

# Attitudes on Imported Food Regulation in Minnesota's West African Communities

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## Background

- Imported food approximately 15% of U.S. food supply
- 1-2% of imported foods physically inspected
- Increasing demand for imported foods
  - Ever increasing immigrant populations
  - Regulator challenge: New, unknown foods
  - Immigrant population challenge: Unfamiliar with reasons for regulations on traditional foods



## Background (continued)

- MN immigration: West African community
  - Largest U.S. Liberian population
  - Approximately 76,000 people
- West African imported foods:
  - Fufu, attiéké, cassava, gari
  - Smoked, uneviscerated fish, many kinds



## Background (continued)

- Smoked, uneviscerated fish
  - Illegal in the United States
  - *Clostridium botulinum* risk
  - FDA Compliance Policy Guide 540.650
  - Traditional West African food



## Background (continued)

- Traditional regulatory actions unproductive
  - Discarding food, initiating food recalls, levying fines
- Desire for traditional foods creates ‘underground market’
  - **Commercialization of illegal imported foods**





## Problem Statement

Conventional inspection and enforcement practices with Minnesota's West African food business owner-operators selling illegal imported foods may not be an optimally effective regulatory approach to public health protection.



## Research Questions

1. What is the nature of regulatory action taken in Minnesota on African food products from June 2007 until June 2012?
2. What is the demand for illegal imported food products in Minnesota's West African community?
3. How can training, education, and community engagement of West African food handlers by regulators impact the demand for illegal importation of food products?

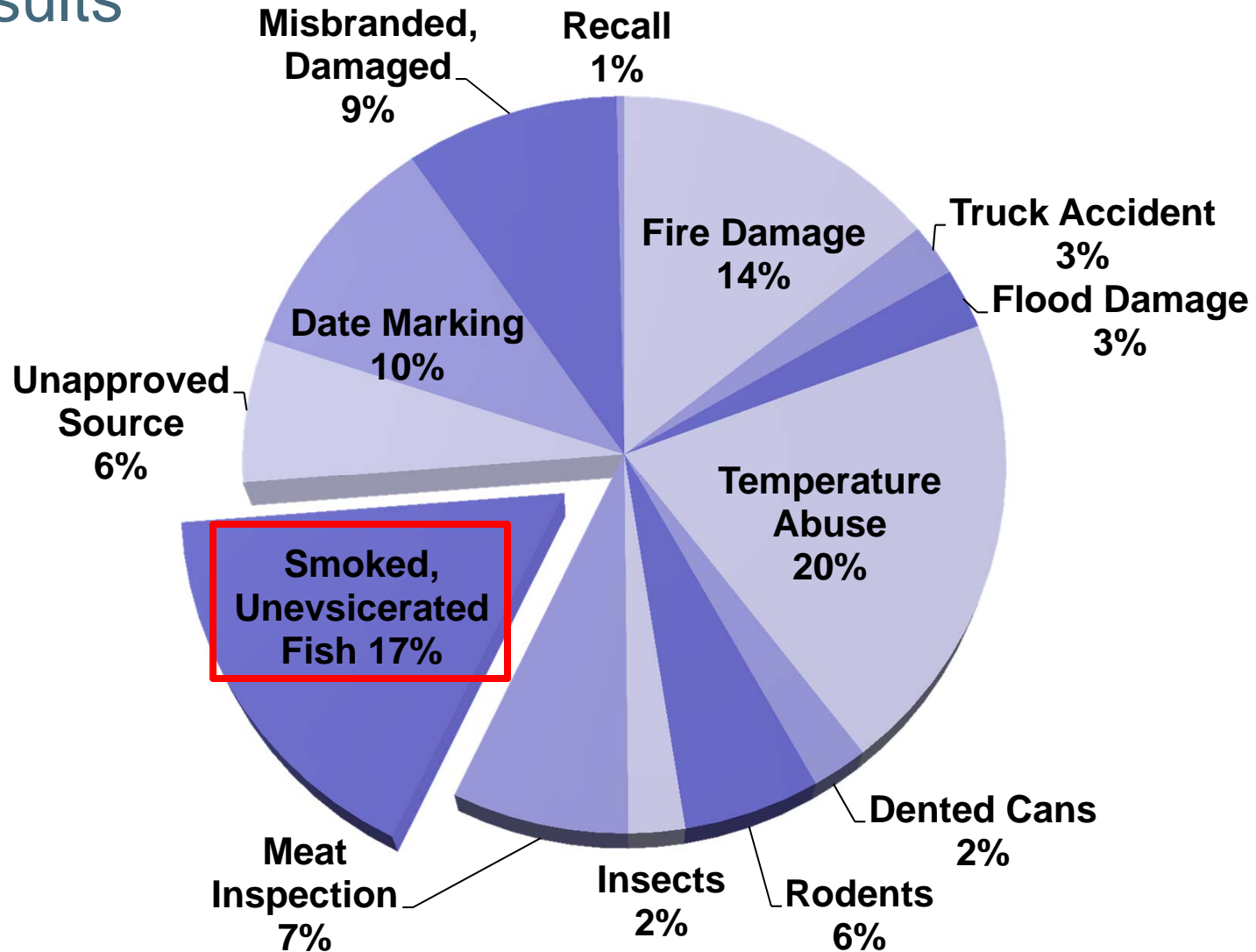
## Methodology

- Primary data analysis
  - MDA inspection tracking data
- Focus group meeting conducted
  - African food business owners
  - Partnership with local health agency
  - Six attendees from West African countries
- Focus group data analyzed
  - Frequency
  - Specificity
  - Emotion
  - Extensiveness

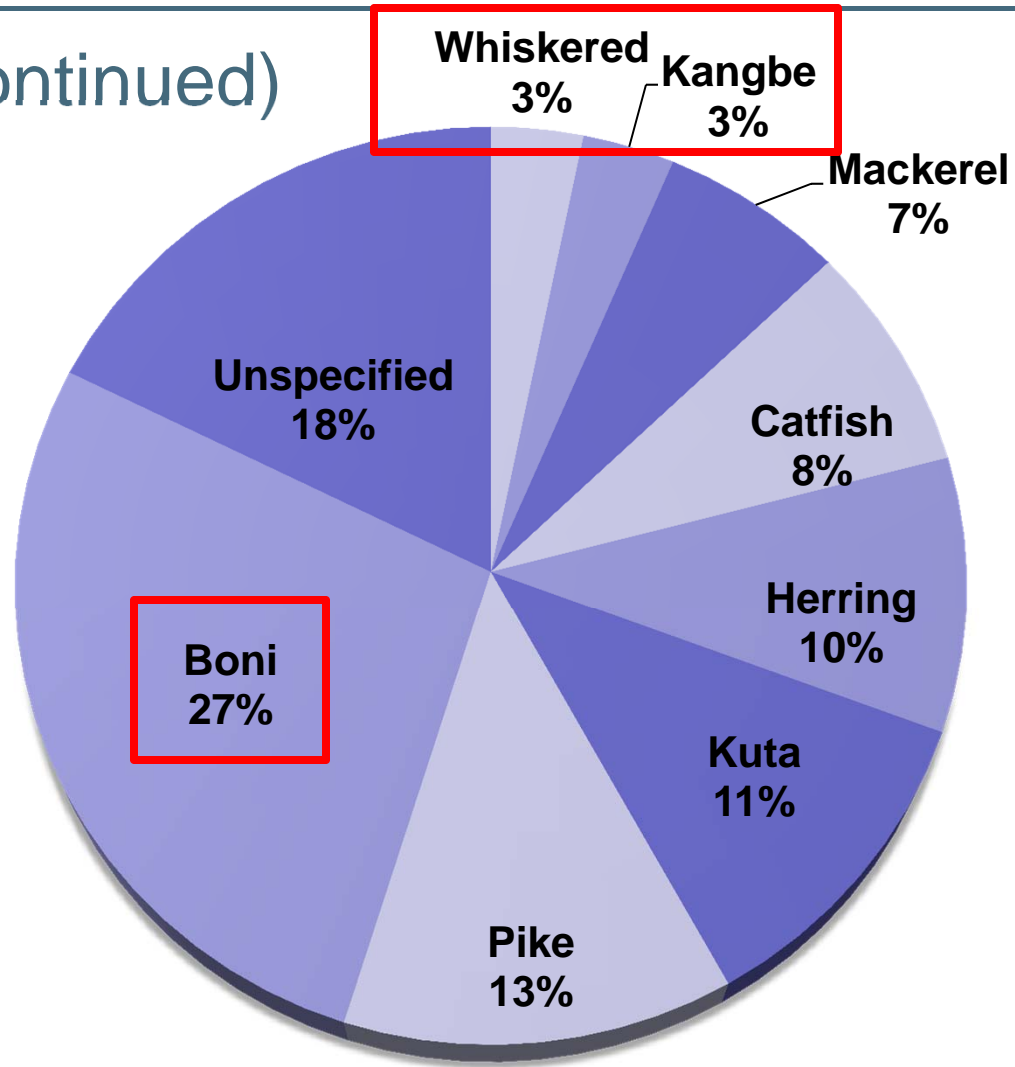
(Krueger & Casey 2000)



# Results



## Results (continued)



## Results (continued)

- Four major themes resulted from focus group discussion. Participants agreed:
  - **High demand** for smoked, uneviscerated fish despite illegal nature.
  - **Significant non-uniformity** in regulatory enforcement in United States.
  - **Different, traditional beliefs** about safety and handling of smoked, uneviscerated fish.
  - **Receptive to education and training** outreach as part of a solution.



## Conclusions

1. Uneviscerated fish = significant challenge among imported foods
  - Adulterated product, regulatory action taken
  - Large demand in West African community
2. West African community in MN will purchase traditional foods by any means
  - Legal or illegal; will purchase it to eat the food
  - **Commercialized in U.S. despite illegality**

## Conclusions (continued)

3. Significant non-uniformity between states
  - Repeated statements on nationwide availability
  - Regulator communication challenge
  
4. Traditional regulatory action not effective
  - Regulatory activity not limiting sales
  - Need for improved education on sourcing of food products
  - Alternate enforcement needed to address uneviscerated fish



## Recommendations

- Imported food regulation
  - FSMA, new proposed import rules
  - Challenge: Number of inspections limited even with new rules
  - State, local and FDA collaboration and communication
- Nationwide discussion
  - Training and factsheets (Compliance Policy Guide 540.650)
  - Address non-uniformity between states and commercialization
- Additional focus groups
  - National level
  - Determine scope, develop community interaction

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## Questions?

