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2026 Legislative Priorities

Over 2,300 shellfish farms on the East and Gulf Coasts provide thousands of jobs in rural coastal communities, producing over $195 million of sustainable, nutritious shellfish. Unfortunately, oyster production has slowed after decades of strong growth. Restoring that growth will require significant investment in marketing and processing capacity. Expanding domestic production has the potential to reduce the $24 billion seafood trade deficit while creating jobs.

Aquaculture Research Funding – NOAA

Federal shellfish aquaculture research is funded through a patchwork of USDA and NOAA programs that have suffered deep cuts. Small-scale shellfish farmers cannot self-fund critical research in shellfish disease and food safety. NOAA Fisheries spends less than 2.2% of its annual budget on aquaculture research, even though 90% of the seafood consumed in the U.S. is imported, and half of that is farmed overseas. Pressing challenges from the impacts of shellfish diseases and harmful algal blooms demand creative solutions and investments in research.

- **Support funding for Sea Grant $80M FY2026.**
- **Support the Sea Grant Marine Aquaculture Competition ($14M FY2026).**
- **Increase NMFS Aquaculture funding to $25M.**

Please Support Destruction of Hazardous Imports Act H.R.2715, S.3213

This would allow the FDA to destroy inspected seafood imports found to contain hazardous and deleterious substances, rather than allowing them to be re-exported to other countries (often to be returned to U.S. ports). Less than 2% of seafood imports are currently inspected.

- Inspectors should be authorized to destroy mislabeled products that incorrectly describe the contents of the container or the country of origin. The FDA supports this expanded authority.
- Tons of shellfish products are entering the U.S. from nations that do not control for harmful-algal-bloom toxins or contaminants such as heavy metals or PFAS. These toxins and contaminants cannot be destroyed by cooking. They threaten consumers' health and destroy markets for American products.

Shellfish Genetics Research – USDA ARS & NOAA

Selective breeding is a proven effective means of enhancing disease resistance and increasing survival. Hard-clam farmers produce over $62 million of sustainably farmed clams in almost every East Coast state, providing hundreds of jobs in rural coastal communities. A collaboration between NOAA and USDA ARS is developing regionally adapted, disease-resistant oyster lines. We are seeking an additional $1.3 million to build a similar selective breeding program for hard clams. Such stocks can be selected to grow faster, resist diseases and tolerate heat waves and low salinity. This would improve the profitability of hundreds of shellfish farms along the entire East Coast.

Appropriate $1.3M to USDA ARS to support the selective breeding of shellfish for disease-resistant lines and enhanced food security.

Suggested report language: *East Coast Shellfish Breeding and Genetics -*
The Committee recognizes the economic importance of shellfish aquaculture for rural coastal communities on the East Coast and the value of disease-resistant genetic stocks that can tolerate changing conditions and emerging disease threats. The Committee provides $1.3 million to the ARS National Cold-Water Marine Aquaculture Center to advance genetic and physiological research for the development of hard-clam stocks that are regionally adapted to the wide variety of conditions throughout the range of the entire East Coast and to transfer technology and improved stocks to industry.

Expand Quotas for Seasonal H-2B and H-2A workers

Expanded H-2B and H-2A quotas would allow more farmers to access needed non-immigrant temporary labor. Our growers and processors often find that quotas for these workers are snapped up by seasonal hotels and restaurants before our seasons get going, meaning we lose access to this valuable pool of hard-working folks who are employed for a limited period and return annually to their country of origin.

Working Waterfront Access – Critical Infrastructure Need

Waterfront access for shellfish farmers has been shrinking for decades and is approaching a critical tipping point. Commercial waterfront is being repurposed for condominiums, while marinas are pushing out commercial fishermen and shellfish farmers in favor of yacht owners. After a massive increase in recreational boating sparked by COVID-19, public boat ramps have been overwhelmed with recreational boaters. If shellfish farmers cannot access the water and land their crops, they cannot have a farm.

- **Support Keep America's Waterfronts Working Act H.R.1808 (Rep. Pingree), to establish a grant program and loan fund to preserve and expand access for water-dependent businesses, authorize $50 million each for the loan and grant programs, and organize a Working Waterfronts Task Force at the Department of Commerce.**
- **Direct the Department of Commerce to support the Blue Economy by making critical investments in coastal working-waterfront access.**

Please Support H.R.644 Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Research and Control Amendments Act of 2025 (S.93 passed in the Senate). H.R.644 will revise and improve the effectiveness of this critical research effort to improve forecasting, modeling, and reporting of harmful algal blooms and hypoxia.

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The Destruction of Hazardous Imports Act

The FDA Needs Authority to Destroy Dangerous Imports

Background

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) estimates that the U.S. imports roughly 94% of the seafood that Americans consume annually.

The FDA consistently reports that foreign exporters ship contaminated, illegal, or fraudulently labeled seafood to the United States. When the FDA interdicts these products and refuses admission, their data indicate that the products are often repackaged and reshipped to another port of entry, a practice commonly referred to as "port shopping."

State shellfish control authorities are seeing illegal Chinese shellfish products in the marketplace labeled as being from other countries, described as fish, or even office equipment. Without the authority to destroy these products, studies show they are likely to be repacked and reshipped to America unless we fix this problem. This is a public health threat that damages our markets and the reputation of seafood.

Legislative Solution

The bipartisan ***Destruction of Hazardous Imports Act*** **(H.R. 2715; S. 3213)** would authorize FDA to destroy any FDA-regulated product, including seafood, that presents significant public health concerns.

This legislation:

- Closes a loophole by eliminating the option to re-export hazardous products.
- Strengthens the FDA's oversight authority over Chinese-origin goods.
- Will act as a significant deterrent to unscrupulous exporters.

Beyond the broad support for this legislation by U.S. commercial seafood producers, the FDA included a request for this authority in the agency's legislative proposals for fiscal year 2026, stating that "this new authority would prevent re-importation of refused products and would deter importers from seeking to import products they know or have reason to believe would pose a significant public health risk and could be ordered destroyed."