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An animals rights group is asking the state of Florida to file charges against Johan Andreassen, CEO Atlantic Sapphire, for animal cruelty. Photo: IntraFish

Pro-vegan activists that targeted Cooke's salmon operations now take aim at Atlantic Sapphire

The group alleges the land-based salmon farmer committed violations of animal cruelty laws, and is calling for the company to be punished -- including jail time for its CEO.

10 May 2021 19:24 GMT *UPDATED 10 May 2021 19:24 GMT*

By [Rachel Sapin](#)  

A Washington, DC-based non-profit that [previously attacked Cooke Aquaculture in Maine over animal welfare violations](#) is now targeting land-based salmon farmer Atlantic Sapphire for issues related to the "prolonged suffering and agonizing death" of fish being raised at the company's Miami, Florida, facility.

The non-profit Animal Outlook, formerly known as Compassion Over Killing, submitted a complaint last month to Florida's Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) alleging several instances where it said Atlantic Sapphire violated the state's animal cruelty law, and has not raised the fish in "optimal environments."

[\[Read the full complaint against Atlantic Sapphire here \(pdf\)\]](#)

The non-profit alleged that in the last nine months Atlantic Sapphire's "failure to take actions it knew were essential to provide for the proper care of the animals confined at its facility has led to the suffering and death of 800,000 salmon in two separate 'mass mortality events.'"

The non-profit asked the state agency to revoke the company's Aquaculture Certificate of Registration and has even suggested "jail time for its CEO, and severe monetary penalties" to pay for the suffering of salmon at its land-based facility.

However, Animal Outlook's first attempt fell flat, according to Will Lowrey, an attorney with the group, who told **IntraFish** FDACS Division of Aquaculture Assistant Director Charlie Culpepper replied to Animal Outlook's letter on May 5 saying the company was found to be in compliance with the state's Aquaculture Best Management Practices in an inspection on March 17.

The group has since sent its letter to the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office, which, according to Lowrey, said it would investigate the allegations.

Executives with Atlantic Sapphire did not respond to **IntraFish** requests for comment by the time of publication.

NGO claims

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The Animal Outlook allegations point to two incidents at Atlantic Sapphire's US farm, including the July 2020 die-off of 200,000 salmon the group attributed to construction work nearby, including loud sounds and severe vibrations.

Atlantic Sapphire claimed the noise [stressed the fish and caused the mortalities](#), adding at the time that it did not have an emergency harvest facility in place to deal with the issue.


"Having failed to implement the systems necessary to care for these fish, Atlantic Sapphire decided to kill them, vacuum pumping them to be electrically shocked then have their gills slit until they were left to bleed out in a tote of chilled water with thousands likely regaining consciousness in their final, harrowing moments," the nonprofit alleges.

The process the letter described is standard practice for harvesting and processing salmon and other fish worldwide.

The letter also references a March incident in which Atlantic Sapphire lost 600,000 more fish [due to a "weakness" in its recirculating aquaculture system \(RAS\)](#).

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In total, Animal Outlook alleges that between July 2020 and March 2021, Atlantic Sapphire committed 800,000 violations of the state's animal cruelty law, a number it arrived at by counting each individual salmon death.

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Same playbook

This is not the first time the non-profit has targeted a seafood company over animal cruelty.

In October of 2019 the animal rights group went undercover at Cooke Aquaculture's operations in Bingham, Maine -- an Atlantic salmon hatchery that supplies to Martha Stewart's True North Seafood line -- and published footage showing workers stomping on the heads of salmon.

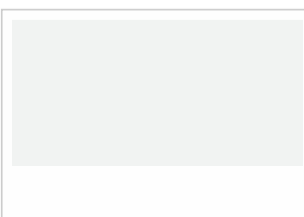
Animal Outlook Exposes Cruelty on Fish Factory Farm



Animal Outlook aggressively promoted the video across social media channels, which prompted Cooke [to issue an apology over the incident](#).

It also resulted in the state of Maine [conducting an in-depth investigation into the issues raised](#), but, ultimately, the company did not face disciplinary action.

Animal Outlook [has since filed a lawsuit against Cooke](#), alleging deceptive marketing over the group's claim of being "sustainably farmed."



The group deploys a similar strategy for all its anti-animal cruelty activism, whether it's undercover video, legal threats or other efforts to pressure companies to change practices.

The group touts campaigns against US poultry, pork, cattle and lamb producers, including Tyson, Pilgrim's Pride, Nestle, Foster Farms and Hormel.

Many of those campaigns launched with the group embedding workers in processing facilities to document practices oftentimes in violation of US or state regulations. Some of the group's investigations have resulted in regulator fines and changes in company practices.

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The group also highlights what it calls "victories" on its site, highlighting the launch of plant-based alternatives at Starbucks, McDonald's, Dunkin' Donuts and Subway.

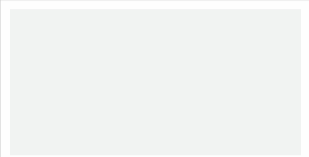
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Links to plant and cell-based groups

Animal Outlook [promotes vegetarian eating among mainstream America consumers](#), and runs the vegan promotional site [TryVeg.com](#), which is endorsed by the seafood, plant-based alternative company Good Catch that has had increasing success at retail and foodservice, and [has even partnered with tuna giant Bumble Bee Seafoods](#).



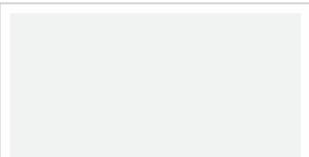
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[The group also has ties to VegInvest](#), which provides early-stage capital and guidance to companies working to replace the use of animals in the food supply, according to its website.

However, when contacted for comment following the Cooke video in 2019, attorneys for the group sent a letter to **IntraFish** warning that "any characterization of ties between [Animal Outlook] and VegInvest – implicitly or explicitly – is inaccurate and raises concerns about bias and defamation."

The VegInvest portfolio of companies includes alternative seafood firms Good Catch, Shiok Meats and BlueNalu, among other plant-based food producers, [including, ironically, Tyson Ventures-backed plant-based shrimp producer New Wave Foods](#). [\(Copyright\)](#)



Plant-based seafood investor has ties to group targeting Cooke

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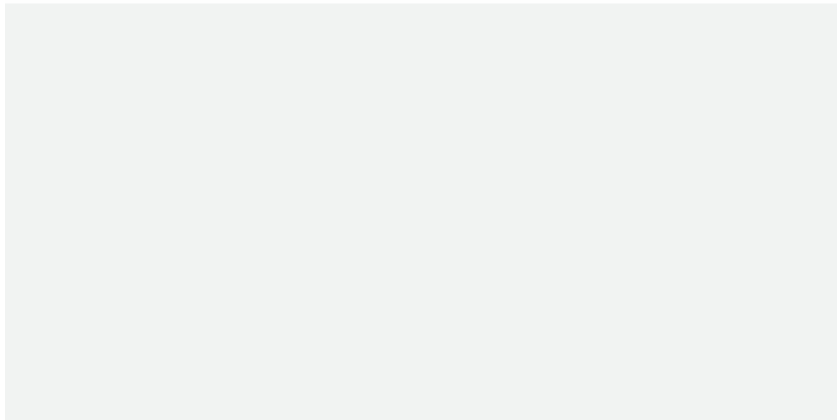
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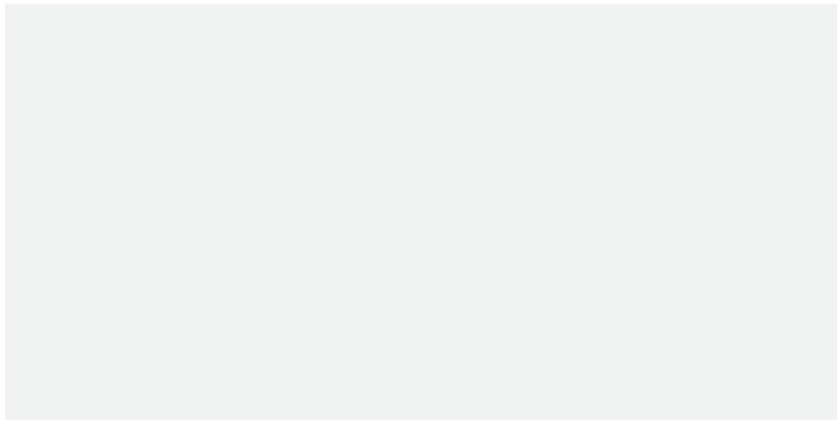
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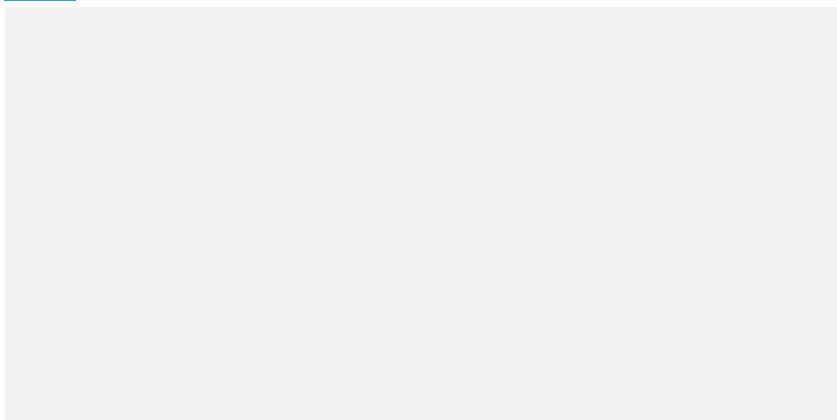
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