



Costco sued for allegedly selling Thai shrimp from slave labor

Plaintiff claims Costco misled consumers over supply chain origins.

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A Californian woman filed a lawsuit in San Francisco federal court on Wednesday against Costco Wholesale for selling farmed Thai shrimp and misleading US consumers allegedly over the origins of its supply chain and its connections with Thai slave labor.

Monica Sud filed a class action status on behalf of similar California consumers against Costco, Maryland-based US prawn distributor CP Food Products Inc., and its Thai-based parent company Charoen Pokphand Foods Public Company Ltd.

She seeks an "injunctive relief to prevent Costco and CP Foods from continuing to import and sell Thai frozen farmed prawns in California as long as the supply chain continues to be tainted by human rights abuses as well as restitution to customers who bought the tainted products," according to the law firm Cotchett, Pitre & McCarthy, LLP.

"Human suffering cannot be ignored to enhance a company's economic bottom line," said Niall McCarthy, the plaintiff's lawyer. "The complaint charges that Costco is aware that the farmed prawns it purchases from Southeast Asian producers, including Defendant CP Foods, and then resells to California consumers, is derived from documented slavery, human trafficking and other illegal labor abuses."

The US State Department **released its annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report** last month, in which it ranks nations on their human rights records. Thailand, for the second consecutive year, ranked Tier 3, the lowest level.

CP Foods is Costco's US distribution arm and its parent company is Bangkok-based Charoen Pokphand Foods PLC, according to the law firm, which also calls CP Foods "a many tentacled global conglomerate."

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"California consumers are unknowingly supporting slave labor," said McCarthy. "The level of abuse is unspeakable. The truth needs to be exposed so consumers can make informed decisions . . . As we allege in the complaint, Costco does not advise US consumers, in its packaging or otherwise, that it's farmed prawns products are tainted by the use of slave labor on Thai-flagged ships."

Cotchett, Pitre & McCarthy, LLP filed the case with co-counsel at the Howard Law Firm and Jenkins, Mulligan & Gabriel, LLP.

"This lawsuit seeks to give Californians confidence that they are not serving slavery for dinner," said Co-Lead Counsel Derek Howard of the Howard Law Firm in Mill Valley, California. "Costco has the clout to dictate terms to its suppliers and to enforce its policies against slave labor and human trafficking. But Costco prefers to mislead its customers and sell seafood tainted by slavery."
