

American Seafood Competitiveness Act of 2026 S. 4236

NATIONAL
Aquaculture
ASSOCIATION

Keep USDA for Farmers

Wild caught fish are not a crop, and a fishing vessel is not a farm. S. 4236 stretches USDA's farm loan, grant and Farm Credit programs to cover an entirely different economic activity. These programs were designed and funded for farming, the cultivation and raising of food, not for fishing, the extraction of a public, wild resource.

Aquaculture and wild-capture fishing are not the same industry

Farmers, including aquaculture farmers, produce. Fishermen extract.

Farmers grow a renewable crop, that they own throughout the entire process. A commercial fishermen harvests a public trust resource they don't own, don't cultivate, and can't replenish through labor or capital investment. USDA's entire loan and risk model is built around the reality of cultivation, not extraction.

Assistance for wild fisheries already exists

Commercial fishing already has a wide range of support systems to enable them access the same benefits farmers have, but specifically designed for their specific challenges and dynamics. NOAA's Fisheries Finance Program exists to provide those services along with a wide range of state based programs. Duplicating these efforts within USDA doesn't create new capital for wild fisheries, but will overall decrease the amount of capital accessible to all farmers.

What S. 4236 does do?

Amends the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act to let commercial fishing and fish-processing businesses access:

- USDA direct and guaranteed farm ownership and operating loans
- USDA Local Agricultural Market Program Funds, with waived matching-fund requirements
- Farm Credit System lending, expanded to any business that supports fishing operations

All of these programs draw from a finite pool of appropriated dollars and limited lending capacity intended and built for America's farms. Every dollar or loan that goes to commercial fisheries is one that is not available to a farmer.



3,400+

U.S. aquaculture
farms

\$1.908B

U.S. aquaculture
annual total sales

\$4B

U.S. aquaculture
annual economic
contribution

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How does this impact aquaculture?

- **Dilutes USDA's mission**
 - USDA programs are already under immense pressure from farmers. Adding an entirely new, non-agricultural user base, with different risk and collateral profiles loan officers aren't trained on or have expertise on, strains an already strained system. Slowing down service for the farmers it was designed for.
- **Does not solve underlying issues**
 - NOAA and regional fishery management councils are equipped to address challenges facing commercial fisheries. Routing those needs through USDA doesn't solve underlying issues within fisheries, instead it borrows resources from agriculture to fill gaps that fisheries specific policy should close.
- **Precedent matters**
 - Once "farmer" is legally redefined to include extraction based sectors, the door is open to further redefinition of USDA's mandate, and could lead to future pushes to expand access to USDA resources to non-agricultural sectors.



Keep USDA programs focused on farmers

The NAA urges you to take a close look at whether folding an extraction-based industry into farm support infrastructure is the right vehicle for helping American seafood producers.

Aquaculture producers rely on USDA support and programs, and dilution of those programs will hurt aquaculture producers who are also critical to American seafood competitiveness.

Strengthening U.S. seafood production is a worthy goal, and aquaculture producers support our colleagues in the commercial fishing sector. We firmly believe that commercial fisheries deserve their own dedicated tools to address their challenges, through the agencies with the expertise and knowledge to support wild fisheries. Forcing the USDA to take on fisheries issues will not alleviate these challenges, and instead will dilute limited agency resources, put significant strain on staff who are untrained on wild fisheries, and ultimately reduce the amount of resources available to all farmers.

With the seafood trade deficit at \$20 billion it is more important than ever that we support aquaculture production in the United States, and ensure that aquaculture has the support systems it needs to grow and keep the United States globally competitive.