

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1806

June 17, 2022

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

Domestic, wild caught shrimp are a healthy and sustainable source of protein for Americans. Unlike imported shrimp, we can be sure that our American shrimp is caught sustainably, is free of antibiotics and other harmful chemicals, and supports American workers rather than foreign companies using slave and forced labor. Shrimp is a rich source of protein, supplying over twenty grams in just a three-ounce serving. It is also a strong source of omega-3 fatty acids and other nutrients that support brain health. Seafood is a way of life in the Gulf of Mexico, and our shrimpers produce the best shrimp in the country. In 2020 and 2021, USDA purchased over 9 million pounds of domestic shrimp and distributed it to 49 different states and territories. It is imperative that USDA continue this domestic shrimp purchase initiative in 2022.

In recent years, our domestic shrimpers have been undercut by illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing that occurs overseas. Foreign shrimpers are scorning human rights and fishing laws to produce more shrimp—at a lower cost—than our honest shrimping families. They are then dumping these shrimp into our markets and competing against domestic shrimp. This is further exacerbated with worker shortages, supply chain issues on necessities as simple as ice, and unchecked inflation pushing gas prices to unprecedented highs. Our local producers are struggling with demand from distributors and struggling to keep up with foreign prices.

Hurricanes and other major storms have been hard on our shrimpers over the last handful of years. The grounds that our shrimpers are used to fishing have been disrupted, their equipment and homes damaged, and they have lost out on time on the water. Landings in 2021 were nearly forty percent lower than the twenty-one-year average—and this trend continued into December—with the lowest reported shrimp landings for the month since at least the year 2000.¹ Between recent natural disasters and foreign industry undercutting our strained domestic producers, our shrimpers are landing fewer shrimp and making less than they could on each one while the American consumer loses out on this sustainable and nutritious source of protein.


Section 32 of the Agricultural Adjustment Act authorizes USDA to purchase our domestic shrimp and donate it to schools and low-income or disaster relief groups. These shrimp can give everyday students and families a healthy food source that boosts brain function. With disaster relief, planning ahead is always

¹ <https://www.shrimpalliance.com/noaas-preliminary-reporting-shows-shrimp-landings-in-the-gulf-of-mexico-in-2021-higher-than-2020-but-data-also-appear-to-be-substantially-understated/>

better than recovering, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) forecasts yet another above average hurricane season in 2022.² If NOAA's forecast is correct, Gulf shrimp can support our own citizens—and any other states that may be affected by the coming storms—if USDA continues this purchase initiative.

As the Department considers where to direct its relief funds, we respectfully ask that you consider our Gulf shrimp for Section 32 purchases, or any and all other possible funding sources within your authority. I stand ready to work with your Department however I can to secure this relief for our industry.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Garret Graves', with a stylized, sweeping flourish at the end.

Garret Graves
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jerry L. Carl', with a large, circular flourish at the beginning.

Jerry L. Carl
Member of Congress

² <https://www.noaa.gov/news-release/noaa-predicts-above-normal-2022-atlantic-hurricane-season>