

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 1, 2024

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 regarding the Farm Bill and the critical need to better support United States seafood producers and seafood products. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) administers countless programs that are vital to supporting our nation's food producers, and the U.S. food supply would benefit from improved consideration and inclusion of American seafood. As you draft the next Farm Bill, we ask you to include language that would establish an Office of Seafood Policy and Program Integration at the USDA Office of the Chief Economist, support seafood procurement across USDA nutrition programs, and extended eligibility for certain USDA grants and loans to U.S. seafood producers and businesses supporting this sector.

We represent seafood harvesters and processors active in numerous distinct fisheries around the Nation, including wild and farmed fish, shellfish, and seaweed products that are sustainably managed by federal, state, or Tribal entities. This industry provides remarkably diverse and healthy products for seafood markets at home and around the world, collectively generating more than \$150 billion in annual sales, supporting 1.1 million jobs, and contributing to coastal economies and cultural traditions.¹ Federal programs administered by the USDA present valuable opportunities to help American seafood producers, who face many of the same challenges as American farmers and ranchers. Like other food producers, the U.S. seafood sector has been chronically disadvantaged domestically and abroad due to challenges such as impacts from changing environmental conditions, inability to compete in markets, increasing costs, and supply chain vulnerabilities.

It is past time for the USDA to provide clear and consistent leadership for domestic seafood producers and commodities, and to promote healthy, nutritious seafood in American diets at consumption levels commensurate with the most recent research and recommendations. To this point, we have worked together to identify and collectively request three bi-partisan, national, multi-sectoral seafood-focused priorities for inclusion in the Farm Bill:

First, please include language that would establish an Office of Seafood Policy and Program Integration in the USDA Office of the Chief Economist. Such language can be found in § 5 of S. 2208, the National Seafood Supply Act of 2023. This section was written in recognition that the U.S. has, for too long, failed to think strategically about how to support seafood, both farmed and wild, as a priority food commodity and position U.S. seafood to be more competitive in domestic and global seafood markets. This office would also ensure agencies with roles in the seafood supply chain work together towards common goals, provide

¹ *Fisheries Economics of the United States, 2020 Report*, NOAA Fisheries (last visited December 5, 2023). <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/fisheries-economics-united-states-2020-report>

greater and more consistent integration of seafood in USDA’s national food security goals, and put seafood on par with federal support programs extended to every other major domestic food commodity. The USDA and the U.S. seafood industry would realize mutual, meaningful benefits from the establishment of such an Office and additional seafood expertise within the USDA.

Second, please include language that would increase the inclusion of seafood in USDA nutrition programs, including purchases from small and midsize seafood businesses along with large seafood businesses. One way this can be achieved is by adapting and applying language based on language enacted in the 2008 and 2014 Farm Bills to boost whole grain products and pulse crops in such programs. USDA programs should reflect the most current nutritional guidance, including the *2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (DGA) that describes the remarkable health benefits of seafood’s protein; omega-3 fatty acids; Vitamins A, B12, and D; and selenium, potassium, and other vital nutrients. It specifically recommends that Americans of all ages, from six months on, consume at least two to three servings of seafood each week, yet USDA data suggests that Americans are not meeting this mark.^{2,3} This is particularly true among low-income Americans, who consume even less seafood.⁴ Seafood intake in federally supported nutrition programs are currently well below those in many American diets and far from meeting the DGA recommendations. For example, a 2022 Government Accountability Office (GAO) study found that significant childhood health benefits could be gained if the USDA purchases more seafood for its National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs, in which seafood is currently only being delivered in strikingly small amounts (roughly three ounces of seafood per student per year).⁵ Targeted changes to federally supported nutrition programs would provide an opportunity to help bridge this seafood gap and support all Americans in accessing healthy, sustainable seafood while sourcing seafood products from a greater diversity of U.S. seafood businesses, particularly small businesses that have historically had difficulty participating in these programs. Congress should demand greater and more diverse purchasing and accessibility of seafood as a public health imperative.

Third, please include language allowing commercial fishermen, seafood processors, and other supporting businesses to gain access to USDA grant and loan programs, as well as Farm Credit System (FCS) services. Such language can be found in §§ 402 and 405 of S. 2354, § 7 of S. 2208, and H.R. 4940/S.1756. The Farm Bill presents a long overdue opportunity to address the economically destabilizing challenges in seafood supply chains and global markets, which are exacerbated by the lack of access to the same financial support programs offered to other domestic food producing sectors. Clarifying that the seafood industry is eligible for USDA financial support programs, including the Rural Development Meat and Poultry Processing Expansion Program and the Food Supply Chain Guaranteed Loan Program, would bring parity and increased stability to the seafood sector. American food producers – including seafood producers – simply must have access to these USDA programs to become more resilient and competitive. In addition, the FCS has the authority to lend to farming-related businesses. Providing FCS the authority to lend to fishing-related businesses will help ensure that fishing communities have the same access to support as our farmers, ranchers, and loggers.

In closing, we applaud your leadership in the upcoming Farm Bill legislation and thank you for your consideration of these national seafood priorities for inclusion. We look forward to working with you to pass a

² Advice about Eating Fish, U.S. Food and Drug Administration, (September 28, 2022). <https://www.fda.gov/food/consumers/advice-about-eating-fish#pattern>

³ Linda Kantor, *Americans’ Seafood Consumption Below Recommendations*, USDA Economic Research Service, (October 3, 2016). <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2016/october/americans-seafood-consumption-below-recommendations/>

⁴ David C. Love et al., *Affordability influences nutritional quality of seafood consumption among income and race/ethnicity groups in the United States*, American Society for Nutrition, (June 13, 2022). file:///C:/Users/AS82450/Downloads/noaa_55413_DS1.pdf

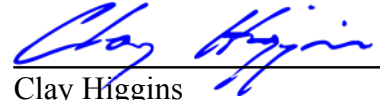
⁵ *NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM: USDA Could Enhance Assistance to States and Schools in Providing Seafood to Students*, Government Accountability Office, (November 2022). <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-23-105179.pdf>

comprehensive piece of legislation that will serve Americans, both as seafood producers and seafood consumers, in the ways they deserve.

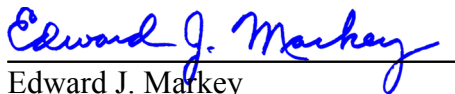
Sincerely,



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



Clay Higgins
Member of Congress



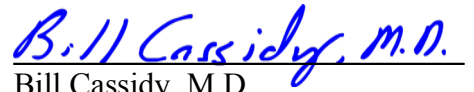
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Dan Sullivan
United States Senator



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator



Bill Cassidy, M.D.
United States Senator



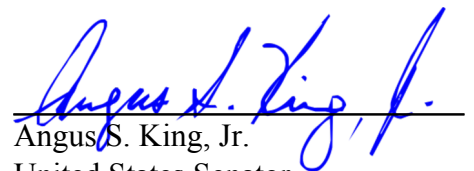
Mary Sattler Peltola
Member of Congress



Randy K. Weber, Sr.
Member of Congress



Marilyn Strickland
Member of Congress



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



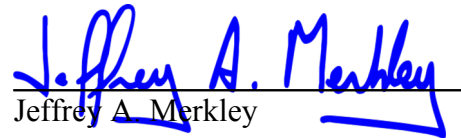
Kathy Castor
Member of Congress



Patty Murray
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Jack Reed
United States Senator



Rick Larsen
Member of Congress



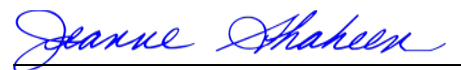
Seth Moulton
Member of Congress



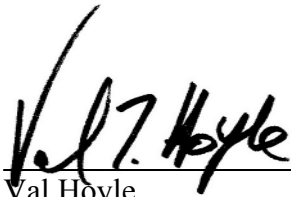
Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



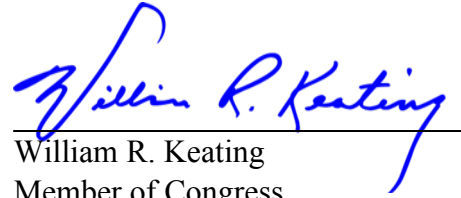
Troy E. Nehls
Member of Congress



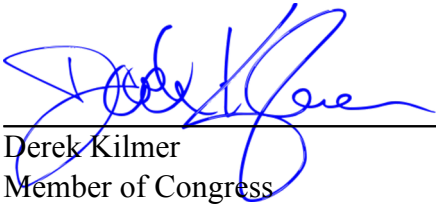
Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



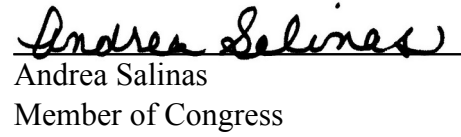
Val Hoyle
Member of Congress



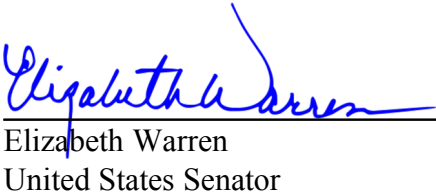
William R. Keating
Member of Congress



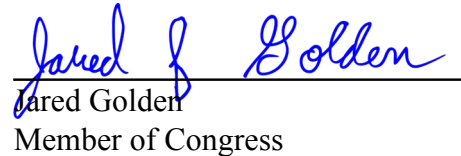
Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress



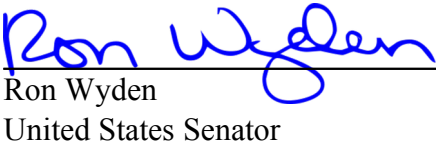
Andrea Salinas
Member of Congress



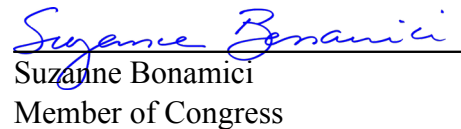
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



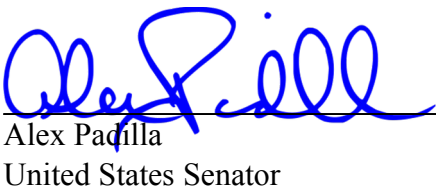
Jared Golden
Member of Congress



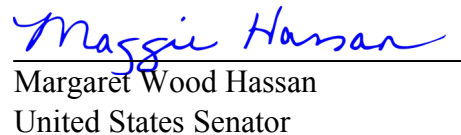
Ron Wyden
United States Senator




Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress



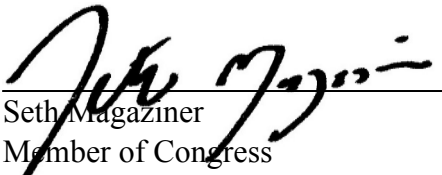
Alex Padilla
United States Senator



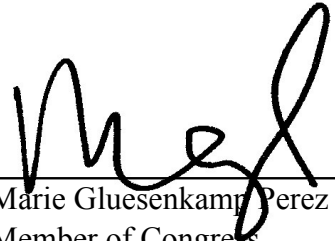
Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator




Suzan K. DelBene
Member of Congress



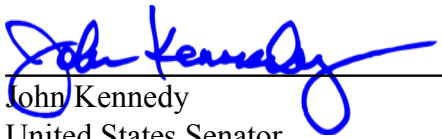
Seth Magaziner
Member of Congress




Marie Gluesenkamp Perez
Member of Congress



Vicente Gonzalez
Member of Congress



John Kennedy
United States Senator



Bill Posey
Member of Congress