

# **BonafIDcatch seeks truth about seafood labels**

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**Local business helps consumers get facts of how mislabeling affects your health, wallet and environment**

BonafIDcatch is a business that is reeling in strong interest from restaurants and grocers in the St. Louis metropolitan area on mislabeling of seafood, a hot topic nationwide.

The business, based in Downtown Alton, has a goal to one day be surveying seafood all over the United States. The two founders have a deep conviction and passion toward proper labeling of food and consumer protection.

The new operation was founded by two strong individuals in their various fields – Joan Stader, PhD, and Charles E. Murphree, Jr. The BonafIDcatch website is [www.BonafIDcatch.com](http://www.BonafIDcatch.com) and it is already extremely active with information and data from St. Louis and Metro Illinois surveys.



Stader has extensive molecular biology, project management and business development experience in the life sciences area. Murphree is a federal and defense industry professional with over 30 years of experience in research and development, program management, operations, business development, strategic planning development and contract negotiations. He is a United States Navy veteran with a strong commitment to this country.

Already, the business has conducted a survey that has created attention in the St. Louis region and discovered 28 of 84 samples of restaurants and grocers failed by mislabeling and 5 by bacterial contamination. This is a failure of 33 percent. Of the 45 retailers tested, 16 sold samples that failed, representing a 36 percent retailer failure rate. More details of the survey are on the company's website.

“We launched the business a couple months ago and we are in the early stages,” Stader said. “We are an independent third party that uses actors who pose as customers and buy food and eat most, but bring some back so we can do DNA coding. We have surveyed mostly restaurants so far.”

There are a number of reasons why the two business people believe in BonifIDcatch.

The top reason why this is a good business, Stader said, is because it is helping consumers know exactly what kind of seafood product they are putting in their mouths.

“There are a lot of concerns about seafood that is farmed because often these people employ many levels of antibiotics and chemicals to increase their yields,” she said.

In recent years, various organizations have tested and reported that restaurants, grocery stores and other fish retailers have been selling mislabeled products, the two partners said.

“DNA bar coding and DNA fingerprinting studies have been employed by various groups to understand the extent of mislabeling at the retail level on behalf of the consumer,” the two said in an introduction on their website.



Murphree and Stader made the decision to locate in Alton because it is a HUB-zone in the United States for federal work and it also allows the company to keep its U.S. Small Business Administration status.

“Alton is an historical, small riverfront town and it is very easy to get clients in and out of here because of being close to (Lambert) airport,” Murphree said. “We even get to look outside at the Mississippi River from our offices. It is a great atmosphere.”

In 2013, a non-profit group performed a study nationwide to measure the extent of the problem in the U.S. and found that about 33 percent of the fish purchased from seafood retailers in 21 states was mislabeled, the two said.

The study conducted by BonafIDcatch in St. Louis included most parts of the St. Louis metropolitan area, downtown, North St. Louis County, Southern Illinois and West St. Louis County. The study was conducted between Feb. 28 and Aug. 13, 2014.

If the food was dine-in, a “doggie bag” was requested for the sample. Other times, the food was ordered as a carry-out. Samples were obtained using sterile, single-use scalpel to cut a small piece of fish, the two said. The sample was then placed in a fresh glass vial, labeled and with a code number sent on ice to the DNA bar coding Laboratory Applied Food Technologies, Inc. (AFT), in Alachua, Fla., overnight. The sample was

analyzed by a DNA sequence alignment (DNA barcoding). The DNA sequences were compared against a qualified taxonomically-validated database for fish.

One interesting fact from the St. Louis metropolitan study was that all of the bacterial contamination discovered occurred in grocery store samples.

“This result led us to ask whether the origin of the contamination was from our sampling process or the retailer,” the two business people said. “We used sterile scalpels to remove the samples and avoided touching the sample with our hands. Recognizing that there could still be human error on our part, we considered the fact that none of our samples (79 of them) had bacterial contamination even though the same people handled the samples at BonafIDcatch’s end.

“None of the sushi samples, which were also raw, were contaminated,” the two said in a report. “We even returned to one of the grocery stores and bought more samples; again, they were contaminated.”

The Salmon Label is more complicated than most, because it can originate from the Atlantic or the Pacific. Salmon, Atlantic Label is extremely misleading the two said in the report, because it is illegal to fish Atlantic Salmon in U.S. waters. If Atlantic salmon is on the menu, the fish is either imported, farm-raised or both, the two said in a report.

Sushi restaurants often label “White Tuna” the wrong name when it is Escolar or Oilfish, that are banned in some countries, the two add.

What separates BonafIDcatch from the others, Stader said, is the “gold standard” test – DNA barcoding. BonafIDcatch also uses the highest quality database to analyze the barcodes.

Stader brought up that in Thailand, the working conditions are often terrible, which likely influences the quality of seafood exported from there to this country and others.

“Retailers who want to assure their consumers they are not misleading with their seafood labels out of greed, will become members of BonafIDcatch,” Stader said. “With a membership, we will send someone over four to five times a year to test the seafood. If you don’t pass the test and insist it wasn’t the fault of business, we will do further testing.”

BonafIDcatch launched its website in March and is already having phenomenal success with attracting viewers. The company will now enter more of a promotion phase, getting the word out to potential clients what information they will have on their site.

“The consumers don’t pay to use the website,” the two said. “We want an honest relationship between consumers and seafood retailers.”

Stader pointed out that the FDA checks out less than 2 percent of the fish at the wholesale level, so there is a lot of room for improvement.

“Nobody checks at the retail level,” Stader said. “The main issue with fraud of seafood, is labeling of the species. Our objective is to work closely with retailers, grocers and restaurants.”

Murphree said the new business is a private enterprise and not affiliated with the government.

“If the government wanted to come to us and get a message out to people from our data collection, we might be interested in that,” he added.

The feedback from national retailers and grocers has been very positive, the two said. “Those national retailers and grocers we have talked to like the website. We care about the integrity and keeping track of what is taken from the ocean and the truth.”

The BonafIDcatch website is [www.BonafIDcatch.com](http://www.BonafIDcatch.com). For more information, contact Stader at 314-610-4480 or Murphree at 314-972-2159.