

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

June 15, 2021

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary of Agriculture  
The United States Department of Agriculture  
14<sup>th</sup> Street and Independence Ave SW  
Washington, DC 20250-1300

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We applaud your leadership as the Administration confronts economic disruption related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this spirit, we are writing to underscore the critical need to engage the nation's commercial fishing industry, particularly independent fishermen.

The non-profit Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance has created a successful initiative to harvest sustainable small haddock and manufacture frozen chowder for donation to food banks across New England and the mid-Atlantic. Since last year, the Alliance has been working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to clarify eligibility for seafood products.

To date, small-boat family fleets have not been able to participate in USDA procurement programs. Haddock is a plentiful, wild-caught fish that can be landed by many small-boat fishermen in the Northeast. It does not necessarily produce uniform fillets, but is perfect for a chowder base—much like comparable sustainable species in other parts of the country.

This initiative thus features a sustainable new product that keeps family fishermen on the water and provides volumes of nutritious, affordable, ready-to-serve meals. Moreover, the Alliance initiative is a replicable model that would be adopted by other independent fleets across the country – from Alaska to Maine to the Gulf of Mexico.

The Alliance has been working for months with USDA staff to address each of the procurement specifications and procedural requirements. However, USDA has historically struggled to recognize new seafood products as commodities for its food programs, making it a challenge for this effort to advance. Notably, the 2020 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee report again recognized fish as an essential element of diet for all Americans and underscored its positive health effects, especially for pregnant women and young children.

For these reasons, we urge you to consider partnering with the Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance and other family fishing industry leaders. Specifically, we ask USDA to:

- Expedite the deployment of seafood chowder specifications within the Agricultural Marketing Service and the Food and Nutrition Service to include haddock chowder;
- Extend these specifications to include chowders using sustainable seafood products from other regions of the country; and
- Include sustainable seafood products from independent fishermen in USDA purchasing and distribution programs.

The long-term goal is to fully integrate fish and seafood purchases into USDA programs, comparable to successful programs for beef, pork and chicken. We look forward to working together to embrace the initiative of family fishermen to help address the urgent priority of food insecurity across the country.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions about this matter please contact Andrew Nelson in Congressman Keating's office at: [Andrew.Nelson@mail.house.gov](mailto:Andrew.Nelson@mail.house.gov).



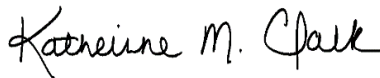
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