

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 20, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Leader McConnell and Leader Schumer:

As you consider providing additional relief to agriculture producers as part of the next coronavirus relief legislation, we urge you to allow shellfish and seaweed growers to access relief payments for agriculture producers.

Shellfish farmers have been devastated by the coronavirus. 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. In the early days of the crisis, shellfish farmers witnessed a near total decline in sales due to restaurant closures. Even as some restaurants reopen, demand is predicted to remain well below historic levels.

Shellfish and seaweed farms should be eligible for future U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) relief payments because shellfish growers are farmers. Unlike fisherman who compete for a limited quota of wild fish, shellfish farmers buy seed, plant them, and harvest their products once they have grown. Furthermore, USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) traditionally plays a critical role in supporting the aquaculture industry. Shellfish farmers work with FSA to insure their crops through the USDA's Non-Insured Crop Disaster Assistance Program and many receive loans from FSA to support their operations. USDA also conducts the only nation-wide Census of the Aquaculture, which is the most comprehensive summary of the state of the industry.

While shellfish and seaweed farmers are able to receive support from fisheries relief funding distributed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, it has become clear that the funding provided to that program and the subsequent allocations leave most states unable to support both their aquaculture industry and traditional fisheries. USDA should take the lead role in supporting the aquaculture industry since the fate of the industry will impact USDA directly through loan defaults.

Thank you for your attention to this important request to ensure that our shellfish and seaweed farmers have access to the resources they need during this challenging time.

Sincerely,

/s/ Jack Reed

Jack Reed
United States Senator

/s/ Bill Cassidy, MD

Bill Cassidy, MD
United States Senator

/s/ Jeffrey A. Merkley

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States

/s/ Susan M. Collins

Susan M. Collins
United States Senator

/s/ Elizabeth Warren

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

/s/ Lindsey O. Graham

Lindsey O. Graham
United States Senator

/s/ Christopher S. Murphy

Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator

/s/ Sheldon Whitehouse

Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator

/s/ Mark R. Warner

Mark R. Warner
United States Senator

/s/ Richard Blumenthal

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

/s/ Tim Kaine

Tim Kaine
United States Senator

/s/ Margaret Wood Hassan

Margaret Wood Hassan
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 A. Coons

Christopher A. Coons

/s/ Angus S. King, Jr.

Angus S. King Jr.

/s/ Edward J. Markey

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

/s/ Thomas R. Carper

Thomas R. Carper
United States Senator

CC: The Honorable Richard Shelby
The Honorable Patrick Leahy
The Honorable Pat Roberts
The Honorable Debbie Stabenow