

April 10, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We are writing to request that you assist farm-raised fish producers and processors with the funds provided in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Stabilization (CARES) Act.

All aspects of the domestic aquaculture industry have been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Approximately 60 percent of catfish processor sales go to foodservice dining establishments. Foodservice sales are down more than 65 percent across all seafood sectors because of the COVID-19 outbreak. Fish inventories continue to build, which is creating significant cash-flow challenges for processors and depressed prices for producers.

Catfish growers alone had sales of \$379 million in 2019. As a whole, the industry supports thousands of jobs across the southeastern United States and serves a critical function in supplying our local food systems, restaurants, and schools. As you know, the CARES Act provides \$9.5 billion to support agricultural producers harmed by the coronavirus, including livestock producers and those who supply local food systems, restaurants, and schools. Aquaculture producers fit this description. The Act also provides \$14 billion in replenishment of the Commodity Credit Corporation's (CCC) borrowing authority, which grants you broad authority to support American agriculture.

As the Department moves forward in determining how it will allocate resources to support injured sectors of the agriculture industry, we respectfully request that you consider providing grants directly to states, as has been done in the past, to assist aquaculture producers. We also request that you utilize your authority under Section 32 of the Act of August 24, 1935, to purchase excess inventory at processing establishments to encourage the domestic consumption of farm-raised fish products while stabilizing market prices. This much-needed support is essential to the overall viability of the industry.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any questions.

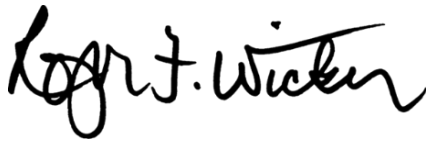
Sincerely,



CINDY HYDE-SMITH
United States Senator



JOHN BOOZMAN
United States Senator



ROGER F. WICKER
United States Senator



TOM COTTON
United States Senator