***MEDIA ALERT***

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# USA Today Story on Food Dye & Farmed Salmon is Demonstrably False

## *Editor Sue Kelly refuses to acknowledge facts presented for correction*

**MIAMI, FLORIDA – February 19, 2009** – A story that appeared in the January 23, 2009 edition of *USA TODAY* ("Something Fishy? Counterfeit foods enter the U.S. market") quoted Spring Randolph, a food safety officer with the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition falsely asserting, "'When you cook it, the wild salmon retains its color, and in the aquaculture salmon, the color tends to leak out."

"Randolph's claim is demonstrably false considering the vast information available on how farmed salmon attain their coloring," said Laura McNaughton of Salmon of the Americas (SOTA). "Any type of salmon, both farmed and wild, retains pigment in its flesh from carotenoids they consume when feeding. We're talking about a natural pigmentation that occurs through digestion, not a food dye and it can't leak."

When confronted with the error, USA TODAY Food Safety Editor Sue Kelly responded by email saying the paper stood by the story because "salmon loses some of its color when cooked." That response itself is misleading in two key respects. First, USA TODAY originally reported that "dye" supposedly in the fish "leaked," a reaction that's physically impossible. Second, all salmon – and all meats, fish and poultry for that matter – change color when cooked, a well-known fact and hardly newsworthy. Representatives of SOTA pointed that explicit distinction out to Kelly – yet she, reporter Elizabeth Weise and Accuracy Editor Brent Jones all refused to issue a correction.

In the wild, salmon consume a natural pigment – called a carotenoid – while feeding on krill and crustaceans. Salmon and trout process this pigment, giving it the natural pink flesh the fish is famous for. Besides changing the color of the flesh, this carotenoid is also a vital nutrient, antioxidant and pro-vitamin A source that influences the growth and survival of young salmon.

In salmon aquaculture the industry endeavors to mimic the diet that salmon would normally get in the wild, while supplementing the salmon feed with a synthetic replacement. It's called astaxanthin, and chemically, it's virtually identical to the pigment that salmon consume in the wild. Biologically, it's processed and absorbed by wild and farmed fish in exactly the same manner, though some species retain more color than others. Readers should know the facts behind all foods they consume so it would seem that the USA Today's refusal to provide the most accurate information is not in their readers' best interests. Why would the reporter not be willing to listen to scientific facts and admit her error?

"The bottom line here is simple: *USA TODAY* engaged in shoddy reporting that was both demonstrably false and commercially disparaging of ocean farmed salmon," said McNaughton. "When we brought such an obvious error to their attention, they attempted to play word games with us, pretending that they had written one thing when they had written something else entirely," McNaughton said. "I can only conclude that the USA TODAY editorial team believes they aren't accountable to anyone, even when presented with incontrovertible facts."

*Salmon of the Americas is an organization of salmon-producing companies in North and South America, whose mission is to improve health, awareness and dining enjoyment of consumers in North America by providing timely, complete, accurate and insightful information about salmon on behalf of the member companies. Additional Background and Sources*: http://www.SalmonFacts.org

**A detailed rebuttal to USA Today's original report can be found at*:
[http://salmonfacts.blogspot.com/2009/01/color-of-farmed-salmon-is-no-dye-job.html]