

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

April 27, 2020

Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue,

We write to confirm aquaculture farmers' eligibility for direct relief from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP). The work that the USDA is doing to assist farmers across the country during this uncertain time is absolutely critical, and we urge the USDA to ensure relief is being made available to all farmers, including those who raise seafood.

Similar to other farmers across the country, aquaculture farmers in the state of Maine have suffered greatly due to COVID-19. Maine's aquaculture operations cultivate a range of seafood products, from eastern oysters and blue mussels to seaweed and scallops. These farms rely heavily on the restaurant industry to keep their businesses afloat. For example, the East Coast Shellfish Growers Association estimates that 90 percent of oysters – sales of which brought in \$11 million for Maine farmers last year – are eaten in restaurants. With the closure of food service establishments across the country due to mandated public health measures, Maine aquaculture farmers are in dire need of assistance.

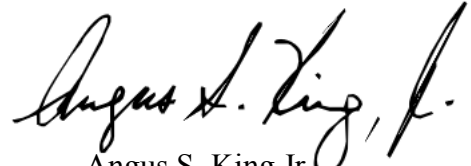
A recent survey of more than 500 U.S. aquaculture companies conducted by the Virginia Tech and Ohio State University Extension Programs revealed some alarming impacts already being felt by this sector: 90 percent of respondents indicated that their farm or business had been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic; 84 percent reported that they had experienced lost sales due to the pandemic; 80 percent reported have had orders and/or contracts cancelled; 59 percent have or will soon have to lay off employees; and only 34 percent expect they can survive three months without external intervention.

Maine's aquaculture industry has undergone significant growth and diversification in recent years, creating new jobs and economic opportunities in our state. We are committed to ensuring that our state's growing industry remains stable throughout this unanticipated downturn. As the Department works to distribute CFAP funding, we urge you to ensure aquaculture farmers are among those eligible to receive much needed direct relief from USDA.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



Angus S. King Jr.
United States Senator



Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress



Jared Golden
Member of Congress