

April 23, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We write to request that shellfish aquaculture farmers be eligible for direct relief payments from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) as part of the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP), funded through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (P.L. 116 -136).

Like other farmers, shellfish aquaculture farmers in our states have experienced a profound economic disruption as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Given that the East Coast Shellfish Growers Association estimates that 90% of oysters and 70% of clams are eaten in restaurants, their closure to dine-in patrons has caused the market for shellfish to evaporate.

A recent survey conducted by Virginia Tech and The Ohio State University found that over 98% of shellfish aquaculture farmers have lost sales due to the impact of coronavirus already, with anticipated additional losses throughout 2020. Many operations report that it is unlikely their businesses would survive longer than three months without additional financial assistance.

Shellfish aquaculture farms support the livelihoods of thousands of shellfish farmers year-round. As a result of vital efforts to prevent the spread of coronavirus, the future of these farms and this growing industry is in jeopardy. As you work to distribute relief funding provided under the CARES Act, we urge you to ensure shellfish farmers are eligible to receive direct relief payments from USDA.

Sincerely,

/s/ Jack Reed

Jack Reed
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

/s/ Sheldon Whitehouse
Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

/s/ Benjamin L. Cardin
Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

/s/ Chris Van Hollen
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

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

/s/ Christopher A. Coons
Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator

/s/ Edward J. Markey
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

/s/ Tim Kaine
Tim Kaine

/s/ Thomas R. Carper
Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator