

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

July 24, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write regarding your efforts to support producers and our country's agricultural economy during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many producers impacted by COVID-19 have benefited from the *Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Stability (CARES) Act*, which provided funding for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to purchase products from and provide direct aid to producers impacted by COVID-19. However, many shellfish producers, including clam and oyster harvesters and processors, have not received assistance from USDA. We respectfully request that USDA consider using funds appropriated by Congress to establish a short-term purchasing program for shellfish products, including farmed and wild-caught oyster and clam products, as part of the Agricultural Marketing Service's (AMS) Section 32 authority.

Delmarva and the Chesapeake Bay region's seafood industries generate billions of dollars in economic activity and support tens of thousands of jobs throughout the region. In particular, clam and oyster operations across Delmarva and throughout the Chesapeake Bay region are important to local economies and help support regional seafood supply chains. Nearly 70 percent of all seafood consumed in the United States is sold at restaurants and hospitality venues. As restaurants were forced to close and continue to adhere to restrictions decreasing service capacity, our local seafood industries, many of which are small businesses, have suffered extreme losses due to substantial reductions in demand.

The *CARES Act* provided the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) \$300 million to assist U.S. fishery participants affected by COVID-19. Of this funding, NOAA allocated approximately \$9.5 million to assist seafood industries in Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia. Although we appreciate this much-needed assistance, the amount provided will not satisfy the needs of eligible applicants in the region. The *CARES Act* also provided tens of billions of dollars for USDA to assist families and farmers in need through the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP), Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), and nutrition assistance programs. To date, none of this funding has been used to assist clam or oyster producers.

Market-ready shellfish can be packaged into shelf-stable products that provide valuable nutrition to the American public. The shellfish industry has been significantly impacted by the disruption

in normal supply chains and these products are ideally positioned to aid USDA's efforts to address food insecurity during this difficult time. We request that USDA consider establishing a short-term purchasing program for shellfish products, including farmed and wild-caught oyster and clam products, as part of AMS's Section 32 authority.

Thank you for your attention to this request. Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or would like additional information.

Sincerely,

/s/ Christopher A. Coons

Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

/s/ Thomas R. Carper

Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator

/s/ Mark R. Warner

Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

/s/ Tim Kaine

Tim Kaine
United States Senator

/s/ Benjamin L. Cardin

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/ Lisa Blunt Rochester

Lisa Blunt Rochester
Member of Congress

/s/ Elaine G. Luria

Elaine G. Luria
Member of Congress

/s/ Robert J. Wittman

Robert J. Wittman
Member of Congress

/s/ Steny H. Hoyer

Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress

/s/ Robert C. "Bobby" Scott

Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress

/s/ Andy Harris, M.D.

Andy Harris, M.D.
Member of Congress

/s/ John P. Sarbanes

John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress

/s/ C.A. Dutch Ruppertsberger

C.A. Dutch Ruppertsberger
Member of Congress

/s/ Anthony G. Brown

Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress