



Seafood News Food Safety & Health

■ **Safety, quality of Gulf fish touted in Chicago**



By [Christine Blank](#), *SeafoodSource* contributing editor

26 May, 2010 - Louisiana chefs and officials urged support of the state's restaurants and seafood industry at the National Restaurant Association (NRA) Show in Chicago this week, aiming to calm consumers' fears about the safety of Gulf of Mexico seafood in the aftermath of the worst oil spill in the nation's history.

"If it is in the marketplace, it is good. The health department is testing our waters on a daily basis, and fishermen don't want tainted product on the market," said Tommy Cvitanovich, owner of Drago's Seafood Restaurant in New Orleans and

Metairie, La., after an NRA media briefing presented by the Louisiana Restaurant Association and the NRA Show.

In addition to Cvitanovich, Ewell Smith, executive director of the Louisiana Seafood Promotion & Marketing Board, Jim Funk, president and CEO of the Louisiana Restaurant Association, and Ralph Brennan, owner of the Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group, spoke about the safety, quality and availability of Louisiana seafood.

The Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, other agencies, and the fisheries themselves are ensuring that Louisiana seafood is tested and is safe to eat, said Cvitanovich. Restaurateurs are also ensuring that their food is at the "highest level," he added.

While Cvitanovich is still using Gulf oysters and shrimp in his two Louisiana restaurants, the oil spill has definitely caused headaches for the state's restaurateurs.

"I can't wait until all the oyster beds are open again. They ripped the heart of our oyster production area out," said Cvitanovich, who supports the oyster bed closures as a safety precaution.

While Gulf oyster prices have risen "a little bit," availability is steady — for now.

"In the very near future, availability is going to become a major issue for us. Our restaurant is famous for char-broiled oysters," said Cvitanovich.

If and when Gulf oysters become unavailable, Cvitanovich will not substitute with oysters from the Northeast or Pacific Northwest, or from other countries.

"The oysters aren't as fat, so they do not work for our char-broiling method," he said.

However, Cvitanovich has added char-broiled Canadian mussels to the menu and may rely more on the shellfish in the future.