliance and conducted by SeaD Consulting demonstrates that transparency laws significantly improve the accuracy of labeling and enable consumers to make informed choices.

“The retesting results in Charleston show only incremental improvement and make clear that voluntary transparency is not enough,” said **Blake Price, Director of the Southern Shrimp Alliance**. “We are glad to see that, as of last week, five of the eight shrimping states have passed labeling or disclosure laws to help local shrimpers, honest restaurants, and consumers. In light of widespread false advertising of shrimp, we hope the Carolinas and Florida will follow suit. It’s also important to note that the restaurant associations in states like Georgia and Texas either did not oppose or supported the final bills.”

Taylor Tarvin of family-owned Tarvin Seafoods in Mount Pleasant added, “We work hard to ensure our customers and restaurants are receiving excellent wild-caught seafood. We applaud restaurants that are honest and transparent about what they serve. It’s frustrating to see that some purveyors deceive diners about what they are getting, while portraying our work.”

Bryan Jones, Vice President of the South Carolina Shrimpers Association, emphasized the need for policy change: “South Carolina clearly needs legislation, and we are working on it. People deserve to know what is in their shrimp & grits.”

SeaD Founder and Commercial Fishery Scientist Dave Williams underscored the broader economic stakes: “We want to protect the American wild-caught fishery and the communities they serve. Seventy percent of seafood expenditures in the United States

are in restaurants, so having restaurants tell the truth about what they are serving is paramount. Consumers should be empowered to decide whether they want to eat and support the highly regulated and inspected American wild-caught fisheries versus very low-inspection-rate imported shrimp that are likely from ponds in Indonesia, Vietnam, or India."

The Charleston findings are part of a broader multi-state investigation into shrimp mislabeling and substitution fraud. Advocates say the data reinforce growing evidence that **state disclosure laws and enforcement mechanisms improve marketplace honesty**, though additional legislative action is still needed in South Carolina.

About Southern Shrimp Alliance

The Southern Shrimp Alliance (SSA) is an organization of shrimp fishermen, shrimp processors, and other members of the American shrimp industry in the eight warmwater shrimp-producing states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas. SSA has funded SeaD Consulting's genetic testing at restaurants, with results available here. The list of restaurants found serving American wild-caught shrimp across all tested markets is available here.

About the South Carolina Shrimpers Association

The South Carolina Shrimpers Association (SCSA) is a non-profit organization that represents the interests of South Carolina shrimpers. The SCSA works to promote the sustainability of the shrimping industry, to advocate for the rights of shrimpers, and to educate the public about the importance of the shrimping industry to South Carolina's economy.

About SeaD Consulting

SeaD (Seafood Development) Consulting works with diverse stakeholders—seafood producers, academia, governmental agencies, and environmental organizations—to foster innovation and sustainability throughout the sector, bridging commercial fishery science with testing and processing technologies to combat seafood mislabeling and substitution fraud. SeaD Consulting currently holds the patent, in partnership with Florida State University, for the portable rapid ID high-accuracy genetic test RIGHTTest™, which is being used in a multi-state study to determine shrimp species being served at seafood restaurants. For more information about the investigation and how you can support ethical seafood sourcing, visit www.seadconsulting.com.

Disclaimer: SeaD's testing and reporting is intended to be used as an investigatory tool to assist the restaurant industry's fight against seafood mislabeling and is not intended for use in any legal proceedings, nor may SeaD's data, testing, or reporting be used in any legal proceeding without the express written authorization of SeaD.

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