

**United States Senate**  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 1, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue,

We write today concerning the ongoing public health crisis caused by the spread of COVID-19 and the urgent need to support our nation's food production industries, including the shellfish aquaculture industry. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Stability Act (CARES Act; Pub. L. 116–136) provides appropriations for relief to agricultural producers who have suffered economic harm due to the novel coronavirus pandemic. In the Chesapeake Bay region, the seafood industry provides more than \$4.6 billion in economic impact and supports more than 30,000 jobs. The industry, including the shellfish aquaculture sector, has suffered significant economic harm due to supply chain disruptions. We request USDA provide support to the shellfish aquaculture industry by leveraging the \$16 billion in Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) funding and tools available through the Agricultural Marketing Services (AMS) Section 32 purchasing authority.

A total of \$16 billion has been appropriated and allocated through CFAP to directly support agricultural producers impacted by the coronavirus. This includes \$9.5 billion appropriated under Title I of Section B of the CARES Act and \$6.5 billion in Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) funds. USDA can include shellfish products in CFAP, and we strongly encourage the agency to allow aquaculture farmers to utilize this program.

Further, we request that USDA establish a short-term purchasing program for shellfish aquaculture products, including Chesapeake Bay oysters and clams, as part of AMS's Section 32 authority. Market-ready shellfish, including oysters and clams, can be packaged into shelf-stable products that provide valuable nutrition to the American public.

The shellfish aquaculture industry has been impacted significantly by the disruption in normal supply chains due to social distancing measures that shuttered many businesses essential to the marketing and sale of Chesapeake Bay shellfish aquaculture products. Nearly 70 percent of all seafood consumed in the United States is consumed at restaurants and hospitality venues. A survey completed March 23 - April 10, 2020 of coronavirus impacts to the aquaculture industry indicated that 84 percent of aquaculture businesses experienced sales losses associated with the virus. Further, 64 percent of operators expected their business to close by June 2020 without external intervention – a date fast approaching.<sup>1</sup>

Restrictions on restaurant operations are especially damaging to Chesapeake Bay oyster farmers, many of whom are small, family-owned businesses. As most sales and harvests of shellfish

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs\\_ext\\_vt\\_edu/AAEC/aaec-218/AAEC-218.pdf](https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/AAEC/aaec-218/AAEC-218.pdf)

products occur in the spring, the inability to offload products have impacted shellfish growers' ability to prepare operations for the next production season.

We request that USDA include shellfish aquaculture products, including Chesapeake Bay oysters and clams, in relief programs established by Congress. This includes CFAP and AMS Section 32 food purchasing authority. These healthy, consumption-ready products are ideally positioned to aid USDA's efforts to address food insecurity during this difficult time.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your response.

Signed,

/s/ Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator

/s/ Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator

/s/ Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator

/s/ Tim Kaine  
United States Senator