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New Report Exposes Significant Gaps in U.S. Seafood Fraud Oversight

The Vermont Law School report includes recommendations for domestic and international policymakers to address seafood and fishery fraud

SOUTH ROYALTON, VERMONT, UNITED STATES, June 28, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A new report from Vermont Law School's Center for Agriculture and Food Systems (CAFS) outlines the widespread issue of seafood fraud in the United States and its implications for policy across the globe, adding to the recent body of research and advocacy trying to combat the issue.

Titled "Seafood Fraud: Analysis of Legal Approaches in the United States," this comprehensive overview identifies gaps in the regulatory structure over the seafood value chain and offers recommendations for domestic and international policymakers attempting to address the issue of seafood fraud.

The international seafood trade has come increasingly under fire in recent years, with legislation introduced in the U.S. House and Senate to expand regulatory rules. According to the report, studies have shown that between 16 and 75 percent of U.S. seafood is mislabeled. While domestic fisheries are regulated, the international supply chains from which 80 percent of U.S. seafood originates are difficult to monitor and complicate efforts to enforce regulations.

Currently, there is no single authority for regulating seafood in the United States; instead, an overlapping patchwork of laws and regulations covering issues such as conservation, food safety, and consumer protections attempt to close gaps in traceability, adulteration, mislabeling, and other issues. This piecemeal approach often leads to duplicate efforts and oversights.

"Mitigating seafood fraud within the U.S. is a complicated and multifaceted issue," said Laurie Beyranevand, Director of CAFS and co-lead author of the report. "Currently, our government uses a mix of federal and state-level laws, plus formal and informal programs, to oversee the seafood industry. Not only does seafood fraud erode consumer trust in the market, but it also threatens public health, food safety, and the conservation of the natural resources it is closely tied to."

Seafood fraud includes five main categories related to consumer deception, including forms of adulteration such as species substitution and undeclared processing methods, along with origin-based deception that includes fishery fraud; illegal, unreported, and unregulated substitution; and ethical claims fraud.

"There are many opportunities for individuals and entities to engage in seafood fraud throughout the supply chain," said co-lead author Emily Spiegel, professor of law and faculty fellow at CAFS. "Because so much of U.S. seafood is imported, the product moves through various countries and regulatory networks by the time it gets to our markets. The issues in this industry are global, and the lessons we glean from examining the American legal approach are also relevant in other countries with similar regulatory challenges."

The report recommends several policy actions for states and countries seeking to enhance seafood fraud regulation, including:

--Develop a legal definition of seafood fraud to allow for a coordinated means of addressing the problem

--Prevent and detect fraud, including targeting co-occurring maritime crimes, more stringent fishing vessel registrations, and effective whistleblower laws

--Enforce laws by designating specific agencies responsible for enforcement and imposing penalties as a deterrent

--Increase coordination to monitor and document complex supply chains

To view the report, visit vermontlaw.edu/seafood-fraud. This publication was funded in part by the United States Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Library, with support from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

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About VLS Center for Agriculture and Food Systems: Vermont Law School's Center for Agriculture and Food Systems (CAFS) uses law and policy to build a more sustainable and just food system. In partnership with local, regional, national, and international partners, CAFS addresses food system challenges related to food justice, food security, farmland access, farmworkers' rights, animal welfare, worker protections, the environment, and public health, among others. CAFS works closely with its partners to provide legal services that respond to their needs and develop resources that empower the communities they serve. Through CAFS' Food and Agriculture Clinic and Research Assistant program, students work directly on projects alongside partners nationwide, engaging in innovative work that spans the food system. Visit www.vermontlaw.edu/cafs to learn more.

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