

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

July 6, 2020

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

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write to urge you to reverse the decision to prohibit shellfish aquaculture from being eligible for direct payments through the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Shellfish aquaculture is a \$30 million industry in our state and this decision puts the long-term survival of these farmers at risk.

The CARES Act allows shellfish aquaculture to be eligible for assistance through USDA. In addition, shellfish operations are already eligible for numerous other USDA programs and are working with local Farm Service Agencies. It is unfair to acknowledge shellfish as a crop that can receive assistance through some programs and exclude them from other assistance programs when there is no congressional directive to do so. Like other farmers, shellfish farms grow their crops from a seed, plant and harvest their crops, and use numerous farming practices to protect their crops.

While we understand the concern that shellfish farmers can receive funding through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), that amount is relatively small and must be spread between commercial fishing, recreational fishing, wholesalers, and aquaculture. The current aid available to Connecticut shellfish operations through NOAA is insufficient to cover current need. In addition, USDA could always take into consideration NOAA assistance when determining the amount of USDA funding any particular shellfish operator receives. In a survey from early April, 64 percent were at least uncertain they could survive the next three months without USDA assistance. In addition, 80 percent of companies had sales orders canceled for 2020¹. It is extremely difficult for operations to make up these lost sales because most shellfish operations sell to restaurants and cannot easily shift sales to grocery or direct to consumer markets. Simply put, most people don't buy raw oysters to consume within in their home in a way they would another fish or agricultural commodity. As restaurants remain closed – or open with limited capacity to comply with important public health guidelines – shellfish

¹ Virginia Agricultural Research and Extension Centers, "Impacts of COVID-19 on U.S. aquaculture, aquaponics, and allied businesses," Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Retrieved from https://www.ares.vaes.vt.edu/ares/virginia-seafood/research/Impacts_of_COVID19.html.

operations will be able to sell only a fraction of the product they typically would. This results in less revenue, layoffs, and financial hardship. Federal aid through the USDA is critical to supporting these farmers during this severe economic downturn.

According to a survey by Connecticut Sea Grant, Connecticut shellfish aquaculture has experienced a 93 percent loss in revenue due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We appreciate all that USDA does to help farmers in our states and across the country through this challenging time, but believe that additional changes to the CFAP program are necessary to fully meet the needs of all Connecticut farmers. Therefore, we urge you to make shellfish aquaculture eligible for CFAP aid.

Thank you for your expedited consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

/s/Christopher S. Murphy
Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senate

/s/Richard Blumenthal
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate

/s/Rosa L. DeLauro
Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress

/s/John B. Larson
John B. Larson
Member of Congress

/s/Joe Courtney
Joe Courtney
Member of Congress

/s/Jim Himes
Jim Himes
Member of Congress

/s/Jahana Hayes
Jahana Hayes
Member of Congress