

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 1, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue,

We write again to request that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) include East Coast seafood producers among the recipients of financial assistance to agricultural producers that the Department is providing in response to the coronavirus pandemic. On April 17, 2020, USDA announced a \$19 billion Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) intended to support farmers, ranchers, and consumers during this public health and economic crisis. But USDA did not specify whether seafood producers would be eligible for that aid.<sup>1</sup> We ask that you recognize the devastating effects the pandemic has had on seafood businesses, engage with these important stakeholders, and include them in these financial assistance programs.

As we have previously explained, the fishing and seafood industries are essential to the American economy, with \$5.6 billion worth of fisheries products landed and \$11.6 billion worth of fisheries products processed in 2018.<sup>2</sup> The coronavirus outbreak has caused restaurants across the United States to shutter, eliminating a key customer base. The pandemic has also disrupted large export markets in countries such as China, which the coronavirus has hit hard. As a result, the U.S. fishing and seafood industries are under serious financial duress that shows no signs of abating.<sup>3</sup>

The \$19 billion CFAP includes \$9.5 billion from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, \$3 billion from the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, and \$6.5 billion from the Commodity Credit Corporation. Congress designated the \$9.5 billion in CARES Act funding for support to agricultural producers affected by coronavirus, including producers that supply local food systems and restaurants.<sup>4</sup> Approximately two-thirds of U.S. seafood consumption occurs in restaurants.<sup>5</sup> When USDA begins its purchasing programs intended to assist those whom the pandemic has effected, USDA should include domestic seafood.

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<sup>1</sup> USDA, Press Release, *USDA Announces Coronavirus Food Assistance Program*, (Apr. 17, 2020),

<https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2020/04/17/usda-announces-coronavirus-food-assistance-program>

<sup>2</sup> NOAA Fisheries, *Fisheries of the United States, 2018* (Feb. 21, 2020), <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/fisheries-united-states-2018>.

<sup>3</sup> Laura Reiley, *Commercial fishing industry in free fall as restaurants close, consumers hunker down and vessels tie up*, Wash. Post (Apr. 8, 2020), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/04/08/commercial-fishing-coronavirus/>.

<sup>4</sup> P.L. 116-136, Title I, Agricultural Programs.

<sup>5</sup> Christine Bank, *Seafood suppliers forced to adjust to rapidly changing market condition*, Seafood Source (Mar. 30, 2020), <https://www.seafoodsource.com/news/foodservice-retail/seafood-suppliers-forced-to-adjust-to-rapidly-changing-market-conditions>.

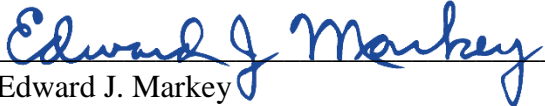
In addition to assistance available through the CFAP, USDA announced on April 17 that it would provide an additional \$873.3 million in Section 32 funding for the purchase of a variety of agricultural products for distribution to food banks. USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service has previously purchased seafood through the Section 32 program, and we urge USDA to continue that practice.<sup>6</sup> East Coast seafood producers can offer a wide variety of seafood that currently does not have a market, and which should be included in purchases made for this program.

We urge you to work with these producers to better understand the available supply and to ensure their inclusion when USDA starts implementing its announced programs. In order for us to better understand USDA's consideration of seafood in its assistance to agricultural producers affected by the coronavirus pandemic, please respond to the following questions by May 13, 2020:

1. Will USDA include seafood in its purchases of agricultural products under the CFAP?
2. Will USDA include seafood in its purchases of agricultural products under the additional \$873.3 million in Section 32 funding?
3. Are there other USDA programs that will buy seafood products to provide assistance to producers impacted by the coronavirus pandemic?
4. Is USDA currently in conversations with seafood producers from the East Coast to purchase seafood?

If you have any questions about this request, please reach out to Claire Richer on Senator Markey's staff at [claire\\_richer@markey.senate.gov](mailto:claire_richer@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

<sup>6</sup> Agricultural Marketing Service, *2021 USDA Budget Explanatory Notes for Committee on Appropriations: Marketing and Regulatory Programs*, <https://www.obpa.usda.gov/21ams2021notes.pdf#page=126>.