



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSUMER SERVICES
COMMISSIONER NICOLE “NIKKI” FRIED

AQUACULTURE BUYER SCAM ALERT

A Florida aquaculture facility was recently victim of a complex fraud scheme which resulted in the loss of hundreds of thousands of dollars in revenue. An unknown third-party acting as a legitimate and established seafood purchaser operating in Florida contacted the farm to setup a recurring product order. When the purchaser failed to pay after multiple shipments, the farmer discovered that the business email, address and phone number were fraudulent and that an unknown party had disguised themselves as a legitimate customer. As of November 3, 2020, the FDACS Office of Agricultural Law Enforcement is investigating this case and further details are not available. Aquaculture businesses who would like information about filing a complaint against a business or who believe fraud is taking place should contact the Division of Aquaculture directly for assistance at (850) 617-7600 or (850) 352-9832 for Spanish speakers.

Best practices to avoid fraud:

- **Sell product to reputable businesses with verifiable credentials.**
 - Confirm if the business has a webpage or social media presence with reviews and determine if you already have contact information on file.
 - Verify the physical address prior to product shipments and be wary of payments going to a different address, such as a post office box.
 - Call the buyer to verify the telephone number is correct and working. Conduct a reverse phone lookup to determine who the number is registered to.
 - Confirm e-mail credentials
 - Search to see if the email address is active and used elsewhere in webpages or past correspondence. Be wary of those that utilize free e-mail services where a credit card wasn't required to open an account.
 - Check to see if the emails are structured in a similar way to past correspondences with the purchaser.
- **Confirm the identity of clients through all methods possible.**
 - For example, you can confirm Florida businesses via the Division of Corporations at: <https://dos.myflorida.com/sunbiz/search/>
 - Request the purchasers FEIN number which can then be validated.
- **Require payment up front, at time of delivery, or directly following each shipment.**
- **Do not continue business with a buyer that has unpaid invoices.** Scammers will often make authentic excuses for non-payment while requesting more and more product.