



# UNITED FISHERMEN OF ALASKA

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## **United Fishermen of Alaska announces USDA Trade Adjustment Assistance recertification for all Alaska salmon species for fishing year 2003**

Kodiak - United Fishermen of Alaska (UFA) announces the recertification of its petition that qualified all five species of Alaska salmon last year for the USDA Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) for Farmers and Fishermen program. The 90-day signup period to apply for price adjustment and educational benefits based on the 2003 salmon fishing season begins on Friday, October 15. Salmon fishermen and crew members can expect 3.1 cents per pound price adjustment on their share of 2003 season catch if they can show a decline in their salmon income from 2002 to 2003 - or from 2001 to 2003 if they have already received payment from the first year of the program.

"The first year of the program brought less applicants than expected and mixed results. There was a steep learning curve both with fishermen and Farm Service Agency (FSA) in a brand new program last year. Considering what they were up against the FSA did a great job just to get this up and running.

"Now that almost two thousand fishermen and crew have received cash benefits totaling over \$3.6 million and many are receiving tuition benefits, word is getting around. We expect many who did not apply last year to do so now," said Vinsel.

FSA will not be opening temporary offices in fishing communities as they did last year, and instead will be conducting seminars to inform fishermen and help with forms. To find out when seminars will be held locally, fishermen should call the FSA main Alaska office toll-free help line at 866-TRADE-20.

"Senator Lisa Murkowski deserves the credit for getting fishermen eligible for this program. Initially the program would have included U.S. fish farmers and not fishermen. Senator Murkowski argued that fishermen should also be included as producers of the same products, and asked UFA to rally public comments last summer. We saw this as an opportunity to level the competitive playing field for Alaska's salmon fishermen

competing with foreign fish farms. Our members responded to a grassroots action alert and over 60% of the public comments mentioned including Alaska salmon fishermen in the nationwide program, and we were pleased when the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service listened and opened the program to fishermen," said Vinsel.

The USDA TAA for Farmers and Fishermen program is designed to assist U.S. farmers in competing with increased foreign imports, and includes a cash price adjustment, educational benefits and technical assistance. Over 1700 fishermen and crew members received cash benefits in the first year of the program based on the 2002 fishing season averaging about \$2000, and many are using the educational benefits of greater value.

With the program's basis of increasing domestic producers' competitiveness with imports, the TAA program requires that technical assistance be provided to applicants. UAF Marine Advisory Program created educational workshops to fulfill the requirement, parallel to the network of county extension offices that serve farmers across the country.

"The shortened signup last year and the 180 day technical assistance deadline were major hurdles. Alaska FSA Director Chad Padgett and Marine Advisory Program Director Paul Cullenberg and their respective staffs also deserve acknowledgement for their huge efforts. The appendix of the technical training booklet was very valuable itself, listing dozens of agency contacts for financing, marketing assistance, and information. With so many State, federal and university programs being aimed at helping Alaska's salmon fishermen, this booklet is a good resource for fishermen on contacts and summaries of these programs."

"Fishermen that already applied and attended the technical training are not required to attend again, but may want to for updated information. And there is a lot less paperwork for second year applicants already in the FSA system," said Vinsel.

The first year of the program suffered some confusion on the part of fishermen, very few of whom had been successful in applying for the previously established Department of Labor TAA program for retraining and relocation of displaced workers. Only four of Alaska's major processors' were able to meet the worker group requirements for the Labor TAA before the USDA TAA opened the door to many more fishermen.

Fishermen who qualify for the USDA TAA program benefits become automatically eligible for the labor retraining benefits, with one important distinction. Because the intention of the USDA TAA is to help fishermen compete, these educational programs are not necessarily restricted to topics outside of fishing if one is qualified through the USDA TAA.

"Many fishermen were not interested in the retraining, thinking or having been told they would have to give up fishing or couldn't take fishing related topics, but the educational opportunities deserve a second look."

"The biggest obstacle to qualification and a remaining source of confusion is the year-to-year income decline requirement. Initially it was assumed that the only acceptable

verification of the income decline was IRS Schedule C for personal business. In the appeals process a signed affidavit from a licensed tax preparer or tax attorney, verifying that the fisherman's salmon income had declined that year, was usually acceptable.

"With the deductions and other income that gets wrapped up in Schedule C, many fishermen were looking only at that and decided not to apply," said Vinsel.

Another category where many did not apply was those who did not fish and so were not eligible for the 3 cents per pound price adjustment, but educational benefits have been extended to these individuals who applied.

"These fishing income decline requirements continue to be an obstacle to many fishermen who clearly have suffered low prices due to increased imports, and other TAA qualified products of shrimp and catfish are seeing the same problem. We are working this issue together, and our best hope is in the numbers of fishermen who show interest in this program by applying, and doing so promptly," said Vinsel.

In response to difficulties in qualifying for TAA, Senator Murkowski was also instrumental in securing an \$8 million Department of Labor National Emergency Grant (NEG) that provides educational and relocation assistance to fishermen that are not eligible for the Labor and USDA TAA programs.

Information on the NEG, and on the Department of Labor retraining benefits component of the USDA TAA is available at local State Job Center offices.

Information on the USDA TAA and local application seminars call the Alaska FSA toll-free at 866-TRADE-20.

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