

human beings, but with other species, the earth itself, with God. Everything we do has some effect, whether it is using energy for heat and light or eating imported foods. The choices we make should be made mindfully. Let's look at one food, shrimp. It used to be a luxury but now has become commonplace in restaurants all over North America. North American shrimp consumption drives a massive worldwide trade in the crustaceans, most of which are raised in farms in Asian and Latin American countries. The unregulated global shrimp-farming industry is environmentally destructive and economically unsustainable. This article from Third World Network talks about the effect of shrimp farming.

Third World environment and economies destroyed to meet North American shrimp demand

by Isabel de la Torre

North American consumers ate about one billion pounds of shrimp in 1998 — 695,000 pounds of it imported. Over the past 15 years, imports of farmed shrimp have increased phenomenally. It is now a \$3 billion-a-year industry.

This consumption drives a massive worldwide trade in shrimp. The unregulated global shrimp-farming industry is environmentally destructive and economically unsustainable.

Most shrimp served in restaurants and sold in grocery stores were raised in oceanside shrimp farms in more than 50 Asian and Latin American countries — including Thailand, Indonesia, India, the Philippines, Ecuador, Honduras and Mexico. In a relatively short time, this young industry has wrought havoc in these countries. Now it is looking to expand operations to Africa.

Advocates paint shrimp aquaculture as the solution to global food insecurity, poverty and unemployment. In practice, however, shrimp remains a luxury item. Rather than serving as a local protein source for hungry people, shrimp is exported to far-off restaurants in rich countries. Shrimp farming makes a few investors very rich, but it displaces and impoverishes thousands of local people.

Shrimp Farms vs. Mangroves

Nearly one-quarter of the world's remaining tropical mangrove forests have been lost in the past 20 years. Clearing mangroves to build shrimp farming has been a major cause. Mangroves protect coral reefs and provide nurseries for 85% of the tropic's commercial fish species. Because mangrove forests serve as storm surge protection, their loss has been implicated in the deaths of some 10,000 people in a recent cyclone.

Shrimp farming destroys habitat, silts coral reefs, and deplete coastal marine fisheries. Reduction of fish populations endangers the traditional livelihood of native fishers. Sometimes it endangers their very lives.

On June 11th, 1999, five Indian villagers were killed and 24 others injured for protesting the non-implementation of a Supreme Court's ban on shrimp farms within 1,000 metres of Orissa's Chilika Lake — India's largest brackish water lagoon. More than 100 Bangladeshi villagers were killed in conflicts over land acquisition efforts by shrimp investors in 1997.

The control of land and water resources lies at the root of shrimp-farming conflicts. While outside money pours in to expand shrimp operations, local needs remain unmet. As one Filipino fisher lamented, "The shrimp live better than we do. They have electricity, we don't. The shrimp have clean water, we don't. The shrimp have lots of food, but we are hungry."

Fresh groundwater is critical for people living in coastal areas but shrimp farms can pump water from the ground faster than it can be replenished. In some coastal regions, this can cause seawater to seep into local aquifers, making the water unfit for drinking and irrigation. Shrimp aquaculture has caused salt-water intrusion in villages in India, Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia, Ecuador and the Philippines.

Mangroves link tropical forests and coral reefs, providing a critical transition between terrestrial and marine ecosystems. They protect shorelines from erosion, capture sediments (thereby protecting coral reefs), protect coastal rainforests from tropical storms, are critical to local biodiversity, and

have increasingly been used for recreation and eco-tourism.

The destruction of mangroves is made worse by other environmental impacts, such as introduction of pathogens and parasites. Shrimp aquaculture can result in the loss of genetic diversity and weakening of native shrimp species.

Shrimp farms are stocked with ocean-caught juvenile shrimp. But the fine-meshed nets used to capture these shrimp also remove other animals from the sea. By some estimates, this by-catch claims 100 other sea creatures for every shrimp. Shrimp farms may be even more destructive than shrimp trawling — an industry notorious for its enormous take of by-catch.

Antibiotics, fungicides, parasiticides, algicides, and pesticides are used to control diseases inside the crowded shrimp ponds. But treating bacterial infections with heavy doses of antibiotics may leave residual antibiotics in marketed shrimp, increasing antibiotic resistance among human consumers.

Grassroots movements have emerged in North America, Europe and Japan to address the impacts of shrimp aquaculture.

The Industrial Shrimp Action Network (ISA Net) — a global coalition of environmental organisations — was founded on World Food Day, October 16th, 1997. Its strategy is two-fold: (1) to support local communities in their efforts to gain control of the use and management of their resources and (2) to educate consumers about the social, economic, and environmental costs of shrimp production so they can make informed decisions about purchasing and eating shrimp.

At the World Shrimp Market '99 opening in Madrid, Greenpeace joined several other NGOs to hang three large banners from the conference site, the Sol Meliá Hotel. The anti-shrimp-farm banners were unveiled at the precise moment the Spanish Agriculture-Minister of Fisheries and other industry representatives were preparing to

enter the hotel. During the meeting, the Fisheries Secretariat specifically addressed the industry's problems — pollution, by-catch and mangrove destruction.

In October 1999, ISA Net and the Asia-Pacific Environmental Exchange (APEX) held a press conference in Seattle in advance of the World Trade Organisation's "Millennial Round."

In a joint report, *Prawn to Trade, Prawn to Consume*, the two groups criticised the WTO's policies. "We don't need free trade. What we need is sustainable trade. WTO rules would support destructive shrimp farming," the report stated. The NGOs called for labelling shrimp products to inform shoppers how the prawns are caught and produced. Such eco-labels are opposed by the WTO as a "barrier to free trade."

Father Thomas Kocherry, coordinator of the World Forum of Fish-harvesters and Fishworkers, proposed that "Rather than

mindlessly promoting free trade, the WTO should promote sustainability, environmental enhancement, social benefits and economic efficiency."

ISA Net's member organisations have called for shoppers to reduce their consumption of farmed shrimp. Instead, ISA Net recommends that consumers in the Pacific Northwest support the local spot prawn industry — a more ecologically sound form of shrimp farming.

*Isabel de la Torre is co-author, together with Dave Batker, of the report **Prawn to Trade, Prawn to Consume**, from which the above article is adapted. For the complete report or more information, contact: ISA Net, 25415 70th Ave. East, Graham, WA 98338, www.shrimpaction.org. isatorre@seanet.com.*

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