



PRESS RELEASE

May 13, 2021

For more information, contact:

Lori Steele, West Coast Seafood Processors Association: 503-227-5076, lori.wcseafood@gmail.com

WCSPA Welcomes New USDA Seafood Purchases

Today, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced its plans to purchase domestic seafood products, including up to \$17 million for three products specifically from the West Coast, for food assistance programs. The timing couldn't be better as fishermen and processors are still coping with COVID-19 pandemic disruptions to seafood markets and global supply chains. The USDA announcement also calls for buying other domestic commodities.

Of the \$159.4 million in funding for purchasing domestic products, up to \$4 million can be used to purchase Pacific rockfish filets; \$4 million for Pacific pink shrimp and \$9 million for Pacific hake (whiting). Other seafood items include pollock and salmon from Alaska and shrimp from the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic.

"COVID-19 upended our domestic and global markets," West Coast Seafood Processors Association Executive Director Lori Steele said. "The USDA purchases will help supplement and stabilize our existing markets, allowing us to keep American fishing and processing families working through difficult times. The USDA and public get healthy, nutritious seafood from sustainable stocks. It truly is a win-win."

Pink shrimp, especially, is considered a good option for USDA food assistance programs. The small, coldwater shrimp common to the West Coast are flavorful and available year-round as individually quick-frozen products. They can complement salads; be formed into patties, like a burger; used to enhance breakfast dishes; or featured on their own, like a shrimp cocktail, for a healthy snack.

"With significant inventory in stock and more than 18 million pounds of potential shrimp purchases coming up this season, pink shrimp could reach a number of food service outlets through USDA purchases," Steele said.

Secretary Vilsack said this Section 32 purchase is largest single seafood purchase in USDA history and should help food producers with existing inventory and ongoing harvests. It's not just about getting the current inventory out of the freezer, though.

"The entire West Coast fishing and seafood industry benefits from USDA purchases and from building long-term relationships with the Agency," Steele added. "These kinds of purchase programs offer our industry an 'overflow valve' for some of our seafood products as well as some economic stability when other markets are unstable or unavailable."

Steele hopes to build on this initial purchase and expand future purchases to other seafood items.

"Getting a foot in the door with the USDA for the purchase of West Coast seafood products is first step to building a long-term relationship with the USDA," she said. "This is just the beginning of the West Coast seafood industry's relationship with the USDA and it's very exciting! We have a number of products that are ideal for these markets, and we are excited about working with the USDA to continue to bring a greater diversity of high-quality seafood to their programs."

In a March 2021 letter to the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, the WCSPA, Midwater Trawlers Cooperative, Oregon Trawl Commission and Fishermen's Marketing Association asked the AMS to specify Pacific pink shrimp, Pacific rockfish and Pacific hake (whiting) as USDA Section 32 "bonus buys." Ten West Coast lawmakers, including Sens. Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden, D-Ore.; Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash.; Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Calif.; Reps. Kurt Schrader, Peter DeFazio, Suzanne Bonamici, and Earl Blumenauer, D-Ore.; Rep. Jared Huffman, D-Calif.; and Rep. Derek Kilmer, D-Wash., supported the seafood industry in a letter to Secretary Vilsack in early April. During the past few months, processors worked with AMS staff to become certified vendors for specific commodities -- all with a goal of making seafood products available to the USDA and assistance programs.

"We thank Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and our West Coast Congressional delegation for recognizing our plight, acknowledging our determination and finding value in our products for food assistance programs," Steele said. "These seafood products are delicious, healthy and nutritious -- perfect for food assistance programs. In turn, the purchases will help keep our coastal communities working."

About WCSPA

The West Coast Seafood Processors Association represents small and large processors involved in the processing of U.S.-caught seafood in Washington, Oregon and California. In addition, some companies engage in harvesting, distribution, transportation, retail sales, aquaculture and international trade. Collectively, WCSPA members process the majority of Dungeness crab, Pacific pink shrimp, groundfish (flatfish and rockfish) and Pacific hake (whiting) landed on the West Coast.

###

Links to More Information:

COVID-19 Impacts to Processors:

<https://www.wcspa.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Covid-Impacts.pdf>

<https://www.wcspa.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/WCSPA-COVID-19.pdf>

Congressional delegation letter to USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack:

<https://www.merkley.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/21.04.12%20Letter%20to%20USDA%20re%20West%20Coast%20Seafood%20Purchasing.pdf>