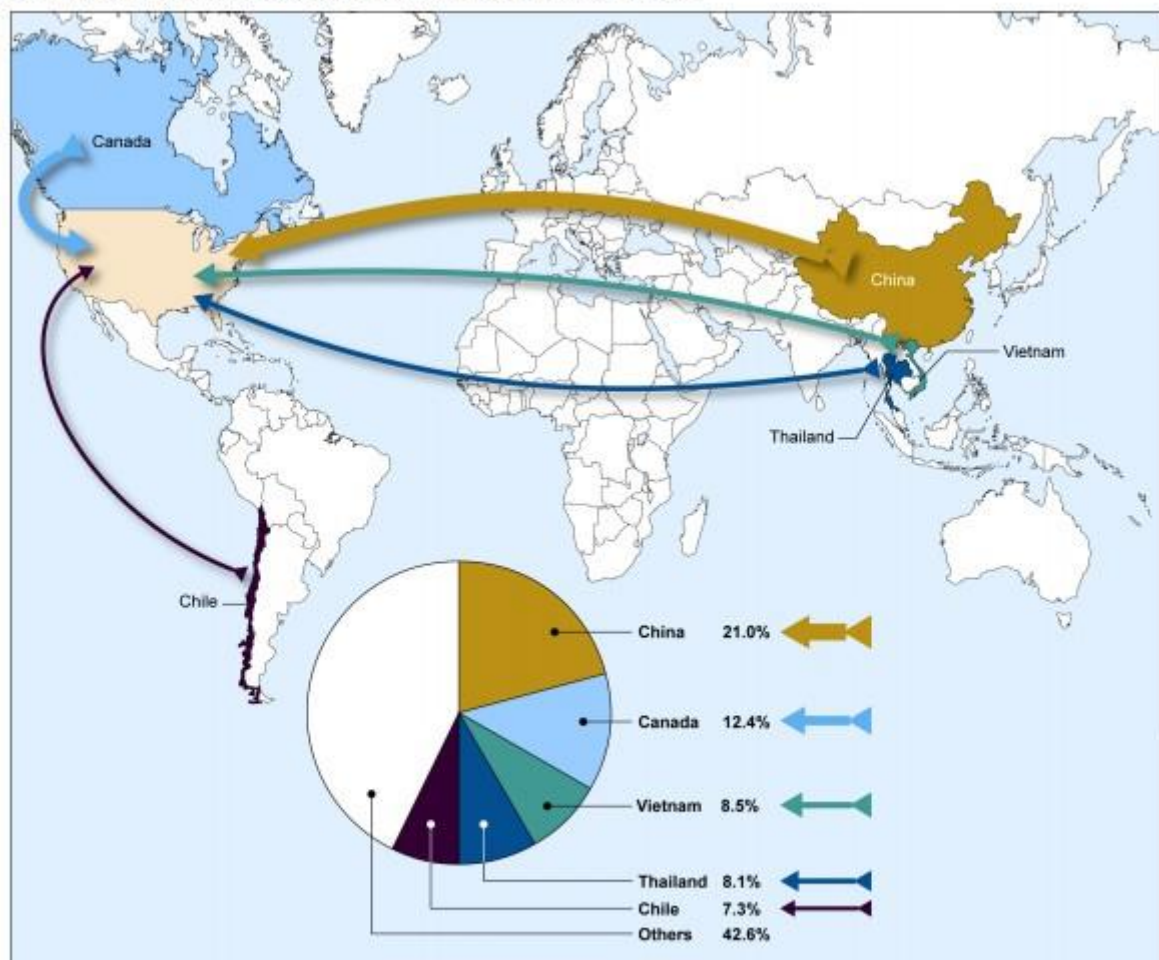


Imported seafood often contains dangerous drug residue, new report

A new federal study finds that fish imported from other countries, including China, Indonesia, Vietnam and Thailand, contain potentially hazardous levels of drug residue, which can cause allergic reactions or even cancer in consumers.

The analysis, conducted by the General Accountability Office (GAO), is based on the fact that about 90 per cent of all seafood in the US comes from overseas, and about half of that comes from fish farms.

Figure 1: Seafood Imports to the United States in 2015 by Country of Origin



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Commerce and U.S. Customs and Border Protection data; Map Resources (map). | GAO-17-443

Note: The "Others" category represents 137 countries that also exported seafood to the United States in 2015. These countries include Australia, Indonesia, and Mexico with seafood exports such as swordfish, shrimp, and snapper.

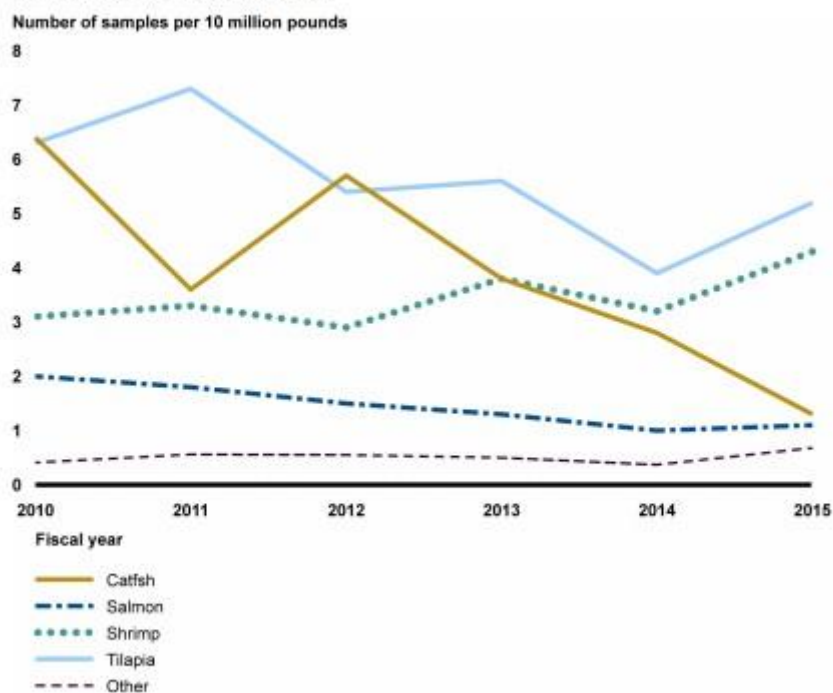
The GAO offers the example of Hawaii, where last year about 300 people contracted hepatitis A after eating scallop sushi from the Philippines. Another issue took place in May, when frozen ahi from Indonesia tested positive for hepatitis A.

The federal office concludes that the agencies that are supposed to protect American consumers — the FDA and the US Department of Agriculture (USDA)— are not doing enough to prevent tainted seafood from reaching the American market, adding that the agencies cited limited resources as a continuing issue at a time that seafood imports are rising.

Researchers at the GAO found that the FDA was inspecting only about 2 per cent of fish processors and that less than 1 per cent of samples taken were also inspected for unsafe drug residues.

They also stressed that of that small amount tested, about 12 per cent of shrimp tested positive for drug residues, about 11 per cent of tilapia, and about 9 per cent of catfish and that no drug residues were found in the samples of salmon.

Figure 5: Number of Imported Seafood Samples, by Type, Tested for Drug Residues by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), per 10 Million Pounds of Imports, Fiscal Years 2010 through 2015



Source: GAO analysis of FDA, Department of Commerce, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection data. GAO-17-443

Note: Other includes, for example, crab, frog legs, and lobster.

Moreover, the GAO found, of a sample of 74 inspection reports they reviewed, officials from the FDA had visited only one overseas fish farm to see how and where the fish were actually being raised.

For her part, Patty Lovera, assistant director of Food & Water Watch, recognised that US laws are “tighter on drugs” for animal consumption than foreign countries are.

The environmentalist said that consuming fish treated with antibiotics could make the people who eat them more susceptible to falling victim to drug-resistant bacteria.

Lovera said that giving the FDA more resources to police the quality of imported fish could help solve the problem, but that the budget impasse in Washington makes that unlikely.

In her view, the problem is not just money, noting that the FDA has a reputation for looser enforcement of food safety than the USDA, which recently began inspecting catfish, at the request of the American catfish industry.

“It’s a resource issue and a political will issue at the FDA,” she concluded.

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