

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

April 28, 2022

Secretary Thomas Vilsack
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-0110

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

Commercial fishing and seafood processing on the West Coast is a significant contributor to U.S. seafood production and also a key part of our country's agricultural and food production system as a whole. Perhaps more importantly, the industries are the economic and community backbone of the small ports and vibrant rural towns that dot our Pacific shorelines.

On average, commercial fishermen on the West Coast deliver more than \$500 million in ex-vessel value per annum, accounting for 13% of the value of total U.S. seafood production. A quarter of all American seafood processing and wholesale jobs are located in Washington, Oregon, and California, representing the largest employment opportunity among all seafood-producing regions in the U.S. The domestic seafood sector is also a critically important component of America's food production system, supporting more than 1.2 million jobs, generating more than \$144 billion in sales impacts, and contributing more than \$61 billion to the nation's gross domestic product.

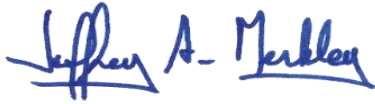
As with rural economies everywhere, but perhaps most acutely in small coastal communities, COVID-19 had a devastating impact and a primary driver of that impact was the effect on the fishing and processing industry. According to a report issued by NOAA Fisheries in December 2021, ex-vessel revenue fell by 27% from 2019-2020 and seafood dealers and processors sustained a decline in value added of \$598 million (or 13.47%) as well. The West Coast saw a larger decline in revenue from commercial fishing landings than all regions as a whole, with a dip of 24% in 2020 as compared to a five year baseline (2015-2019). NOAA found that a significant part of the lost value was due to restaurant closures and reduced export.

Last year under your leadership, USDA purchased just over \$16 million in West Coast seafood products, providing a significant boost for the industry and our coastal communities. We are very thankful for that purchase but note that other regions have received significantly more support during the pandemic. USDA's procurement programs are critical for ensuring that our food production systems remain robust, essential workers remain employed, supply chains keep operating, and America's nutritional needs are met. We thus request that you include appropriate Pacific Northwest and West Coast seafood products that are currently being produced in large volumes, are easily accessible, and easily transportable for immediate distribution to food assistance programs.

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Thank you very much for USDA's assistance in assisting our region's coastal economies.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
U.S. Senator



Ron Wyden
U.S. Senator



Maria Cantwell
U.S. Senator



Patty Murray
U.S. Senator



Alex Padilla
U.S. Senator



Peter DeFazio
U.S. Representative



Kurt Schrader
U.S. Representative



Suzanne Bonamici
U.S. Representative



Earl Blumenauer
U.S. Representative



Jared Huffman
U.S. Representative



Derek Kilmer
U.S. Representative