



Supply Chain Operations & Technologies  
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"Fraud can occur anywhere along the supply chain, beginning on the boat that hauled the fish to the distributor to the fish shack that offers a grouper sandwich for a bargain price."

The sentence is a quote from an article that appeared in the July 23, 2012 South Florida *Sun Sentinel* newspaper about fish fraud. The article highlighted the results of a study by Oceana, the largest international organization focused on ocean conservation, who found that one in three fish servings at 60 South Florida restaurants and markets were in fact substitutes. Ninety-six samples in total were collected.

The study's chief author marine scientist Kimberly Warner stated: "Given that Florida is a state that tests regularly, I was wondering if we would find any fraud at all. Why in the world would people think they can get away with this? That it's happening is quite shocking."

As I read the article I started thinking about what types of frauds could be occurring:

- Deceptive identification and labeling.
- Deceptive pricing at any or all points in the supply chain given that each entities' (fisherman, distributor, and retailer) involvement must mark up from the cost at which they acquired. Different fish sell for different prices, especially to the end consumer at a restaurant or market.
- Testing cover-up, either falsifying results or creating fictitious results when no testing was actually performed.
- Taste cover-up by the restaurant if they were trying to mask the substitution with seasonings and sauces.
- Health & safety issues. The article noted that one problem with fish substitution is that it can pose a health risk. In one instance grouper was replaced by king mackerel, a fish that federal and state authorities warn women of childbearing age to stay away from due to king mackerel's high levels of mercury.

"Full traceability of the seafood supply chain from boat to plate, combined with verification and accountability, is needed to ensure that the seafood sold in the United States is safe, legal, and honestly labeled" wrote the study's authors. Verification of the type of fish can be done with genetic testing as a Nova Southeastern University genetics class proved last year.

Whether checking if food has been tainted or substituted the technology is out there to ensure the integrity and safety of our food supply chain. I think the benefits in fraud reduction and increased health & safety would outweigh the additional costs. But until the scales tip in favor of the consumer, let the buyer beware.

Thank you.

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