

## Sanitary Practices Protect Seafood Quality

LAWRENCE W. STRASBURGER  
*Strasburger Inspection Service*  
*Metairie, Louisiana 70005*

I am a Consulting Food Technologist. I own and operate the Strasburger Inspection Service. My educational background included bacteriology and chemistry. After graduating from college, I spent 16 years with the United States Food and Drug Administration, where, among other duties, I carried on research on the decomposition of shrimp. After the Seafood Inspection Act became law, I organized and headed the Seafood Inspection Service for that bureau, for 11 years.

After leaving the Food and Drug Administration, I joined the Envoldsen Shrimp Company, as their buyer and technical advisor. In addition, I set up my consulting business and inspection service to the industry. In addition I served on the Fisheries Advisory Board to the Secretary of the United States Department of the Interior, for 7 years. For many years I served on the Quality Committee of the Shrimp Association of the Americas; and for even more years I have acted as technical advisor and on the Quality Control Board, of the American Shrimp Cannery Association.

My services to the industry, especially the shrimp, oyster and crab, and other shellfish segments of the industry, are especially pointed to the quality control and plant sanitation aspects of production. Over the years we have made numerous inspectional visits to Mexico, Honduras, Panama, Columbia, Cuba, Barbados and other countries for the purpose of consulting with management of seafood producing firms, and inspection of their facilities.

Today, those of you who export seafoods to the United States are facing more and more intensive surveillance of your products. United States food laws are constantly changing, as are the methods for examination of food products. Technical methods, year by year, become more sophisticated. Foods themselves are not necessarily being standardized, but Quality Standards are being written and promulgated as regulations. A few years ago, all you needed to worry about were: (1) the freshness of your product; that is, did it contain decomposed material? (2) was the correct weight in each package? and (3) were the packages labeled properly?

Today, we are looking at other aspects as well, such as: has the product been prepared, packed, and held in a clean and sanitary manner, wherein it is not contaminated with filth? Be wary of the word "filth"; for it connotes everything from a protein build-up on equipment; dust; dirt; insects; rodents; animal hair; excreta of all kinds; and even to bacterial filth. As time goes on, more and more bacteriological standards are being utilized to judge the sanitation (or lack of it), that has been employed in the processing of foods. For instance, the United States Food and Drug Administration is spending over a million dollars to investigate the feasibility of adopting bacteriological stand-

ards for breaded shrimp. If they do adopt either Standards or even Guidelines for such things as coliforms, E. coli, coagulase positive staphylococcus, salmonella, and total plate counts, *you* may be assured that it will not be long before peeled shrimp meats and possibly even headless shrimp will have to meet bacteriological standards.

There are already in existence Standards for *Good Manufacturing Practice* (generally referred to as G.M.P.'s) in the various food industries of the United States. These standards are applicable to United States food producers; and theoretically, to those food producers in other countries who export their products to the United States. Thermal processing of foods needs special attention if we are to avoid the devastating effects of outbreaks of botulism. Consequently, in the United States very strict regulations have been promulgated. These outline in detail the complete set-up of the processing equipment and specifically detail the times and temperatures to be used as well as the methods of operation of the equipment. They also detail the complete records which must be kept.

Our Inspection Service attempts to keep abreast of the changes manifested by Food and Drug Administration controls, and probably can be of assistance to many of you who export to our country. This assistance can be based on examination of products, or by inspection of your physical property and manufacturing practices. We believe that the latter practice is by far the best procedure, since guidance in proper plant sanitation and quality control can obviate many detentions and refusal of entry to shipments of fishery products.