

CLAY HIGGINS
3RD DISTRICT, LOUISIANA

MEMBER, HOUSE FREEDOM CAUCUS



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

January 30, 2024

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
CHAIRMAN, BORDER SECURITY AND ENFORCEMENT
TRANSPORTATION AND MARITIME SECURITY
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY
GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND
THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE
NATIONAL SECURITY, THE
BORDER, AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary, United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Secretary Vilsack,

I request the U.S. Department of Agriculture to include drought as an eligible cause of loss for the crawfish aquaculture industry in the Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish Program (ELAP), particularly in light of the severe drought in 2023 and the recent freeze that has devastated the industry in Louisiana.

The 2023 drought has led to an alarming decrease in crawfish production across approximately 45,000 acres of ponds.¹ This has been compounded by a recent freeze event, worsening challenges faced by our farmers. The Louisiana State University's Agriculture Center estimated the potential losses to be nearly \$140 million due to the combined drought and freeze.² This figure represents a significant portion of the state's \$230 million crawfish industry, underscoring the severity of the situation.³ The broader impact of these events on Louisiana's agriculture and forestry sectors is staggering, with an estimated \$1.69 billion in damages. This data highlights the vulnerability of our agricultural industry to extreme weather conditions and the urgent need for targeted support under programs like ELAP.⁴

In addition to the direct impacts of these natural disasters, it is important to implement stringent sanitary and phytosanitary standards for imported aquaculture imports such as crawfish. Strict standards for these imports are essential to guarantee fair competition and safeguard consumer health, as they ensure that imported products meet the same safety and quality requirements as domestic products. Additionally, high standards for imports promote global adherence to best practices in aquaculture, benefiting producers and consumers by fostering an industry culture of excellence and safety.

Given these considerations, I strongly urge the Department of Agriculture to revise the eligibility criteria to include drought events and to redefine what constitutes a freeze under ELAP. These changes are vital for providing relief to the crawfish industry, which is not only economically significant but also an integral part of our state's cultural heritage. Furthermore, I advocate for the implementation of robust regulatory measures to maintain the highest standards for all aquaculture products entering our country. Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. I look forward to working with you to address these concerns.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Clay Higgins".

Clay Higgins
Member of Congress

¹ <https://www.dreaded.org/2023/12/18/mother-nature/louisianas-crawfish-industry-could-potentially-lose-140m-due-to-drought-and-high-temperatures/>

² *ID*

³ <https://louisianaradionetwork.com/2023/09/05/33082/>

⁴ <https://www.agfax.com/2023/11/30/drought-excessive-heat-cause-1-69b-in-damage-to-louisiana-agriculture-forestry/>