

Report: US Supermarkets and Restaurants Selling Shrimp Produced by Forced Labor

Chicago, IL – [Corporate Accountability Lab](#) (CAL) today published [a report](#) on the pervasiveness of forced labor, child labor, and other exploitative practices and environmental harms in the Indian shrimp industry.

Indian shrimp aquaculture is a multi-billion-dollar industry that relies heavily on sales to U.S. consumers—shrimp bought in national and local supermarkets and restaurants ([see list](#)). The report’s findings are meaningful because shrimp is the most consumed seafood in the United States, and India is the largest shrimp supplier to the U.S. market, providing 40.8% of all shrimp imports in 2023.

Human rights and environmental abuses in global shrimp aquaculture have been documented for over a decade. Yet, India—despite its huge market share—has remained under the radar. Indian shrimp have been considered a “low-risk” source, even with telltale signs of abuse. CAL’s multi-year field investigations and interviews provide some of the first documentation of the widespread abusive and dangerous labor and environmental practices in the Indian shrimp sector—including shrimp products certified to be socially and environmentally responsible by the industry’s largest certification programs.

Labor Abuses

The report includes examples of workers subjected to debt bondage, verbal abuse, hazardous working conditions, and company-restricted movement. Forced labor is common and even hazardous child labor was observed.

Environmental Harms

Hatcheries and shrimp farms harm the local environment by releasing contaminated effluents into nearby waterways, contaminating communities’ drinking water and polluting nearby agricultural land and local fisheries. Shrimp farms are a leading cause of mangrove destruction, which sequester four times as much carbon as terrestrial forests.

Supply Chain Complexity

The study describes the convoluted, informal supply chains that make it difficult to trace the origin of Indian shrimp products, contributing to the persistence of labor and environmental abuses.

Governance Gap

In the absence of oversight and regulation from the Indian and U.S. governments, abuses in the shrimp sector flourish, and fair-washing and green-washing certification schemes have entered the fray.

Next Steps

Labor violations occur at all stages of shrimp aquaculture production—shrimp hatcheries, farms, and processing sheds and plants. Its pervasiveness demonstrates that forced labor is not a fringe occurrence; rather, it is part of the cost-cutting structure of the Indian shrimp industry. The report calls on U.S. retailers and wholesalers to push for changes in the Indian shrimp sector, from which they buy so much product. It promotes the implementation of binding agreements between companies and independent worker organizations. Finally, it demands the U.S. and Indian governments vigorously enforce laws meant to prohibit labor and environmental abuses, reducing the ability of companies to shirk accountability by, among other strategies, relying on failed industry-run certification schemes.

About CAL

Corporate Accountability Lab is an independent non-profit organization, with a mission to unleash the creative potential of the law to protect people and the planet from corporate abuse. CAL deploys innovative legal strategies to combat egregious abuses by companies operating in the United States and abroad.