TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

TODD STAPLES
COMMISSIONER

October 20, 2010

The Honorable Gary Locke
U.S. Secretary of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave, N.W.
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Locke:

I am pleased to hear about the approval of the Gulf States Fisheries Disaster fund. The Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) has been invited to have an agency representative on the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, and we look forward to using this role to augment our numerous efforts to date to help the Gulf fishery industries recover from the impact of the Deepwater Horizon Incident. Today I am seeking your partnership in a vast consumer awareness effort to remind consumers that the Gulf seafood they have loved for years is just as safe and delicious as it has always been.

The Gulf fishery industries represent an $8 billion economic impact in Texas, which is second in the nation to Florida. I am pleased the oil has not reached Texas shores and that the Texas seafood in stores and restaurants is safe to consume. However, our businesses and economy were not insulated from the effects. From fishermen to seafood restaurants and retailers, the impact has been devastating. Consumer confidence has fallen, and aggressive efforts to combat consumer misconceptions are underway and must be continued with your partnership.

During the past several months, TDA has been working with other state agencies to monitor the oil spill in the Gulf and its effects, and to educate consumers on the safety and quality of Gulf seafood available in stores and restaurants. To date, TDA has distributed consumer educational materials for grocery stores and restaurants, worked with retail partners across the state to host Texas shrimp product demonstrations, and connected GO TEXAN restaurants with Texas shrimp and other seafood suppliers. The department has also served as a liaison by requesting claims process information and ensuring BP and administrators at the Gulf Coast Claims Facility understand the unique effects of the disaster on Texas commercial fishing companies.

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Texans have been inundated with advertisements proclaiming the interests of BP and the federal government in helping rebuild Gulf state economies since this disaster. I submit to you that there is a larger need for investment into advertisements about the safety and quality of Gulf seafood. Furthermore, you will be pleased to know that Gulf states like Texas already have remarkable consumer education campaigns of Gulf seafood. There is no need to reinvent this wheel.

Therefore, I request that a portion of any federal resources you plan to spend on this Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission and its outcomes should go directly to these state education campaigns. The Texas Department of Agriculture stands ready to use such resources and we are separately submitting a $2.4 million proposal to the Governmental Entity Claims and Funding Requests Administrator.

I appreciate your efforts and will anxiously await your consideration and response on this partnership.

Sincerely yours,

Todd Staples

TS/AH/ah

cc: Dr. Jane Lubchenco