

Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce
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Retail Shrimp to be Routinely Tested for Chloramphenicol

Today, Dr. Lester Spell, Jr., Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce, announced a no-holds barred effort to protect the consumer from potentially-contaminated foreign shrimp that might be on the market in Mississippi grocery stores.

“We consider any confirmed presence of Chloramphenicol as adulteration. Review of sample retail outlets has shown that there may be significant quantities of imported shrimp products entering Mississippi commercial food channels without complete safeguards. Some of these imported shrimp may contain this antibiotic,” Spell said. “As Commissioner of Agriculture, if I have reason to question the safety of a food product, I have the responsibility of ensuring that it not be for sale in our grocery stores. Beginning today, we will mount a full-fledged effort at ridding our stores of any unacceptable product. Today, we are taking action to inform all retail food stores of our action by letter and by follow-up visits during the next week.”

“While we cannot require shrimp to be tested before being offered for sale, we can randomly test shrimp for this drug. We will be stepping up our efforts aggressively to do so,” Spell stated. Julie McLemore, Director of the Department’s Regulatory Division, gave the following advice to consumers in purchasing shrimp, “Insist that your grocer confirm that his product is Chloramphenicol-free. If it is foreign shrimp, and the packaging does not state that it is free of this adulteration, ask him. If he doesn’t know—move on to a product that says it doesn’t contain it or that it has been grown in America,” McLemore stated.

The products found to contain the antibiotic were taken off-sale under the direction of the Mississippi Department of Agriculture. Earlier this week the Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce found imported shrimp containing the antibiotic Chloramphenicol. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has banned Chloramphenicol for use in food producing animals. The tested products found containing the antibiotic included those marketed as

“Lumar Shrimp, a product of Thailand,” and “Sea Best/Raw Salad Shrimp, a product of China.”

FDA has banned the use of the antibiotic in food-producing animals because of a number of health effects from human exposure to Chloramphenicol. It is a potent antibiotic developed in the 1950’s and is being studied as a possible contributor to the development of anemia.

The antibiotic is still used in very serious infections, but only under strict medical supervision. Due to unpredictable effects of doses on different patient populations, it has not been possible to identify a safe level of Chloramphenicol in animal or seafood products.