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Fishing and Farming Groups Urge Caution and Call for Transparency and Engagement Around New USDA Office of Seafood

The groups welcome inclusion of fishing communities but warn the new office could prioritize corporate interests unless there's meaningful input from small- and mid-scale producers.

Washington, DC — The North American Marine Alliance (NAMA) and the National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC) today released a joint statement in response to the launch of the USDA Office of Seafood, welcoming the inclusion of fishing communities while raising concerns about the office's direction and potential to favor industrial aquaculture and corporate interests.

The statement reads:

For decades, the [North American Marine Alliance](#) (NAMA) has worked tirelessly to prioritize the needs and vision of fishing communities. Alongside family farmers, they are the foundation of a healthy food system and should be welcomed alongside farmers in programs and funding opportunities that bolster community-driven food producers. In 2008, NAMA joined the [National Family Farm Coalition](#) (NFFC) to build a bridge between our land and sea food systems.

Although we think it's important that government institutions like USDA recognize the essential role of fishing communities, we have serious concerns about the role and direction of the [Office of Seafood](#). We are not alone. Many in our network of fishing and farming communities have reached out to us with their apprehensions.

Representing family farmers across the United States, NFFC members have [felt firsthand](#) the repeated shortcomings of USDA's policies and programs. While USDA claims to support family farmers, often its policies have ended up helping financially powerful multinational corporations and agribusinesses. This ranges from [subsidies and grading systems](#) that favor the largest farming operations, to decades of

discrimination, and most recently, cancelling financial benefits to [farmers](#) and [farm groups](#) across the country.

If left unchecked, a similar dynamic could unfold where big-moneyed factory fishing or aquaculture interests could reroute valuable resources for their own ends, *instead* of providing support for struggling fishing families working to build sustainable livelihoods in their respective communities.

We are particularly concerned about the role of [corporations](#), including agribusinesses, interested in replicating the land-based industrial agriculture model by establishing factory fish farms on land and at sea. Referring to fishermen as “farmers of the sea” without addressing issues of scale, ownership, and ecological responsibility raises concerns that seafood systems are being framed through a large-scale, production-focused agribusiness lens,”

Based on prior talks between NOAA and USDA, we worry that the new office could just serve as an interagency alignment tool to bolster [feedlot-style industrial fish farming](#). This practice degrades marine ecosystems and hurts wild fisheries, and by extension commercial fishing families. It also raises concerns for soybean and corn farmers whose crops may get funneled into fish feed systems, while they continue to be [underpaid](#) for their crops due to existing USDA policies.

NAMA and NFFC urge USDA to ensure there is an honest participatory process to develop the mission, policies, and programs of the Office of Seafood by engaging fishing and farming communities. We believe that is the only way this new office’s purpose and objectives will meet the true needs of America’s fishermen and farmers and the communities they feed.

As organizations representing small and mid-scale food producers across North America, NAMA and NFFC members and allies are eager to work with USDA to help steer the office toward a positive path forward — one that honors their hard work in providing nutritious food to communities across this land.

If USDA follows its pattern of favoring agribusiness over family farming communities, there is no guarantee that the agency will help fishing communities achieve economic parity. With the right direction, and with comprehensive input from the nation’s fishing communities, the Office of Seafood has the potential to create and manage programs that serve as a lifeline to fishing communities — helping them weather future economic shocks and environmental fluctuations.

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