

Nate Hegyi: Hey, this is outside in. I'm Nate Hegyi. It is the week of 4th of July, and a lot of us are out on vacations with our families. And that reminds me that while I visited a lot of America, I have never been to the Gulf Coast, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana. These states are mysteries to me, which is why I love this new podcast called Sea Change. It's from our public radio buddies down in New Orleans, and it immerses you in the life and culture of the Gulf. Especially this episode we want to share with you that is all about the shrimp industry. It takes you from fishing docks to the bayous to an awesome po'boy restaurant. It is like a vacation for the ears. So if you're stuck at home this week or you're on vacation, but you really want to be somewhere else, this episode is for you. Enjoy.

<<ambient frying shrimp>>

Carlyle: That is the sound of frying shrimp. We are at Parkway Bakery and Tavern, one of New Orleans' oldest and most famous poboys shops. It's been around since 1911.

Justin: They come off the boats in here, into that flour. You can see em making the sandwiches here, she's about to make a shrimp poboy.

Carlyle: And that is Justin Kennedy, the general manager of Parkway. We sit down in the dining room to talk, specifically about what makes their shrimp poboy so good that lines are often out the door.

Justin: there are 2 sandwiches that are judged at every poboy shop...the roast beef and the shrimp. to have a good shrimp poboy you gotta have to buy quality shrimp. And here in Louisiana, we have some of the best shrimp in the world so why the hell not use it?

Carlyle: We love shrimp here in Louisiana—where we catch more of them than in any other state. And the shrimp poboy is a big deal at Parkway...President Obama had one. They outsell everything else on the menu by about 10 to 1. But you're about to hear a story about how this is all at risk of disappearing. While it may not feel like it here at Parkway where the kitchen is pumping out 1500 pounds of wild gulf shrimp every week, a beloved industry is on the verge of collapse.

Justin: If the shrimping industry went away here in south Louisiana, it would, it would be, I mean, I can't even put it into words. it's a part of our culture. and to see it go away, That would be, it would, that would be disastrous.

Carlyle: I'm Carlyle Calhoun

Halle: And I'm Halle Parker. And this is Sea Change, it's a podcast about life on our rapidly changing coast.

Louisiana is a seafood mecca — we are the nation's second-largest seafood supplier, and we're number one in shrimp. ...Shrimping has always been at heart of life in Louisiana dating back to native tribes shrimping these waters centuries ago.

Carlyle: And over the years the rest of the country has also developed a big appetite for shrimp. Today, Americans eat way more shrimp than any other seafood.

Halle: So times should be really good for shrimpers, right?

Carlyle: But actually shrimpers here in the US say things have never been worse...

Halle: While there are lots of restaurants like Parkway dedicated to serving locally caught seafood... many don't. The problem? Massive amounts of cheaper shrimp coming from overseas.

Carlyle: The US has become the world's largest importer of shrimp... 94% of the shrimp Americans eat is coming from other countries. these days, the market is drowning in imported shrimp. And all you have to do is drive to the coast to see what this means for the future of a way of life that goes back generations.

Halle: Today on Sea Change, Carlyle takes us on a journey into the world of shrimp to find out why a quintessential Louisiana industry is at risk of extinction.

Carlyle: It's a business story. It's a climate story. It's a story about a culture sinking away.. And if you love shrimp like Halle and I do, well you're going to want to hear what is actually in a lot of the shrimp we are eating.

Halle: That's coming up today on Sea Change.

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Carlyle: It's a chilly winter day when I leave New Orleans. I drive across the narrow industrial canal and into St. Bernard Parish, past a dystopian-looking oil refinery and then it's open land...huge live oaks heavy with Spanish moss frame the road. I keep going until the land narrows to a sliver...and the welcome sign reads "Delacroix Island— End of the World."I drive through the small village and then... the road just ends. Beyond the asphalt lie thousands of acres of wetlands. beyond those, the Gulf of Mexico.

<<Ambient car door>>

I park and walk down to the dock.

This was once a bustling outpost for shrimping in Louisiana. And it's here, on Delacroix Island, where the remaining shrimpers are trying to hold on to their jobs, and their way of life.

<<Ambient sorting crabs>>

A few guys are unloading crates of blue crabs. Another boat pulls up to the dock and this old fisherman nimbly gets off. He's dressed in foul-weather gear. still spry, his face lined by a lifetime out on boats. His name is Thomas Gonzales and he's lived here since he was born.

Gonzales: I've been a fisherman my whole life. since i was a young boy.

Carlyle: I ask him what he's been out fishing for.

Gonzales: Crabs. they gonna go through my crabs over here. we made a day's work that's all it is.

Carlyle: Thomas used to shrimp. But not anymore...he says it's hard to make any money with shrimp these days. Driving through the skinny slip of a town...I didn't see too many big fishing boats — most are pleasure boats. I ask him how things have changed

Gonzales: Changed? Oh, we don't have no more land. Everything's gone. this island was all commercial fishermen. 99% spanish. mm-hmm. it was a big community. we had our own school and a theater and everything down here. now we ain't got nothing left here.

Carlyle: There used to be hundreds of island residents living off this estuary's famous riches. Hell, even Bob Dylan has sung about a fishing boat right outside of Delacroix.

Gonzales: Gon we had 7 different dance halls. every saturday, louis armstrong—now you must have heard of him—jazz band from the city, he didn't drive down here, they'd go get him. every saturday, Louis Armstrong, he'd come down here and play at a different dance hall every Saturday night.

Carlyle: how many people live here now?

Gonzales: now? They might have 25 or 30. that's about it.

Carlyle: I heard about Delacroix Island from Acy Cooper. He's the president of the Louisiana shrimp task force. The task force is a group of shrimpers and state agency officials charged with studying the shrimp industry and working to improve it. That's a busy job, and Acy has been crisscrossing the state, meeting with shrimpers, industry reps, politicians, trying to save the shrimp industry. He's meeting me here at the dock.

Carlyle (at docks): So you just pulled up?

Acy: I just got here. Yeah.

Carlyle: Acy has bright blue eyes and a goatee. He's thin. And a fast-talker. Acy's been a shrimper his whole life. His father, also Acy, was a shrimper, and his son, yep, Acy the 3rd, is a shrimper too. Acy shrimped for 50 years straight, but last year after some health issues took him off the boat, he started a restaurant with his wife serving local seafood.

Acy: I'm gonna pick up some crabs and shrimp and i'm gonna go back and boil em.

Carlyle: We're standing together outside the wholesaler's office, where the fishermen sell their catch right off the boat...which is in a tiny shack on the edge of the dock. Acy opens the door and there is a group of fishermen somehow squeezed in.

Acy: y'all huddled up in a hole back here!

Unnamed voice: I don't do interviews.

Carlyle: can we come in? <<chatter>> I know but it's warm in here!

Carlyle: I'd chatted with some of the guys down on the dock before Acy got here, but most of them were pretty shy around the microphone.

Carlyle: Y'all gonna let me in?

Carlyle: With Acy here though, they warm up to me a bit a little bit, and decide I can come in. I tell them I'm here to talk about the state of shrimping, well, that gets them fired up. Acy says the shrimpers have worried about their jobs for decades.

Acy: It ain't like we didn't went to Washington for 20 years and begged 'em and we been fighting ever since. and we haven't stopped. We are going to keep arguing the point until there's no more point to argue, whatchu going to do?

Carlyle: The problem he's been begging politicians to help with, is imports. The US imported way more shrimp than we can even eat last year, and it's decimating the profits for local shrimpers. If you adjust for inflation, these guys are making less than half what they were back in the 1980s. Like Acy said, this fight over imports is not new., it's just gotten steadily worse over the last couple of decades. Louisiana used to supply the majority of the shrimp we eat in this country, but now the state supplies a measly 1.8%.

For shrimpers like Acy, whose father shrimped, whose son shrimps it's more than their jobs at stake.

Acy: hell yeah. this is a generational thing and that's the thing, the cultures gonna be lost and that's hard to swallow.

Carlyle: Take just this one outpost of Delacroix Island: Three years ago there were 85 commercial boats coming in and out. It's now down to 25.

Acy: This is our way of life this is what we do. And it's very serious.

Gary: and we're the young guys. so whose gonna take over?

Carlyle: That's Gary Mayfield, another shrimper in the cramped room.

Carlyle: wait, how old are you?

Gary: I'm 58

Carlyle: and you're the young guy?

Gary: yeah.

Acy: and i'm 62 already.

Carlyle: When people start talking age...everyone looks over at Thomas Gonzales — the fisherman we met on the dock talking about Louis Armstrong . he's like the elder statesman here and he's sitting next to Gary on a couch a camouflage couch

Acy: How long you been fishing?

Thomas: I've been fishing—I fished with a cane pole on the side of the bayou catching mullets and filleting em drying em down and salting em.

Acy: and how old are you? 95?

Thomas: i'm 84!

Carlyle: That's called the graying of the fleet. Some shrimpers aren't even here to fish at all, they're just hanging out. Gary Mayfield is the only one who's actually shrimping these days.

Carlyle: So you were just out?

Gary: Yeah because I have to. I have to pay the bills. I don't have any choice.

Carlyle: Guys like Gary are trying to make a living in the face of a lopsided trade situation that is stacked against him. And to understand that, we need to meet someone else...

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Carlyle: Eddy Hayes is an international trade lawyer and we are sitting in his office in downtown New Orleans.

Eddy: I'm gonna run and get a coffee, do you want water, coffee?

Carlyle: If it's time to talk international trade? I'm definitely going to need a coffee. Eddy has worked on all kinds of thorny trade issues over the years, including representing the shrimp industry ... and he also teaches this stuff at Tulane Law School. So I am hoping Eddy can help me understand how shrimp imports took over the industry. He's watched shrimpers battle for their livelihoods for years.

Eddy: unfortunately this industry goes from one crisis to another. That's sort of how they've lived, since the major volumes of imports started coming in.

Carlyle: But he says some shrimpers are now at a breaking point.

Eddy: You're really starting to see panic. I've heard a lot of desperate pleas over the past, you know, 17 years that I've been working with this industry. But these cries are a little bit different. The tone's different and it worries me.

Carlyle: His concern is, the commercial shrimp industry in Louisiana will totally collapse.

Up through the 1970s American wild-caught shrimp still accounted for about 70% of the US market. Back then, shrimp was an expensive dish— like the classic shrimp cocktail with a handful of shrimp artfully displayed with cocktail sauce and a high price tag. But shrimp isn't a luxury anymore.

Eddy: now it's almost like a side item, you know, all you can eat and, there's 30 little shrimp on the plate.

Carlyle: Louisiana shrimp and wild-caught shrimp in general — they're not the same as farmed shrimp — Eddy thinks they're way tastier. But that doesn't necessarily mean people are willing to pay more for them

Eddy: In a lot of industries you'll see niche products obtain a higher price. but that's not the case in a commoditized type of product like shrimp. Even though those of us from Louisiana and the Gulf South know that our shrimp tastes the best, it's got that true just-caught marine quality to it. Ultimately consumers and, and in particular restaurants and things like that, they don't necessarily care. It's all about the price.

Carlyle: Here's the problem for Louisiana shrimpers: they can't meet that demand — or that lower price, with the way they've shrimped traditionally—Picture guys like Gary going out into the bayous and oceans to catch shrimp. Shrimp are wild creatures, and there a finite number of them, Plus their availability rises and falls in cycles. Shrimping is not always predictable. So as our demand for shrimp skyrocketed through the years, the farmed shrimp industry in Southeast Asia grew to satisfy it. shrimp farming has become such a big business, that in Bangladesh shrimp are known as "white gold"

Eddy: Within the last 30 years, you saw a significant increase in the development of aquaculture

Carlyle: American shrimpers are competing against a whole different system...we have some of the strictest fishery regulations in the world, much stricter than anywhere we import from that's one reason these countries can produce shrimp a lot more cheaply...

Eddy: And in fact, most oftentimes any, any rules or regulations are lessened for them because it's such an important economic aspect of their economy, that they tend to look the other way on all kinds of different practices.

Carlyle: Practices like wiping out this really important and fragile ecosystem, mangroves, and replacing them with shrimp farms. shrimp farms create a huge amount of water pollution. Plus the whole farmed shrimps system is known to use child and forced labor. And when it comes to climate change, imported farmed shrimp creates more carbon emissions than any other protein

other than beef and lamb. Of course wild-caught shrimp, like we catch here in Louisiana, is not perfect for the planet either, fishing boats use a whole lot of diesel, but still experts rank it as way more sustainable than imported farmed shrimp.

Eddy: So, the choice of, of purchasing domestic shrimp versus imported shrimp, it's a much more complicated and in depth, purchase than, than most consumers think

Carlyle: It's just a totally different process of getting shrimp to your plate. Some of these shrimp farms cover thousands of acres where the shrimp is raised like a crop.

Eddy: And so, you know, they're able to yield more shrimp when it's grown utilizing feed and, and, and assuming that they are using good practices in keeping the shrimp healthy, they can harvest, you know, a whole lot more than we can produce here in the United States. And, you know, that in and of itself would be okay, putting aside enviro and human rights and things like that, if they were playing by the rules. And that's where the problem comes.

Carlyle: Because many companies and foreign countries are not playing by the rules.

There are two big illegal trade things going on that end up hurting shrimpers here. The first is called dumping...ok not a very cute term, but it's actually an official one. It means countries are selling their shrimp into the United States for less than they could at home. Why?

Eddy: you can drive out your competition and, you gain market share and then at some point you own the market and control the pricing.

Carlyle: On behalf of the US shrimp industry, Eddy has sued over dumping, and won! Against 4 Asian countries. Which means they're supposed to pay penalties. And in theory stop dumping so much cheap shrimp on our market ...but

Eddy: we've continued to see volumes increase. and that's the most troubling thing.

Carlyle: That's because these countries mostly aren't paying the fees...they've found ways to get around that.. Then Eddy tells me the second big problem. He says these governments often illegally subsidize their shrimp farms and so they are able to sell to us for artificially low prices, and undercut U.S. shrimpers.

Eddy: And, and that in my opinion is, is driving the volume, which is driving the price down here and, and in what creates the losers

Carlyle: Acy and Gary are certainly not losers, but they are losing their livelihoods and, their way of life.

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Carlyle: Coming up....we head out into the bayous on a shrimp boat where we see the effects of another threat to the shrimp industry and to life in coastal Louisiana...climate change.

Thomas: Good morning, how you doing?

Carlyle: I wanted to go out on a boat to see a shrimper in action...to better understand this way of life that could soon be lost. but it was near impossible to find a shrimper actually shrimping.

First I called Thomas Olander — he's from a multigenerational shrimping family who hasn't missed a season in 44 years. But he wasn't in Louisiana, instead, he was in Florida, working on generators for cell phone towers to make a living.

Carlyle: so it's never been this bad.

Thomas: Never in my career.

Carlyle: so then I tried Christi Lam and her husband Lee, they are shrimpers originally from Cambodia. But she and her husband weren't going out these days.

Christi: It's not worth it. We quit since October it's not worth it. We don't know what to do.

Carlyle: Finally one of the producers here at the station, Kezia, reached out to a shrimper she knew. he said he was going out for a short trip and could take us with him.

Kezia: We are going to see Donald Dardar. he is the second chairman of the Pointe-au-Chene Indian Tribe. He's really nice. he always wears his white Reeboks like the white boot Reeboks.

Carlyle: It's early morning. Kezia and I are driving south on a country road winding its way alongside a narrow bayou. We pass the occasional fisherman standing on the banks, coolers by their feet.

Kezia: we are about to turn into Pointe au Chene...yeah, where the car is.

Carlyle: We drive into the small village that's home to the Pointe Au Chene Indian tribe. Houses are built right along the bayou...one house deep on either side and all hoisted on stilts high up in the air—you can tell this was done out of necessity and not for looks. Climate change is not abstract here. Hurricanes are getting worse. Seas are rising. Land is vanishing.(short pause) We park at the tribal building where we are meeting Donald.

Ambient: Donald/Theresa talking in French in background

Carlyle: He's there talking with another member of the tribe in French...the first language of the older generations here. Donald is in his mid 60s. Grey hair and a calm and content-kind-of energy. He's semi-retired but still shrimps often, just not the doing the back-breaking, no sleep kind of shrimping he used to.

Theresa: Au revoir! Y'all have luck catching shrimp!

Carlyle: We follow Donald and climb aboard his boat.



(In the background...“ok, you all ready?”...)

Carlyle: It's a 30-something foot long shrimp boat with fresh green nets that his brother hand-makes hanging from masts on each side.

Donald: hey man, how you going? putting more cages out?

Carlyle: As we head down the bayou towards open water, Donald waves and greets people on their docks and sitting on their front porches. Most of them are family.

Donald: That's my nephew right here. that's my brother's boat. that's my other brother's boat. that's my brother in laws boat.

Carlyle: you do have a lot of family here!

Donald: all family here, yeah

Carlyle: Crab traps are stacked high on the banks and blue tarps cover the roofs of some of the homes. Hurricane Ida made a direct hit here in 2021 and most houses were completely destroyed. People are still living in FEMA trailers next to the carcasses of their old homes.

Donald told me despite the destruction, almost everyone returned...this is their home here on the bayou, their tight-knit community...people don't want to move. But they feel climate change bearing down on them. A global force with local, personal consequences. It's not too different from how imported shrimp threatens their way of life... Donald points out an industrial building built right on the bayou.

Donald: that was a shrimp processor when they built it. They working oysters now.

Carlyle: they don't process shrimp anymore?

Donald: nope, not anymore. we can't compete with that overseas shrimp. That overseas stuff is messing us up.

Carlyle: almost everyone in Pointe Au Chien makes their living from fishing...mostly for shrimp and crabs. And pretty much every house has a working dock in front of it.

We leave the village behind. The bayou widens as we motor beyond the protection of the 12 foot levees. It's a beautiful sunny and warm day, but there is a dense wall of fog over the bay in front of us. Some other shrimpers come on the radio.

<<radio sounds>>

Rodney and Joe are also from Pointe Au Chien and are out too. we can just make out their boats through the fog. We hear them say on the radio that they just pulled up their nets and caught mostly seaweed—what they call “jelly”—so we head out further – out into the bay, in the hopes we'll have better luck.

This area used to be broken up by islands and marsh. Donald would trap muskrats and nutria here in the off-season. But that land is gone now. It's just open water— except for some abandoned platforms and pipes from the oil and gas industry that are scattered across the bay.

Donald points to his GPS. It uses an old map.

Donald: All this was all land before. It's all open water now. Now more land at all. Me: Yeah this is an old GPS. Donald: yeah it's quite a few years old. Me: if this was accurate we'd be run aground. Donald: Yeah we'd be on ground, yeah. I wish it'd still be like that.

Carlyle: The land and wetlands of coastal Louisiana were once built and maintained by the Mississippi River...it's regular floods deposited sediment and replenished the wetlands. But in our flood control efforts, we leveed the Mississippi, and stopped the land-building sediment from getting here.

On top of that, oil and gas companies sliced and diced these marshes with thousands of miles of destructive channels which hurried land erosion. Now there's sea level rise.

Coastal Louisiana is losing land at one of the fastest rates on earth. As the wetlands vanish, shrimpers are losing not just their homes, but also the shrimp's habitat. Pointe au Chene means Oak Point in French...there were once areas thick with live oak trees...I see none now.

Donald leaves the steering wheel in the cabin and comes up on deck.

We are getting ready to open up the frames get the nets ready. He's letting out all the rope. The nets are down.

Donald: Now gonna speed engine up and ready to hopefully catch some shrimp. Now we are shrimping!

Carlyle: We drag the nets for a while...dolphin and seagulls are swimming along side us...snagging the occasional shrimp from out of the nets.

Donald: Ok getting ready to pull in the bags

Carlyle: Then Donald turns on the electric wench and pulls in the nets.

Donald: I was hoping we'd catch a little bit anyway!

Carlyle: He dumps out the shrimp onto a big table in the middle of the boat

Donald: Maybe 35 pounds

Carlyle: And he starts quickly sorting...throwing back into the water any small fish or seaweed that got caught in the net. A few of the tiny fish don't make it...the seagulls swoop in for a snack.

Donald: The seagulls are saying thank you!

Carlyle: When Donald finishes sorting, he puts the shrimp on ice, hoses down the boat and we are ready to do it all over again. It's late afternoon when we are done. It's near the end of the season in December, and we didn't catch a lot of shrimp...maybe 50 pounds.

Probably not enough to pay for the gas. But Donald doesn't seem too disappointed. He says, yes this is how he makes money, but what they catch here is also a main source of food, and it's their heritage...one he's proud of and wants to see carried on.

<<engine stops>>

Carlyle: We kill the engine and drift for a bit while Donald fixes a hole in his net made by a hungry dolphin trying to eat our shrimp, and he tells us about his life here.

Donald: I started shrimping with my dad when I was about, uh, 13 years old I guess. I got my own boat when I was 15 and then i quit school in 8th grade. but pretty close to 50 years I've been doing some shrimping. Been a good life for me

Carlyle: Donald thought about becoming a tugboat captain. He could have done a lot of things...but shrimping is what he grew up doing and he loves this way of life. He has spent a lifetime living off the land and sea much in the same way as his dad did, his grandfather did before him, and shrimping the same waters his ancestors did going back centuries.

Donald: Pointe-au-Chene, well, if you are a fisherman, that's where you wanna be. Right there. And, cause I could just go to the bayou right in front of my house and cross the road, get on my boat or I could catch me a fish right there or catch me some crab. So far i did pretty good with that... didn't get rich but it's a life, so. (11 min)

Carlyle: But it's also a life that's changing. Stronger hurricanes like Ida are hitting more often as the climate warms and the land Donald grew up on continues to vanish into the Gulf. it's not just the shrimp industry people fear is going to disappear.

It's also this way of life, this rich culture, in this place...people like Donald wonder how long it will be able to continue. The neighboring tribe on Isle de Jean Charles where most everyone also made a living and a life off the water...thanks to land loss, they were forced to move inland 40 miles last year.

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UP NEXT, we take the issue home to your kitchen. I talk with Halle about how imported shrimp is impacting not just American shrimpers, but potentially our own health..

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Halle: So Carlyle, you have taken us on quite the journey to understand what our Gulf shrimpers are going through. We've learned about the effect of these giant global systems and markets on

shrimpers who have grown up in the business, who really don't know any other way to live. My head is spinning a little bit.

Carlyle: I know... There's just so much going on for shrimpers...there's everything you just said and then there's also the land loss, hurricanes, the growing impacts from climate change. These shrimpers are dealing sooo much. And then there's another layer, if that's not enough.

Halle: I don't know if I want to hear it.

CARLYLE: Yeah, you don't but it's something we really do need to know about. This kind of blew me away. I first heard it from Gary Mayfield on Delacroix Island. Do you remember him?

HALLE: Yeah, Gary was the only one who was still actually shrimping, right?

CARLYLE: Exactly, that's the one. Gary went to walmart recently and he showed me a photo on his phone for a frozen bag of shrimp.

Gary: "Great value" it says. The shrimp peeled. ok, i grab it and start looking at it. and it was from India. product of India. but if you don't know, you just got off work, isn't it better to get this cheap and already peeled shrimp to go home and cook dinner? but you don't know where it's from. you don't know what's in it. The antibiotics and everything.

HALLE: Wait, did he just antibiotics? Is that true?

Carlyle: Well, I was wondering the same thing. You know I am a shrimp lover, I eat shrimp all the time...and I know that's true for a lot of people. So of course I wanted to dig into this to find out. Soo I called up Steve Morris. He's the director of food and agriculture safety at the Government Accountability Office. Which is the investigative branch of Congress.

Basically, the GAO is a watchdog agency that comes in when there's an issue of national concern—like the safety of imported shrimp and they conduct investigations. And at this point they've been investigating imported shrimp for over 20 years . So Steve whose been leading the GAO's investigations explained that the biggest problem stems from the way shrimp is grown in farms.

Steve: and often that occurs in very confined conditions, which can lead to kind of high rates of disease. what happens is that farmers basically are treating their seafood with various types of drugs, such as antibiotics to improve the survival rate.

Halle: Wait, so we know that shrimp farms are causing problems with the market and environmentally.. But now there's even another reason why some of them are problematic?

Carlyle: Yes, exactly, and the antibiotics they're using are actually illegal.. Both here and in a lot of the countries they're operating in.

Halle: If these antibiotics used, how dangerous are they?

Carlyle: Well, Steve told me they can cause a range of negative health effects. They can be minor like allergic reactions to more serious consequences like antibiotic resistance. Some of the drugs found in shrimp have even been linked to cancer.

Halle: Do we know how much tainted shrimp is coming into the country?

Carlyle: No, we don't really know. The FDA, or the food and drug administration, they're in charge of making sure what comes into our country is safe for us to eat, but there's just so much shrimp coming in. Like, over 2 billion pounds. and FDA's current system is not up to that task. This is what Steve's investigation found

Steve: We found that about one 10th of 1% was actually being tested.

Halle: So only .1% is being tested?? So does that mean that we don't actually know how pervasive this problem is? Do we know how much of the shrimp that is tested has antibiotics and drugs in them?

Carlyle: Yeah, we really don't actually know how pervasive this problem is because we are testing so little of the shrimp. But, multiple studies have shown pretty high rates of drugs and antibiotics in the shrimp that actually does get tested.

The GAO investigation showed 12% of the sampled shrimp contained illegal drugs in them and then there another study done here at Louisiana State University in 2017 where the scientists went to grocery stores around Baton Rouge, bought frozen products with imported shrimp in them and tested them. So they tested 42 samples and of those, 32 of them had banned antibiotics and drugs in them.

Halle: Wow. \*quiet\* honestly... that number is shocking. It feels like we should be taking this pretty seriously. Who's in charge of fixing this?

Carlyle: So really it does land on FDA's plate. But from everybody I spoke to, it just seems to be this enormous task where our system is trying to get better... but we're talking about fixing systemic, complicated problems in a huge global market. Some good things are happening. There is a big effort to get shrimp farmers to stop using the drugs and antibiotics, and there's a big push for what's called traceability.

So this will help us just as a country and as consumers have more information about where our shrimp and seafood is coming from. You know is the product linked to child and forced labor? is it potentially from farms known to be using banned drugs and antibiotics. So traceability is something we should be working towards.

Halle: but we are not there yet.

Carlyle: no we are not there yet. But interestingly enough, the state where we live, Louisiana, passed a new law a few years ago in the effort to give consumers more information about where

their shrimp is coming from. Restaurants now have to put it on their menu if they are serving imported shrimp.

Halle: And is that working?

Carlyle: Well, I spoke with Gwen Shook at the Louisiana Department of Health, and she told me every year, more and more restaurants are complying. I should say though, the department did cite 411 restaurants last year for not following the law.

Halle: So if I'm going out to order shrimp or buy it to cook at home, what is the healthiest option? I'm guessing fresh, local or American Wild caught?

Carlyle: (word this however) You guessed right. 110%. If you can get it.

Halle: Yeah, and when it comes to getting it, I feel like that can be hard to do, even in New Orleans.

Carlyle: I totally agree and shrimpers I spoke with talked about the access problem too. And even Here in the state that supplies the most amount of shrimp... it can be hard to find any local shrimp in grocery stores. A lot of what you will find is imported...But some places here are making some pretty bold moves to change that. And you're about to hear about it.

Halle: Tell me it's good news.

Carlyle: Yep, it's coming up next, finally some good news.

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## MUSIC

Carlyle: The whole world is eating more shrimp –an enormous amount of shrimp. and that is estimated to nearly double by 2030. But what does this mean for shrimpers here? I guess the big question is: has our love for cheap shrimp, led to the demise of our own wild-caught shrimping industry? Acy Cooper: says yeah

Acy: If we can't get to the point we need to be, we will lose it within a year or two. I promise you. It's gone.

Carlyle: But then, a few weeks after Acy tells me this, my phone rings. And it's Acy

Acy: I wanted to call you with some good news!

Carlyle: The good news came from St. Bernard Parish, where Delacroix Island is. The parish council passed a new law.

Acy: Today, they put it together this week, and today it passed that no one can sell imported shrimp in St. Bernard because of the health risks. Me: wow that is huge. Acy: that is huge. That's one step in the right direction.

Carlyle: This has never happened before anywhere—the St. Bernard parish council voted that imported shrimp can no longer be sold anywhere in the parish. Acy played a big role in making this happen. He's been meeting with council members, talking with them about the health risks of imported shrimp and how seriously in trouble the shrimp industry is. Acy is elated. HE AND the shrimp task force are now taking this movement state-wide. They want other parishes to follow WHAT ST. BERNARD DID—ban imported shrimp. and they want people who buy shrimp to make informed decisions. Because at the end of the day, what happens to shrimpers lies in the hands of the market...that is, in our hands.

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Here in Louisiana, every spring at the start of shrimping season, fishing communities gather for their annual blessing of the fleet. It's a tradition that goes back centuries to similar ceremonies performed in fishing towns along the Mediterranean coast. After a Sunday mass, shrimpers parade their boats which they've decorated in brightly colored flags, through the bayou. Crowds line the banks, watching as each boat passes on its way to receive its blessing from the priest for a safe and bountiful season. But year by year less holy water is sprinkled as fewer shrimp boats line up for the parade.

We still go to the grocery store and buy cheap shrimp so we aren't too concerned. Maybe we hardly notice the smaller blessing of the boat parades or that this deep culture intermeshed in our web of bayous—the culture we flaunt in our Louisiana advertising... is at risk of disappearing.

Sometimes the world we think is still there...slips away really slowly without us noticing. It's like what Donald Dardar told me about land loss around Pointe Aux Chenes...it's happened so incrementally, that one day he looked up and found himself shocked at how much had vanished.

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Halle: Thanks for listening to Sea Change. This episode was reported and fact-checked by Carlyle Calhoun with editing help from Halle Parker, Patrick Madden, Rosemary Westwood and Eve Abrams. Our sound designer is Maddie Zampanti. Kezia Setyawan handled promotion.

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To see photos from our trips with Louisiana shrimpers and find links to learn more, check out our website: [WWNO.org/seachange](http://WWNO.org/seachange)

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