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Report: Offshore Aquaculture Would Benefit U.S. Economy

Aquaculture shows significant economic potential and good prospects for success in the United States, according to a new report commissioned by NOAA. The report's authors call for clear rules to be enacted to guide the development of an offshore aquaculture industry.

"We must make a commitment to the health of our citizens and our economy through safe, sustainable aquaculture," said retired Navy Vice Admiral Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA administrator.

The report by leading fisheries and resource economists and business experts, *Offshore Aquaculture in the United States: Economic Considerations, Implications & Opportunities*, examined a range of topics on the industry's potential and found that a significant domestic offshore aquaculture industry could develop and be successful over the next 20 years with a clear regulatory framework.

A primary barrier to developing an offshore aquaculture industry is the lack of a clear regulatory or permitting process to allow seafood farming in federal waters, three to 200 miles offshore. To address that gap, President George W. Bush proposed legislation to give the Department of Commerce the authority to set regulations for this type of marine aquaculture. The legislation, which is currently pending before Congress, would provide a clear regulatory process for businesses and individuals to develop safe, sustainable aquaculture in U.S. federal waters

"The U.S. has the choice to become an important player in offshore aquaculture to help augment our wild fish products to supply a growing domestic market for healthy seafood," said Lautenbacher. "If the U.S. chooses not to become a player, we will continue to import an increasing amount of foreign aquacultured products, leaving the U.S. with diminishing control over how our seafood is produced and without the economic benefits from the jobs, technology and innovation that domestic offshore aquaculture would bring. "

Other key findings of the report include:

- A range of technologies would likely develop to address logistical and environmental challenges;
- Over time, the economic potential for offshore aquaculture is likely to grow because seafood demand and prices will increase, there will be more competition for sites closer to shore, and costs will be lower due to improved technology, experience, and economies of scale;
- The limited supply of fish meal and fish oil is not likely to be a constraint on the expansion of U.S. aquaculture as alternative feed ingredients from soybeans and other plants, algaes, yeasts, fish processing waste, and other products are being developed; and
- Offshore aquaculture would create job opportunities for U.S. fishermen, especially jobs that involve vessel operations and maintenance of offshore operations.

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources. Visit http://www.noaa.gov.

To read the report on the Web: http://aquaculture.noaa.gov