



New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association
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Formal Statement from Dustin Delano, NEFSA, Regarding the Saltonstall-Kennedy Program and the America First Seafood Strategy

Chairman Bruce Westerman and Members of the Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife, and Fisheries,

The New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association (NEFSA) appreciates the opportunity to provide input on the role of the Saltonstall-Kennedy (S-K) Grant Program in supporting the President's Executive Order, "Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness." As directed, this order tasks the Secretary of Commerce, in coordination with the Secretary of Agriculture, to develop and implement an America First Seafood Strategy to promote the production, marketing, sale, and export of United States fishery and aquaculture products, and to strengthen domestic processing capacity.

NEFSA believes the Saltonstall-Kennedy Program is uniquely positioned to advance these objectives, provided that certain strategic adjustments are made to more fully align the program with industry needs and the realities of the domestic seafood marketplace.

1. Enhanced Industry Engagement in Funding Prioritization

NEFSA strongly supports the inclusion of direct fishing industry representation in setting funding priorities for the S-K Program. Too often, funding decisions have been shaped without sufficient input from those actively engaged in harvesting, processing, and marketing U.S. seafood. By establishing structured, recurring opportunities for fishermen, processors, and seafood business leaders to participate in priority-setting, the S-K Program can ensure its investments address the most pressing challenges and opportunities confronting the industry.

2. Strategic Emphasis on Domestic Market Development

A core pillar of the America First Seafood Strategy must be the expansion of domestic consumption of U.S. seafood products. The S-K Program should allocate a significant portion of its resources to initiatives that:

- Promote consumer awareness of the nutritional, environmental, and economic benefits of domestic seafood;
- Develop innovative marketing campaigns to elevate demand for underutilized species and regionally distinctive seafood products;
- Support product development that responds to evolving consumer preferences for convenience, sustainability, and traceability; and
- Facilitate partnerships with food service, retail, and institutional buyers to expand domestic seafood offerings.

3. Investment in Domestic Processing Capacity and Infrastructure

To reduce reliance on foreign processing and strengthen domestic supply chain resilience, the S-K Program should prioritize projects that:

- Modernize domestic seafood processing facilities through technology adoption and capital investment;
- Support workforce development and training programs to build technical skills in seafood processing and value-added production;
- Assist small and medium enterprises in overcoming logistical, regulatory, and capital barriers to growth; and
- Encourage innovation in packaging, cold storage, and distribution that can extend product shelf-life and expand market reach.

4. Support for Export Expansion and Global Competitiveness

While enhancing domestic consumption is critical, international markets also offer significant growth potential for U.S. seafood products. The S-K Program should work in collaboration with trade agencies to:

- Assist businesses in navigating export certification and regulatory requirements;
- Develop market intelligence and branding initiatives to promote U.S. seafood abroad; and
- Support participation in international trade shows, trade missions, and partnership development.

5. Simplification of the Grant Process to Broaden Participation

Finally, NEFSA recommends that the S-K Program simplify its application and reporting requirements to facilitate broader participation, particularly from small businesses, individual harvesters, and community-based organizations. Technical assistance should be made readily available to help applicants navigate the federal grant process.

In conclusion, the Saltonstall-Kennedy Program has the potential to serve as a central tool in realizing the objectives of the America First Seafood Strategy. By incorporating industry leadership, focusing on domestic demand stimulation, investing in processing infrastructure, supporting export growth, and improving program accessibility, the S-K Program can meaningfully advance the competitiveness, resilience, and sustainability of the U.S. seafood sector.

Thank you,

Dustin W. Delano
Chief Operating Officer
New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association