

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 21, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
219A Whitten Building
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

We write to express our appreciation to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for including Atlantic seafood in its Section 32 food purchases and to request that USDA continue to dedicate funds to the purchase of Atlantic pollock, haddock, and redfish through solicitations that allow for broad industry engagement.

On May 4, 2020, USDA announced a \$20 million solicitation for Atlantic pollock, haddock, and redfish through the Section 32 program, which makes purchases of surplus stocks to help the national fight against hunger.¹ This marked the first time in decades that Atlantic seafood joined the ranks of Gulf and Pacific seafood in providing healthy, fresh fish to our nation's food banks. And on September 22, 2020, USDA made its first — and thus far, only — purchase with those funds, through a \$4.4 million contract with Blue Harvest Fisheries in New Bedford, Massachusetts.²

The Massachusetts fishing industry welcomes the inclusion of Atlantic seafood in the Section 32 program. It is invaluable to the groundfish industry, which has seen the COVID-19 pandemic disrupt its markets, with prices at the dock off 35 percent as compared to last year.³ We hope that USDA's first purchase through this solicitation will set the stage for further relationships between USDA and New England fisheries and seafood processors. We also encourage USDA to build on successful Section 32 contracts with the New England seafood industry by including it in other USDA procurement programs, such as the National School Lunch Program. Steady demand from regular USDA purchases will further support the industry's recovery from the

¹ USDA, Press Release, *USDA Announces Additional Food Purchase Plans*, (May 4, 2020), <https://www.ams.usda.gov/press-release/usda-announces-additional-food-purchase-plans>.

² Blue Harvest, Press Release. *USDA Will Purchase \$4.4 Million of Blue Harvest's Sustainable, New Bedford Groundfish* (Sep. 22 2020), <https://www.blueharvestfisheries.com/news/usda-will-purchase-4-4-million-of-blue-harvests-sustainable-new-bedford-groundfish>.

³ Caroline Losneck, *Northeast groundfish: retail sales recovering, but prices stay down*, National Fisherman (Aug. 5 2020), <https://www.nationalfisherman.com/northeast-groundfish-retail-sales-recovering-but-prices-stay-down>.

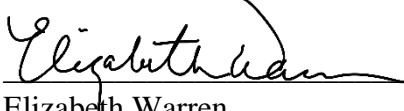
pandemic, help businesses operate with additional certainty, and direct surplus products to supply healthy meals to American families.


With the Blue Harvest contract, we understand that USDA has used only around \$5 million of the \$20 million solicitation for Atlantic seafood, although the remaining \$15 million is available for the Section 32 program during the next fiscal year.⁴ We ask that USDA continue to dedicate those funds specifically to the purchase of Atlantic pollock, haddock, and redfish. Section 32 purchasing is a new type of market opportunity for Atlantic fishermen and processors and surplus stocks will remain accessible throughout next year.


Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request. We stand ready to help facilitate your engagement with the fishing and seafood community however we can. If you have any questions, please contact James LaChance on Senator Markey's staff at james_lachance@markey.senate.gov.

Sincerely,


Edward J. Markey
United States Senator


Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator


Seth Moulton
Member of Congress


William R. Keating
Member of Congress

⁴ 7 U.S.C. § 612c