Local dealers open to more federal seafood inspection

By Pamela Glisson
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A federal call for finer, more frequent inspection of seafood at all levels has left local seafood handlers open, if somewhat leery.

After all, said owners and managers of one restaurant and two seafood processors, they don’t now see much of any feds.

Craig Baudoin, a manager at Don’s Seafood Hut, said seafood quality at that restaurant has never been federally tested in all its 18 years on Lafayette’s Johnston Street.

At Huval Seafood in Breaux Bridge, Flo Huval said that operation also open for 18 years was inspected by the federal Food and Drug Administration only about a few years ago. “They never came back,” she said.

Jason Guidry, owner of Victory Seafood Processors, Inc. in Abbeville, had the record number of federal inspections among the three operations: three visits in the past eight years.

Huval and Guidry said, however, that they do undergo state inspections once a month. And all three parties said in-house inspections are part of their ongoing routine.

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Owners

If problems exist, he guessed, it’s with older operations that were built under looser regulations. “I wish they could hit some of the older plants — mom and pop places — that don’t keep their places up,” he said.

Huval, meanwhile, believes the feds are mainly interested in large, wholesale plants that send their seafood out of the state or country.

“There are probably a lot of these larger operations that are getting away with murder,” she said.

Baudoin said only oysters are closely watched at the restaurant level. Every sack he receives is tagged with the date the oysters were drenched, as well as with the name of the receiving boat and the water from which they were taken.

Weights and measurements of seafood also are checked at restaurant level, though apparently not always on schedule. Baudoin said of a weights and measure inspection two weeks ago, “They’re supposed to do it about once a year, but this is the first time they did this particular restaurant.”

He concluded that, in that

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restaurnat, staff inspection is a given. “Seafood’s got a smell to it when it’s bad, and the eyes of the fish are white when it’s old. I personally inspect it when it comes in.”

In a Monday report on Kessler, the Associated Press stated that nine thousand people die every year from food poisoning, while millions of others are at least sickened.

Just last week, the Agriculture Department outlined its own new plan to reduce contamination of meat. That plan will do what Kessler hopes to do with seafood: monitor meat from its source to the table. The new plan also calls for microbiological testing in addition to standard inspections done by sight and touch.