

September 25, 2023

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Chairwoman
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition, and Forestry
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Boozman
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition, and Forestry
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Glenn Thompson
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Scott
Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Stabenow, Ranking Member Boozman, Chairman Thompson, and Ranking Member Scott:

We write on behalf of America's commercial seafood producers, united in our commitment to supplying Americans with sustainable seafood, stewarding our marine resources, and improving the resiliency of seafood supply chains. As you draft the 2023 Farm Bill, we ask that you focus on practical steps that can provide critical support for America's seafood producers. Specifically, we urge you to: (i) create an Office of Seafood Policy and Program Integration in the USDA Office of the Chief Economist; (ii) promote greater seafood procurement across United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) nutrition programs; and (iii) extend the eligibility for certain USDA grants and loans to U.S. seafood producers and supporting businesses.

The U.S. seafood sector faces challenges similar to those that confront American farmers and ranchers. Crushing market shifts, cost burdens, supply chain vulnerabilities, and foreign market access challenges have caused a crisis throughout the U.S. seafood supply chain. Lost opportunities to participate in programs that support food production and resilient food supply chains harm the entire seafood sector and put U.S. producers at a competitive disadvantage at home and abroad. This has become an especially acute problem in recent years, during the hardships of the pandemic and its aftermath. Inadequate federal policy responses have starkly illustrated the long-standing reality that U.S. seafood producers too often "slip through the cracks" of federal policy support. While the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) manages our federal fisheries harvest and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) oversees seafood labeling and safety, no federal agency has provided clear and consistent leadership for seafood as a priority domestic food commodity. We urgently need USDA to assume that role.

To help advance this objective, the U.S. commercial seafood sector has coalesced around three priority requests for the current Farm Bill, some of which are reflected in bills already introduced in the 118th Congress:

1. **Section 5 of S.2208, Senator Sullivan’s *National Seafood Supply Act of 2023*, would create an Office of Seafood Policy and Program Integration in the USDA Office of the Chief Economist.** This would, for the first time, provide our sector with a point of entry at USDA, and establish a clear point of accountability for integrating seafood and U.S. seafood producers into USDA programs and operations. Such an office would also serve a critical role in coordinating with other agencies that have a role in the seafood supply chain, to ensure that all agencies are collectively working towards common seafood support objectives in domestic and global markets. Importantly, the office would perform these functions for both *wild and farmed* seafood, recognizing that they are both part of America’s domestic seafood supply chain, food security, and coastal/rural economies.
2. **Language in the 2008 and 2014 Farm Bills that sought to boost whole grain products and pulse crops respectively in USDA nutrition programs¹ should now be adapted and applied to seafood.** A Government Accountability Office (GAO) study recently found that several significant childhood health benefits could be gained from USDA purchasing more seafood for its National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs.² The GAO makes clear that reform is an urgent health priority for our Nation’s children: while nutritional guidelines recommend school-aged children receive between four and ten ounces of seafood *per week*, the National School Lunch Program only delivers roughly three ounces of seafood *per year* to these students. The study also confirms that program administrators are very receptive to more seafood offerings. In addition to starting to address an urgent nutritional challenge, adding these provisions to the Farm Bill would strengthen the resiliency of the seafood sector and the rural and coastal communities that rely on it for employment and economic security.
3. **Various legislative proposals—including from Senator Murkowski (S.2354, §§ 402 and 405), Senator Sullivan (S.2208, § 7), and Reps. Khanna, Brown, Miller and Molinaro (H.R.4873)—would assist commercial fishermen, processors, and other supporting businesses gain eligibility to vital USDA grant and loan programs.** We urgently request that Congress seek to address acute seafood supply chain challenges and strengthen resilience across the domestic seafood industry by clarifying that seafood producers are eligible for key USDA financial support programs available to other domestic food producers. Prime examples of USDA programs that benefit terrestrial food producers but not seafood are the Rural Development Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program and the Food Supply Chain Guaranteed Loan Program. These programs, if extended and reauthorized, could provide a vital lifeline to our industry. They could support seafood processors seeking to expand their capacity, encourage competition and sustainable growth within the seafood processing sector, and improve supply chain resiliency. Similarly, codifying Section 7 of S.2208 and Sections 402 and 405 of S.2354 would extend eligibility for certain USDA loans to commercial fishermen and supporting businesses. Like our land-based counterparts, the U.S. seafood industry faces increasing cost burdens and market challenges. It is critical that the Nation’s commercial seafood producers and associated support businesses have access to these USDA grant and loan programs, and that the economic and food security benefit these producers provide to our Nation are recognized and supported.

¹ Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, H.R. 2419, 110th Cong. § 4305 (2008); Agricultural Act of 2014, H.R. 2642, 113th Cong. § 4213 (2014); codified at 42 U.S.C. §§ 1755a and 1755b.

² *USDA Could Enhance Assistance to States and Schools in Providing Seafood to Students*, United States Government Accountability Office Report GAO-23-105179 (Nov. 2022) (<https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-23-105179.pdf>).

We appreciate your consideration of the plight of our industry, and the opportunity that the Farm Bill provides to strengthen resilience across the U.S. seafood sector. We stand ready to provide any additional information or assistance that may be helpful to your offices.

Sincerely,

Association Signatories:

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Julie Decker
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Alaska Groundfish Data Bank

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Trawler Master Ricky

Dao Huynh
Fulton Seafood, Inc.

Diana Tran
USA Sun Stars Insurance Agency, LLC.

Scott Nguyen
N&V Marine, LLC.

Chow Au
St. Joseph

Jose Jimenez
Lucky Damian, LLC.

Vincent Dinh
Trawler Miss Gaby

Trung Vu
Guardian Angel

Maxie Ngo
Ace Marine, LLC.

Hau Huynh
Donovan Tien

Trung Vu
Capt TV

Andy Thuy Nguyen
Princess Steffanny, LLC.

Tran Doan
Tran Van Doan

Hien Vo
Huy Hoan, LLC.

Allen Chinh Nguyen
Capt. Mathew, LLC.

Wayne Cheramie
Fisherman

Tom Thanh Vu
Trawler St Joseph

Kim Nguyen
Lady Whitney

Jose Calderon
Victoria & Mika, Inc.

Barry Holden
Holden Seafood

Anh Dao Nguyen
Miss Anh Dao

Diem Huynh
Fulton Seafood, Inc.

Tran Doan
Capt Doan

Day Nguyen
Miss Anh Dao

Dang V. Nguyen
Trawler St. Paul

Cam Van Vuong
Miss Anh Dao

Van Nguyen
Trawler St. Peter

Minh Van Le
Trawler St. Phillip, Inc.

Joan Doan
Capt Doan 2

Cindy Nguyen
Pegasus

Doan Vu
Gulf Bay Marine

Dung Le
Capt Tony, LLC.

Huynh Vu
Francis Vu, Inc.

Ruyen Vu
Trawler Capt Ron

Marty leblanc
St. June

Tuyen Jack Vu
Capt T&T, LLC.

Bay Van Nguyen
Mrs. Diana

Jason Privett
Fair Maiden Seafood

Julie Nguyen
Capt. Magic, LLC

Nam Van Le
St. Joseph

McCain Rawlings
Matagorda Shrimp Co.

Hung Nguyen
Trawler Capt. Michael II

Minh Kim Nguyen
Trawler Capt. Michael II

Cach Dinh Nguyen
Trawler Big Lucas

Xuan Quang Tran
Miss Cindy

Vinh Nguyen
Tawler J&T

Hill Nguyen
Captain Magic

Tham Huynh
Captain Johnny, LLC.

Buddy Treybig
Buddy's Seafood

Gina Treybig
Arnold's Seafood

Phu Tran
Bama Express V

Bill Viet le Nguyen
Mrs. Diana

Thomas R. Parks
F/V Katie K, LLC.

Francisco Abrego
Muy Positivo, Inc.

Hanh Nguyen
Hoan and Hanh, LLC.

Mark Fabra
Commercial Fisherman

Bruce Drury Jr
Commercial Fisherman

Francisco Abrego
Alpasito, Inc.

Trang Nguyen
Capt. A&T

Francisco Abrego
Abrego Trawlers, Inc.

Francisco Abrego
Si Se Puede, Inc.

Benjamin Lopez
Villa Del Golfo, Inc.

Benjamin Lopez
Monita, Inc.

Phillip Lara
Bay King

Julie Nguyen
Captain Magic

Kevin Drury
Commercial Fisherman

Hoang Dang
Thien Thanh

Benjamin Lopez
Five Lopez Bros, Inc.

Marcos Hernandez
Castellanos Corp.

Tho Le
Johnny Le Marine

Marcos Hernandez
Miro Trawlers, Inc.

Jose Guillen
Eugenia Trawlers, Inc.

Nam Van Nguyen
Capt Jimmy

Raul L. Garcia
Nora Trawlers, Inc.

Hiep Pham
Miss Victoria, LLC.

Arturo Chapa
Chapa Trawlers, Inc.

Andy Hai Huynh
Texas Gulf Seafood, Inc.

Arturo Chapa
Whiskey Joe, Inc.

Schaun Drury
Commercial Fisherman

Ricardo Aguilar
Aguilar Brothers, Inc.

Gage Vincent
Commercial Fisherman

Ricardo Aguilar
Aguilar Limón, Inc.

Ricard Aguilar
Aguilar Sheimp Co. Inc.

Edwin Thompson
Southeast Shrimp Producers

Angela Nguyen
Troy 2

Troy Le
Troy 2

Phin Ta
Young King

Tommy Pham
Captain Tommy

Dat Ha
AM Viet, LLC.

Lucy Pinell
Dragnet Seafood, LLC.

Herbert Brower
Miss Lynn

Luke Rawlings
F/V Lisa Ann, LLC.

Gig Decker
F/V McCrea, LLC.