

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 30, 2026

The Honorable Brooke Rollins  
Secretary  
United States Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Rollins,

We write to support the request made by the U.S. farm-raised catfish industry for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to purchase surplus catfish products through the USDA Agriculture Marketing Service Section 32 Program. Surplus purchases will assist catfish farmers and the thousands of jobs dependent upon this industry throughout the Southeast.

The U.S. farm-raised catfish industry is extremely important to the states we represent. Nearly \$2 billion in economic output, including more than 9,100 jobs, is directly or indirectly attributable to the production of U.S. farm-raised catfish. Farms and processing facilities in our states are typically among the largest employers in the economically depressed counties.

The industry has been caught in a severe inflationary squeeze, particularly from 2023 to the present, fundamentally altering its production economics. This pressure has consistently driven the cost of producing U.S. farm-raised catfish above the prices farmers receive for their fish, leading to three continuous years of negative financial returns.

The industry's rising costs are dominated by the increasing expenses of key inputs, especially feed and energy, which represent the backbone of catfish farming operations.

Feed costs remain high and account for 43 percent of catfish production expenses. While the most recent data indicates some reduction in pricing, feed costs remain elevated above the historical normal range of \$350–\$375 per ton, especially for the 32 percent protein diet. As soybean meal is the major ingredient in U.S. catfish feed, its price volatility and high cost directly translate to increased production expenses.

U.S. catfish farmers have adopted modern, intensive pond production methods and improved energy efficiency per acre, but fuel and electricity costs — which account for 10 percent of production expenses — remain a significant burden. Energy-intensive processes like pond aeration are essential to maintaining healthy fish populations, and producers have limited ability to absorb volatility in fuel and electricity markets.

Together, these cost pressures have pushed the U.S. farm-raised catfish industry into a crisis of economic sustainability, with the cost of production far surpassing the price of fish at the dock — resulting in three consecutive years of negative margins for producers.

The industry's USDA Section 32 purchase request would provide needed relief by providing essential cash flow to farmers to help alleviate the severe financial strain imposed by inflationary pressures. USDA purchases of catfish would provide immediate relief and enable 2026 fish crops to be harvested and processed, while also supporting rural communities and providing nutritious, American-grown product to families, children, and those in need.

We encourage you to consider all the factors facing the U.S. farm-raised catfish industry and approve this request. We also look forward to our continued partnership in supporting agriculture and our nation's rural communities.

Sincerely,



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Cindy Hyde-Smith  
United States Senator



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Katie Boyd Britt  
United States Senator



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Roger F. Wicker  
United States Senator



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Tommy Tuberville  
United States Senator



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Tom Cotton  
United States Senator

CC: The Honorable Erin Morris, Administrator, Agricultural Marketing Service