

NOF Mock Trial Fact Pattern:

State of Caldwell
V.
Margot Bellerose

CHARGE	DEFENDANT	PLEA
Food Fraud / Fraudulent Misrepresentation of Food Products (Felony, Class B)	Margot Bellerose, Age 45 Owner, Bellerose Farm & Market Caldwell, State	Not Guilty

Bellerose Farm & Market is a well-regarded specialty food shop in downtown Caldwell, known for sourcing premium products including artisan cheeses, local produce, and high-end seafood. Among its flagship offerings was wild-caught Pacific salmon, prominently marketed as ocean-caught off the Alaskan coast and sold at \$26 per pound — a price consistent with the premium product advertised.

In March 2026, the Caldwell Department of Agriculture received an anonymous tip alleging that the salmon sold at Bellerose Farm & Market was not wild-caught Pacific salmon. Inspector Cora Yates collected samples from the shop and submitted them to the State Food Safety Laboratory. DNA analysis and stable isotope testing (Exhibit 1) confirmed that the fish was farmed Atlantic salmon — a significantly cheaper product typically retailing for \$8–\$10 per pound.

The State alleges that Bellerose knowingly sold the cheaper product at the premium price for approximately nine months, defrauding customers of an estimated \$47,000 in overcharges. Inspector Yates's review of Bellerose's business records also revealed that the wholesale invoices from her seafood supplier, NorPac Distributors, listed prices substantially below the typical wholesale rate for genuine wild-caught Pacific salmon (Exhibit 2).

Bellerose has maintained from the beginning that she was herself defrauded by NorPac Distributors, whom she claims sent her falsified certification documents representing the fish as wild-caught Pacific salmon. She states she paid what she understood to be the appropriate premium price, relied on NorPac's paperwork in good faith, and had no way to detect the substitution. Complicating the investigation: NorPac Distributors abruptly ceased operations in April 2026, and its owner, identified only as "R. Norris," has not been located by investigators.

The State argues Bellerose's wholesale purchase price was a clear red flag that any experienced retailer would have recognized, and that her detailed marketing claims about the product's origin (Exhibit 3) went far beyond what her supplier documentation actually confirmed. The Defense maintains Bellerose was a victim, not a perpetrator, and that the disappearance of NorPac's owner is the strongest evidence that a broader fraud scheme was being run against retailers like her. Margot Bellerose now stands trial. She pleads Not Guilty.

Witness Statements

Prosecution Witness 1: Inspector Cora Yates

Caldwell Department of Agriculture — Food Safety & Fraud Division

"My name is Cora Yates. I have worked as a food safety inspector for eleven years, with a focus on food fraud investigations for the last four.

Following an anonymous tip, I collected salmon samples from Bellerose Farm & Market and submitted them for DNA and stable isotope analysis. The results were unambiguous (Exhibit 1): the fish was farmed Atlantic salmon — not wild-caught Pacific salmon as labeled and sold. There is no scientific ambiguity in these findings.

I also reviewed Bellerose's business records. Her NorPac invoices listed a per-pound wholesale price of \$6.80 — well below even the floor-level wholesale rate for genuine wild-caught Pacific salmon, which runs \$14–\$18 per pound depending on the season. I have been doing this job for over a decade. Any experienced seafood retailer who receives an invoice for "wild-caught Pacific salmon" at \$6.80 a pound should immediately know something is wrong.

I will acknowledge that we were unable to interview NorPac's owner or examine NorPac's records. The business closed and the owner disappeared before we could serve a subpoena. That is an open thread in this investigation. But the fraud occurred at the point of sale — at Bellerose Farm & Market — and the evidence of what was sold, and at what price, is not in dispute."

Prosecution Witness 2: Theo Randall

Former Part-Time Employee, Bellerose Farm & Market

"My name is Theo Randall. I worked part-time at Bellerose Farm & Market from August 2025 through January 2026, mostly helping behind the seafood counter and with stock.

In November 2025, I was restocking the refrigerated display case when I overheard Ms. Bellerose on a phone call in the back office. The door was partially open. I heard her say — and I'm recalling this as accurately as I can — something like: "As long as the tags say Pacific, no one is going to be checking the fish itself." I remember it because it struck me as an odd thing to say. I didn't fully understand what it meant at the time.

I was let go from the job in January. Ms. Bellerose told me it was due to reduced winter hours, but I hadn't received any prior warning. I want to be upfront that I was disappointed about losing the job.

I'm not here to get anyone in trouble. I'm here because when the investigation was announced and I read what the charges were, that conversation came back to me and I felt I had to come forward. I only heard part of it. I don't know who she was talking to or what the full context was."

Witness Statements

Defense Witness 1: Patricia Yee

Independent Food Industry Consultant; Seafood Supply Chain Specialist

"My name is Patricia Yee. I have worked as a food industry consultant for eighteen years, specializing in supply chain integrity and seafood sourcing. I was asked by the defense to review the circumstances of this case.

First: it is not possible for a retail shopkeeper — or even most culinary professionals — to visually or by taste distinguish wild-caught Pacific salmon from high-quality farmed Atlantic salmon. This is a well-documented challenge in the food industry. Retailers rely, universally and necessarily, on their suppliers' certification documentation. That is the established standard of care.

Second: the NorPac documentation provided to Ms. Bellerose (copies of which I reviewed) included what appeared to be a valid Marine Stewardship Council certification stamp and a chain-of-custody certificate. Both documents were later determined to be forgeries. The forgeries were sophisticated — not something a buyer would be expected to detect.

Third: the disappearance of NorPac's owner is, in my professional experience, a hallmark of a supplier-level fraud scheme. I have consulted on three similar cases in the past decade. In each one, a fraudulent supplier sold mislabeled product to multiple retailers simultaneously, collected payment, and vanished. The retailers were the last to know.

I am not compensated contingently on the outcome of this case. My fee is a flat consulting rate."

Defense Witness 2: James Bellerose

Bookkeeper, Bellerose Farm & Market; Husband of Defendant

"My name is James Bellerose. I handle bookkeeping and accounts payable for Bellerose Farm & Market. I want to be transparent: Margot is my wife, and I'm aware the court will weigh my testimony accordingly.

What I can offer are the numbers, because numbers don't have opinions. Our NorPac invoices, which I paid personally, show a consistent wholesale price of \$6.80 per pound for product labeled "Wild-Caught Pacific Salmon, MSC Certified." At the time, I flagged this to Margot because it seemed low. She contacted NorPac and was told the price reflected a long-term volume contract and a direct relationship with a specific Alaskan fishery.

We believed them. We had no reason not to — they had the certification paperwork, they had a professional website, and they had what looked like legitimate credentials. We were not cutting corners to make a bigger margin. We genuinely believed we were selling what we said we were selling.

If we had known the fish was farmed Atlantic salmon, we would have sold it as farmed Atlantic salmon — at the appropriate price. There is no version of this where deceiving our customers makes business sense to us. This shop is our livelihood and our reputation."

Exhibit 1

CALDWELL STATE FOOD SAFETY LABORATORY

Species Authentication & Isotope Analysis Report | Report No. CSFL-2026-0341

Sample Source:	Bellerose Farm & Market, 14 Caraway St., Caldwell
Collected by:	Inspector Cora Yates, Caldwell Dept. of Agriculture
Collection Date:	March 19, 2026
Analysis Date:	March 24–26, 2026
Report Issued:	March 28, 2026
Analyst:	Dr. Fern Okafor, M.S., Ph.D. — Senior Food Scientist

Analysis Results

TEST	RESULT	EXPECTED (Wild Pacific)	MATCH?
Mitochondrial DNA Sequencing	Salmo salar (Atlantic salmon)	Oncorhynchus spp. (Pacific salmon)	NO X
Stable Isotope Analysis (δ ¹³ C)	−22.4‰ (consistent with farmed, grain-based diet)	−18.1 to −20.5‰ (marine diet)	NO X
Stable Isotope Analysis (δ ¹⁵ N)	9.8‰ (low — consistent with farmed fish feed)	12.1 to 14.6‰ (ocean food chain)	NO X
Carotenoid Pigment Profile	Synthetic astaxanthin detected	Natural astaxanthin from marine diet	NO X

Conclusion: All four tests are inconsistent with wild-caught Pacific salmon. The sample is consistent with farmed Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*) raised on a commercial feed diet. These findings are conclusive within the limits of current species-authentication science. Margin of error: <0.1%. This report has been certified by the Caldwell State Laboratory Quality Assurance Office.

Exhibit 2

WHOLESALE PRICE COMPARISON

NorPac Distributors Invoice Records vs. Market Rates | Prepared by Inspector C. Yates

NorPac Distributors Invoices — Bellerose Farm & Market

INVOICE DATE	PRODUCT LABEL	QUANTITY	PRICE / LB (WHOLESALE)	TOTAL
Jul 12, 2025	Wild-Caught Pacific Salmon MSC Cert. #NP-7741	40 lbs	\$6.80 / lb	\$272.00
Sep 3, 2025	Wild-Caught Pacific Salmon MSC Cert. #NP-7741	55 lbs	\$6.80 / lb	\$374.00
Nov 18, 2025	Wild-Caught Pacific Salmon MSC Cert. #NP-7741	60 lbs	\$6.80 / lb	\$408.00
Jan 7, 2026	Wild-Caught Pacific Salmon MSC Cert. #NP-7741	50 lbs	\$6.80 / lb	\$340.00
Mar 2, 2026	Wild-Caught Pacific Salmon MSC Cert. #NP-7741	45 lbs	\$6.80 / lb	\$306.00

Market Rate Context — Wild-Caught Pacific Salmon (Wholesale)

SOURCE	PRODUCT	WHOLESALE PRICE / LB
Alaska Seafood Marketing Inst. (2025 avg.)	Wild-Caught Pacific Salmon	\$15.20 – \$18.40
Caldwell Fish Market (competing retailer)	Wild-Caught Pacific Salmon	\$14.50 – \$17.80
Pacific Coast Wholesale Co. (certified)	Wild-Caught Pacific Salmon	\$16.00 – \$19.00
NorPac Distributors (Bellerose invoices)	"Wild-Caught Pacific Salmon"	\$6.80 ■

■ NorPac's invoiced price of \$6.80/lb is 55–63% below the lowest comparable wholesale market rate for genuine wild-caught Pacific salmon during the same period. NorPac Distributors ceased operations on April 3, 2026. Owner R. Norris has not been located.

Exhibit 3

Bellerose Farm & Market — In-Store Signage and Product Description Card Photographed by Inspector Yates at point of sale, March 19, 2026

◆ BELLEROSE FARM & MARKET ◆

Curated with care. Sourced with integrity.

WILD-CAUGHT PACIFIC SALMON

\$26.00 / lb

Ocean-caught in the pristine waters off the Alaskan coast, our Pacific salmon is sourced exclusively through a direct partnership with a certified sustainable fishery operating under Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) guidelines. Each fish is caught by line, hand-selected at dock for quality, and delivered fresh within 48 hours of harvest.

Wild Pacific salmon offers a distinctly rich, complex flavor and deep natural color that farmed fish simply cannot match — the result of a natural ocean diet and years of open-water living. Our fishery partners have maintained MSC certification continuously since 2018.

Ask our staff about current seasonal availability by species: Chinook, Sockeye, and Coho.

Bellerose Farm & Market | 14 Caraway Street, Caldwell | bellerosefarmmarket.com

Note: The MSC certification number referenced verbally by Bellerose staff and in supplier documentation ("MSC Cert. #NP-7741") does not appear in the Marine Stewardship Council's public certificate registry. The MSC confirmed to investigators that no certificate bearing this number has ever been issued.