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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6300

MATT GALLIVAN, MAJORITY STAFF DIRECTOR
WARREN GUNNELS, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

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May 27, 2026

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

Chris Ninnes
Chief Executive Officer
Aquaculture Stewardship Council
Maliebaan 50-B
3581 CS Utrecht
The Netherlands

Dear Mr. Ninnes,

Ensuring that American families have access to safe, quality food is essential to empower consumers to live healthier lives and support local American businesses. Improving transparency about what is in the foods we consume is critical if we are to Make America Healthy Again. However, such visibility is impeded due to the growing reliance on imported foods from other countries.

In 2024, the United States imported approximately \$213 billion in agriculture products.¹ As a result of greater imports, Americans spent over \$550 billion in food and beverage products that were imported or contained imported ingredients.² With increased consumer spending on imported food, the potential safety risks from an overreliance on foreign manufacturers grows. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently issued a finding that in the last year of the Biden Administration, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) was estimated to conduct approximately 1,000 foreign inspections out of the 125,000 foreign food facilities subject to FDA inspections.³

¹ Angelica Williams and James Kaufman, *U.S. Agricultural Trade – U.S. Agricultural Trade at a Glance*, U.S. Department of Agriculture (July 22, 2025), [https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/international-markets-us-trade/us-agricultural-trade/us-agricultural-trade-at-a-glance#:~:text=Share%20of%20Imports%20in%20Consumption,Consumption%20\(2008%2D2022\).&text=Unexpected%20Error-,An%20unexpected%20error%20occurred.,contact%20your%20Tableau%20Server%20Administrator..](https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/international-markets-us-trade/us-agricultural-trade/us-agricultural-trade-at-a-glance#:~:text=Share%20of%20Imports%20in%20Consumption,Consumption%20(2008%2D2022).&text=Unexpected%20Error-,An%20unexpected%20error%20occurred.,contact%20your%20Tableau%20Server%20Administrator..)

² Quinton Baker and James Chandler Zachary, *Imports accounted for less than 20% of U.S. food and beverage spending in 2023*, U.S. Department of Agriculture (May 15, 2025), <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/charts-of-note/chart-detail?chartId=112543>.

³ *Food Safety: FDA Should Strengthen Inspection Efforts to Protect the U.S. Food Supply*, Government Accountability Office (Jan. 8, 2025), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-25-107571.pdf>.

We have experienced a serious increase in food safety incidents as a result of imported food products, specifically with regards to imported seafood. Between August to October 2025, FDA issued eight safety alerts on imported shrimp from just a single shrimp processor due to potential Cesium-137 contamination.⁴ Cesium-137 is a radioactive substance that can cause substantial health harms. This follows a long record of potential safety harms from imported shrimp. Indeed, last October, a vendor was fined for selling imported shrimp at the largest shrimp festival in the world, raising questions about the potential safety of shrimp consumed by families.⁵ Shockingly, foreign shrimp stakeholders have been accused of human trafficking related to the supply chain for shrimp fishing.⁶

As Congress examines ways to enable consumers to access high quality food, it must also examine the role that aquaculture certification plays in supporting these efforts. Stakeholders in the food supply chain, including distributors, retailers, and restaurants rely on third-party audits and certifications to determine whether the seafood they purchase is safe and responsibly caught. However, questions have been raised around the independence of these processes. In order for these processes to work and to comply with the law, third-party audits and certifications must be based in legitimacy and take steps to prevent bad actors from abusing the system. To that end, we request answers to the following questions by June 10, 2026:

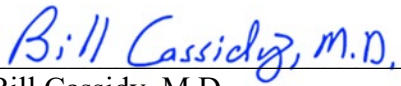
1. How does the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) develop its ASC Farm Standard?
2. How does the ASC collaborate with its members when developing its ASC Farm Standard?
3. Since 2021, how many safety complaints has the ASC received from regulators including the U.S. Food and Drug Administration? How were those complaints addressed?
4. Does the ASC have an internal process to review member practices in safe and responsible fishing practices?
 - a. What enforcement tools does the ASC have if a member is found to be in violation of its ASC Farm Standard?
 - b. Since 2021, how many enforcement actions have been taken by the ASC?
 - c. If a member is found to be in violation of its ASC Farm Standard, does the ASC report those violations to regulators?

⁴ *FDA Advises Public Not to Eat, Sell, or Serve Certain Imported Frozen Shrimp from an Indonesian Firm*, Food and Drug Administration (Oct. 7, 2025), <https://www.fda.gov/food/alerts-advisories-safety-information/fda-advises-public-not-eat-sell-or-serve-certain-imported-frozen-shrimp-indonesian-firm>.

⁵ Andrea Ramey, *Vendor fined for selling imported shrimp at National Shrimp Festival*, NBC15 News (Oct. 10, 2025), <https://myNBC15.com/news/local/vendor-fined-for-selling-imported-shrimp-at-national-shrimp-festival>.

⁶ Hannah Walhout, *A new report sheds light on the problems behind our imported shrimp*, FoodPrint (Mar. 28, 2024), <https://foodprint.org/blog/imported-shrimp/>.

Sincerely,



Bill Cassidy, M.D.
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor, and Pensions



Tommy Tuberville
Chairman
Subcommittee on Education and
the American Family