



Fighting for Economic Justice for America's Family Farmers and Ranchers

INTERNATIONAL SPOTLIGHT



Politics and Economics in Chicken Production in Venezuela: A Complex Task by Juan Fernando Marrero

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learned about the OCM through the internet last September, after which I got in touch by email with Professor Don Stull. I share some things in common with Don. We are both university professors as well as farmers. In my case the productive activity is temporarily suspended, and later I will explain the reasons. During the exchange of emails I realized we also share the concern for the "industrialization" of agriculture, is imposed through vertical integration, particularly in the breeding of broiler chickens. Don asked me to write for the OCM newsletter, and Angela Huffman kindly formalized the invitation. Here I am willing to share an international experience in my country. What follows is the description of the complex productive environment faced by producers, especially integrated farmers, in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

It is well known that Venezuela produces and exports oil. With the discovery of the oilfields and the start of production in 1914, the economic structure of the country changed radically. From being a rural

country that lived on rudimentary exports of meat, furs, coffee and cocoa, among other crops, oil gave a sudden boost to the economy by flooding it with petrodollars. Public spending and aggregate demand increased to levels never seen before, which allowed important urban development and improved general welfare. The country was the world's leading oil exporter from 1920 to 1955, and gross domestic product (GDP) soared, ranking the country among the upper middle-income nations according to the World Bank. But not all the news was good.

Thanks to the export of petroleum, Venezuela has not been able to develop competitive agriculture. This also applied to industry and manufacturing. The years from 1955 to 1977 were ones of important development based on oil revenues, but by 1989 the peculiar weaknesses of the rentier economy led to a crisis. Venezuela continues to depend on its oil, but the country's growth is unstable, resulting in steady

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A "rentier economy" is a term used to designate countries whose income derives mainly from non-productive economic activities (primary-exporting), generally extraction of oil, natural gas, and copper. The sudden inflow of income (rent) that follows exports of the natural resource (for example oil) to the international market, generally produces the overvaluation of the currency which makes the agricultural and industrial tradable goods less competitive, neglecting the development of other sectors of the economy that will guarantee development of the country. This topic is more relevant in countries where the natural resource and the consequent rent is owned by the State because policy decisions are taken considering political issues rather than economic issues. This is the case of Venezuela and most OPEC (Organización of Petroleum Exporting Countries) countries.

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It is time to renew your 2019 OCM membership. If you have already sent in your dues, thank you. If not, please do so today. The support of our members is critical to OCM's fight for traditional family farmers and our values, as we work to build a new food system — one that better serves people, animals, and the environment. By becoming a member, you will have access to the information and tools you need to join the fight.

Below are the various levels of membership:

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As an Individual Member (\$50) you will receive OCM's informative bimonthly newsletter, be invited to attend our bimonthly webinar where national leaders will discuss current anti-monopoly issues, and each week you will receive our news roundup by email.

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OCM's strength comes from collaborating with other like-minded organizations. Let OCM pro-

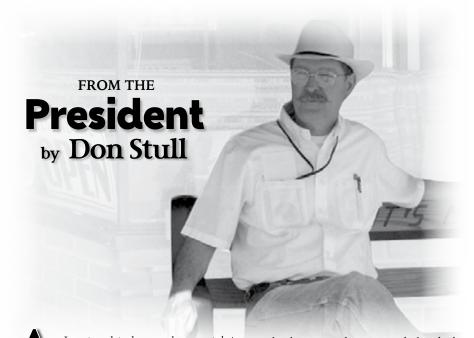
vide you with the information and services you need to succeed by becoming an Associate Organization Member.

As a \$200 Associate your organization will receive OCM's informative bi-monthly newsletter, your organization and its members will be invited to attend our bimonthly webinar where national leaders will discuss current anti-monopoly issues, and each week your organization will receive our news roundup by email. Through OCM's website portal, you and your organization will have access to a toolkit for each of OCM's major campaigns that you can use and brand as your own or jointly with OCM. These will include sample talking points, letters to the editor, social media graphics and telephone scripts.

As a \$500 Associate your benefit package will include OCM staff availability and two conference registrations, giving you a head start on attending OCM's annual conference.

As a \$1,000 Associate your benefit package will include in addition to those listed for the membership levels above booth space and recognition at our annual conference.

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s I write this letter, the partial shutdown of the federal government is beginning its second month. Over 800,000 federal employees and government contractors are either furloughed or working without pay. In farm country, as readers know all too well, this is only part of the story. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is one of the many agencies whose doors have been locked. Agriculture

America's farmers and ranchers have been denied programs and supports by government closures. But foreign-owned meat companies have been allowed to take advantage of the very program intended to aid American producers

hurt the trade wars.

Secretary Sonny Perdid due order many Farm Services Agen-(FSA) offices to open for three days in January help farmers and ranchers with ex-

isting farm

loans and to process 1099 forms before the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) deadline. To say this Band-Aid was "too little too late" is a gross understatement.

Net farm income has fallen sharply

over the last several years, and the declining fortunes of farmers, ranchers, and the communities where they live and work helped elect Donald Trump. But his trade policies have only exacerbated the current misfortunes in farm country. Now along comes the government shutdown. It has postponed implementation of the 2018 farm bill. USDA data collection and reporting services are no longer available, which makes planning for the 2019 planting sea-

son all the more difficult. And the Market Facilitation Program, which is supposed to help farmers hurt by this tariff tit-for-tat, is stalled because FSA offices are shuttered.

America's farmers and ranchers have been denied programs and supports by government closures. But foreign-owned meat companies have been allowed to take advan-

tage of the very program intended to aid American producers hurt the trade wars. On January 9, the *Washington Post* reported that Brazilian-owned JBS would sell almost 2 million pounds of it pork, worth some \$5

million, as part of the allocation the Trump administration provided to help offset losses farmers and ranchers are enduring in the wake of the trade war with China. Who will finance JBS's windfall—you and me. Chinese-owned Smithfield was also set to benefit from this program to the tune of \$240,000 back in November, until negative publicity led to withdrawal of its bid for the payments.

Much of our nation's government, and the vital services it provides, have come to a screeching halt, but OCM has not. As you will see throughout this newsletter, OCM and its staff are still pursuing checkoff program reform, enforcement of the Packers and Stockyards Act, Country of Origin labeling, and a moratorium on mergers of food and agriculture giants. For example, OCM circulated a petition to USDA and Congress to halt bailout payments to JBS. It collected over 1,000 signatures in less than a week.

OCM urges its members and supporters to ask their U.S. senators and representative to co-sponsor the Buy American Agriculture Act. It would prevent USDA from lining the pockets of multinational corporations like JBS and Smithfield at the expense of American taxpayers and family farmers. The bill requires that whenever possible, USDA purchases of agricultural commodities must come from domestically owned enterprises. It would also require the secretary of agriculture to publish the rationale for awarding purchasing contracts and whether those enterprises are domestically owned. The petition and more information on the Buy American Agriculture Act and the abuses of IBS can be found on our website. DS



Or So We Were Told

by Lee Pitts

Ever since the beef checkoff went into effect on July 18, 1986, we could count on regular "independent survey results" informing us that 70% or more of all cattlemen approved of the beef checkoff.

Typical of such glowing report cards was the one that told us that for every beef checkoff dollar collected, cattlemen were receiving back \$11.20 in revenue. You'd have to be a complete, knuckle-dragging ignoramus to not want to invest one dollar to get back eleven. No wonder that between 2010 and 2015 we were told 69% to 78% of ranchers were in favor of the checkoff.

Approval of the checkoff peaked in the early 1980's when four out of five ranchers were in favor of continuing to pay it. At its worst the highest number of ranchers I

could find that disapproved of the checkoff was 27%.

Or, so we were told.

It's Hillary In A Landslide

Some of the oldest and most highly circulated livestock periodicals got so used to printing positive stories about the checkoff through the years that they may have started believing their own BS. Perhaps it's my cynical nature but I never did believe the glowing poll results about the checkoff because, after all, the checkoff was paying for them. Or rather, you were. You don't have to be a genius to figure out that reporting a negative opinion of the checkoff would be a sure-fire way for a polling company to lose

the lucrative beef checkoff account.

A wise author told me years ago that you may have lost your touch as a writer when you start believing the blurbs on the covers of your books. Perhaps Drovers may be guilty of believing their own blurbs because on November 13, 2018, they boldly asked their readers if they believed the checkoff was helping to stimulate beef demand and supporting their cattle business?

Surely Drovers was confident that their results would echo those obtained by the polling outfits hired by the Beef Board. After all, Drovers has gone gaga for the NCBA from day one and has been in a war recently with R CALF, the anti-NCBA of

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the beef business. If Drovers had any idea the results would be so bad we're confident they'd have never asked the question to begin with. Imagine their surprise when 54% of those responding to the Drover's poll said, "No" the beef checkoff WAS NOT stimulating demand or helping their business!

How could this be? Weren't we regularly told 70% of those paying the checkoff were in favor of it? Who knew that Drovers readers were such a bunch of anti-NCBA'ers and radical R CALF members? How else could you explain why 54% of Drover's readers did not believe the checkoff helped their business or increased demand for beef? Who did the polling for the Beef Board and the NCBA, was it the same outfit that said Hillary would be elected in a landslide?

Could the disparity in the results be explained away by a large difference in the sample size? Not really. CBB sponsored polls typically polled 1,000 to 1,200 while 926 Drovers readers responded to their poll. Statistically, the 10 to 15% difference in the sample size would not explain such contrasting results.

That's not even the worst news. At one point during the poll as many as 70% rejected the notion that the checkoff was helpful to their ranch. But even more harmful to the NCBA, the CBB and the checkoff were the comments left by those responding to the Drover's poll. But then you probably didn't see them because they were removed by Drovers on the same day they first appeared. Just for fun, go to Drover's web site now and see if you can find them. If so, you're a better computer hacker than I am.

Deleted But Not Forgotten

Lucky for us someone at the Organization for Competitive Markets (OCM) captured a screen shot of the comments before they were deleted. Here are just some of those comments that no one at Drovers wanted you to see.

Jay Platt: "When the beef checkoff was inaugurated in 1988 per capita beef consumption was 72.5 pounds. It has steadily declined nearly every year since. In 2016, per capita consumption was 56.5 pounds,

a decline of 22%. Were the checkof stimulating demand we should not have seen a steady decline in per capita consumption, which is the true measure of demand. Simply stated, it is a failed program, unless of course, one happens to be the NCBA."

K. Hawkins: "Too much for NCBA and not enough for promotion. I straight up asked a NCBA representative in a question and answer section of a speech at a cattleman's meeting about their position on COOL and got, "No comment." Enough said."

Theresa Fox: "The beef checkoff has provided a large slush fund of monies for those stakeholders who run the organization. No checks and balances, no accountability, plenty of fraud and embezzlement."

Tom Fichti: "Answer me one question. Why am I spending money to maintain a product when the packers for the past six months have been making \$300 per head and I'm losing \$85 per head?" (By the way, packers aren't required to pay into the beef checkoff. Talk about a return on YOUR money!)

Bonnie: "The checkoff is important but it needs to be spent promoting USA beef, not foreign beef or going for the lobbying of the NCBA."

Rick Kiekow: "For too many years the NCBA has manipulated the checkoff funds

to support the beef packer interests instead of supporting cattle producer interests."

Mike: "NCBA has stolen the checkoff tax and used the money and political power it buys to promote a more and more concentrated marketplace that has left cattle producers bankrupt."

Scott: "If there is going to be a checkoff every nickel should be taken out of the

crooked hands of NCBA. One of the real solutions for the beef industry would be to show how few cattlemen NCBA really represents."

Donna: "I believe the checkoff dollars are helping fund the NCBA's agenda, and helping fund demand for imported beef. Bring back COOL, take the checkoff out of NCBA's hands and maybe then the check-

off will help the American cattle rancher again."

Do those sound like satisfied check-off payers to you?

Something's Rotten In Denver

According to OCM, "The overwhelming majority of Drovers' commenters stated that it is not the Beef Checkoff Program they opposed but rather how it is being administered amidst concerns that the program's largest contractor, NCBA, is mismanaging the lion's share of the beef checkoff funds."

According to OCM, "The comments deleted by Drovers are the same sentiments that the OCM has held for nearly a decade."

Along with words like "sustainable" and "paradigm" another one of the magic words these days when referring to any company or organization is "transparency." More is good, less is worse. A company is being transparent if it makes financial information readily available. An organization is NOT being transparent if it tries to hide how much its President or CEO is being paid. The beef checkoff, NCBA and the Cattlemen's Beef Board are about as transparent as momma's muumuu was.

It's simply wrong that a government pro-

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gram, financed by your beef taxes, should be so hard to find any information about. Believe me, I've tried. And so have two other entities that probably wouldn't exist today were it not for NCBA's heist of the beef checkoff. R CALF and the OCM tried to get financial information about the beef

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decline in per capita GDP. Why is it like this?

The sudden increases in income from oil produced an overvaluation of the currency, which made imports of tradable goods such as most food, agricultural raw materials, and industrial goods much cheaper than their domestic equivalents. Venezuelan agriculture must compete with a natural resource-oil-that does not result from the work of its citizens. In addition, oil generates an income in foreign currency because of its great demand on the international market. Under these conditions the government prefers-and politically agrees--to import agricultural products to ensure the food security of the population. As a result, Venezuelan farmers struggle without a minimum of protection from the government, an issue that is not well recognized by economists, who instead speak of efficiency.

Government protection of agriculture, like that of manufacturing, should not be a problem, since the country has, in principle, enough income whose property belongs to the State, which invests and distributes it according to political and economic criteria. This is how the country developed a protected, but in some ways prosperous, agriculture since its economy became dependent on oil.

The economic boost oil gave to the Venezuelan economy made the country an attractive place for the development of protected agroindustries and upstream and downstream vertical integration. Such is the case of the feed industry, which has included independent producers of chickens, laying hens, and eggs. In this sense, Venezuela—a country of 30 million people—developed a poultry industry that has a capacity to produce about 73 million broilers, 27 million laying hens, and 173 units

per capita of eggs. The poultry industry in Venezuela is mostly private and consists of about 30 medium to large-scale companies, vertically integrated in all their stages of production: food manufacturing, breeding farms, hatcheries, fattening sheds, processing plants, and distribution of products.

Without denying the advantages of vertical integration, in terms of increased production and lower relative costs of chicken meat to the consumer, the fact is that the subsidy to industry not only comes from the use of oil income but also from the transfer of the surpluses of the farmers to the industry through the use of imperfect contracts. The integration contract is an adhesion-type contract, either you take it or you leave it. The integrator can choose between multiple farmers, really hundreds, and offer them the "benefits" of their contract. Not so for the farmer. Only 5 out of 30 integrated companies control 85% of the chicken meat and egg market. These firms form an oligopoly and appear to compete in the terms of the contract, but it is only a simulated competition. The transaction costs are much greater for the farmer than for the integrator, which makes the business for the farmer a good business while he is silent and a very bad one when he decides to talk and try to negotiate a fair deal. Along with the hard work of doing agriculture in a rentier economy with a preferential tendency to import almost everything, it is also hard to realize that you have to integrate your farm into a processing plant and discover that the rules of free contracting in really competitive conditions are not granted to the farmer.

But there is another element that weighs heavily on the entire national economy, and particularly on the agricultural economy of the country in these days. I refer to the very wrong public policies that the government applied to the detriment of the agricultural sector. I would not wish to abuse

your kind invitation or try your patience talking about politics, but what is happening now in Venezuela goes beyond the limits of the hemisphere. Venezuela was always a trusted friend and an ally of the United States-until the socialist revolution that governs today came into power in 1999. The Venezuelan government has declared its animosity toward the USA, whom it uses as a scapegoat for any failure. What was thought would be a progressive government that would come to put a little justice to the exercise of economic power of large corporations, among them agroindustry, ended up being an authoritarian regime that aims to nationalize all food production and marketing chains. The British economist Arnold Plant (1898-1978) used to say that "governments often serve special interests, promote monopoly rather than competition, and ordinarily impose regulations that make things worse." Interventions and expropriations of farms and agroindustries, price controls on production and consumption, as well as quotas for marketing have been the order of the day under the so-called revolution. The results were not long in coming: food shortages, hyperinflation, and dramatic fall of production. By way of example, the production of chicken and egg meat has fallen 77% and 68%, respectively, in the last 4 years. The consumption of chicken meat also fell approximately 68% between 2014 and 2017. At present, the crisis in Venezuela's agricultural sector has its origin in the production model implemented by the government, and the government effect is so strong that it prevents analyzing the vertical integration of the poultry sector in all its benefits or detriments. A change of political regime or a big change in ag policies would turn the eves towards the integration contract, again, in such a way that farmers would fight for fairer contracting rules with the integrators. Work is being done on this, as well. JF

"... governments often serve special interests, promote monopoly rather than competition, and ordinarily impose regulations that make things worse." - British economist Arnold Plant (1898-1978)



accountability to the over \$850,000,000 in checkoff program funding. As the new Congress kicks off, it is time to start a renewed effort in pushing for meaningful commodity checkoff reform being introduced. This Congress, OCM will be placing most of its efforts on checkoff reform on the passage of the Opportunities for Fairness in Farming (OFF) Act, S. 741 and H.R. 1753. While the measure was withdrawn from the floor in the House in 2018, the Senate version was voted on and received 38 yes votes. OCM and the many stakeholder organizations fighting for reform felt this was a victory and has given us the momentum to keep up the effort. Congresswoman Titus (D-NV 1) has agreed to re-file the legislation and with the loss of Congressman Brat, we are seeking a Republican sponsor. Both Senator Lee and Senator Booker are reviewing the issue and are likely to re-introduce the legislation in the U.S. Senate. It is time we began to push every U.S. member of Congress and U.S. Senator to sign on to the two federal bills that have been filed. Please contact your members of Congress and ask them to co-sponsor this legislation. We will not end the abuse without you taking the time to let your elected officials know how you feel about the checkoff programs. Let us know that you did reach out to your member of Congress and U.S. Senators so

D.C. and follow up with an in-person meeting.

MORATORIUM ON MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS: At the close of the last Congress, Congressman Mark Pocan (D-WI 2) and U.S. Senator Cory Booker (D-NI) filed the The Food and Agribusiness Merger Moratorium and Antitrust Review Act of 2018. If passed, the legislation would halt the mega-mergers sweeping the agribusiness, food manufacturing and grocery industries that are contributing to falling farm prices, declining farm incomes and food worker wages, raising food prices and sapping the economic vitality of rural communities. Both Congressman Pocan and Senator Booker have pledged to reintroduce the legislation. To increase the likelihood of passage, OCM is helping lead an effort to gain Republican sponsors. Please contact your members of the U.S. House and U.S. Senate and ask them to be an original sponsor of The Food and Agribusiness Merger Moratorium and Antitrust Review Act.

BUY AMERICAN AGRICULTURE

ACT: OCM has led the fight to stop farmer bailout funding from going to the largest transnational corporations like IBS. In January, it was uncovered that USDA was planning to buy \$22 million in meat products from JBS with funding intended to help offset America's family farmers' losses due to the trade war. Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro (CT-3) plans to file legislation. (by the time this arrives to your door it may be filed.) Known as the Buy American Agriculture Act, the bill would require that whenever possible, the USDA Secretary would be required to buy agriculture commodities from enterprises that are U.S.A. owned. OCM is working with members of the U.S. Senate to file a companion bill to the Congresswoman's legislation. JM

we can drop by their offices in Washington,

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All members will receive the bi-monthly newsletter electronically, unless you mark this line for a mailed copy: ____

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checkoff for years from the USDA by going through all the proper channels but they ran into one roadblock after another. This just intensified their belief that there was something rotten in Denver.

A partial audit in 2010 of the checkoff that was the equivalent of just nine days of spending, found numerous irregularities and a full government audit later on was mired in controversy, as released documents showed agency "heartburn" and fear of "embarrassment" over an audit report that was "reworked," "transformed," and "rebooted."

The OCM got tired of the run-around so in 2013 they filed a Freedom of Information Act request to get financial information about the checkoff. According to OCM, "The USDA failed to comply so in 2014 OCM filed the ongoing lawsuit to force the USDA to release the government audit documents and financial records. OCM and its members are still waiting for answers. Since 2014, USDA and NCBA have stalled the release of the information

in court. In 2017, the U.S. Government Accountability Office issued a report calling out USDA for its lack of transparency and oversight over the Beef Checkoff Program. The same year in the courtroom, USDA turned over more than 12,000 pages of

people paying the federally mandated checkoff assessment shouldn't have to spend four years in court to see how the governspends those ment funds. With USDA and NCBA's complete lack of transparency they are destroying the integrity of the Beef Checkoff Program ... "- Fred Stokes

financial and audit documents that had been almost completely blacked-out and redacted."

OCM founding member Fred Stokes says, "The people paying the federally mandated checkoff assessment shouldn't have to spend four years in court to see how the government spends those funds. With USDA and NCBA's complete lack of transparency they are destroying the integrity of the Beef Checkoff Program. If they have done nothing wrong they should just release the audit and financial expenditure documents," says Stokes. "We strongly support a transparent Beef Checkoff Program that works for the hardworking family farmers and ranchers who pay into the program. OCM supports a fair and transparent Beef Checkoff Program but the next time a poll is conducted the overwhelming sentiment might be to simply end the beef checkoff program. This would be a no-win situation for all." LP

This is an excerpt of an article printed in the December 2018 issue of Livestock Market Digest.



Wall Street and Fisheries

by Amy MacKown

Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance

In December a NYC-based private equity firm bought out a fishing business in Maine. But they didn't just buy a business or boats, they bought fishing quota. Quota is the private property 'rights' to catch fish in a management framework called 'Catch Shares.'

For the past two decades, fishermen have organized to fight Catch Share policies and offer alternatives. This is because the Catch Share system inherently leads to consolidation within the industry. Think of the total amount of fish that can be caught as a pie where each share of the pie is your 'catch share.' If you historically had been catching a lot of fish, you were assigned a larger pie slice. The size of your pie slice corresponds to how much fishing quota you are allowed. This means, the largest players were rewarded with the most amount of fishing rights while the smaller players were given the smallest amount of fishing rights.

When it came time to discuss whether Catch Shares would be an appropriate tool for managing our fisheries, policymakers told fishermen that the type of consolidation they feared would never happen. Essentially, they said that Wall Street would never own fish quota in New England, accused us of scare tactics, and ignored fishing community voices. In several instances, they turned off microphones, called us names, and tried to silence us.

Catch Shares were implemented as the new management tool and ever since we've been advocating for safeguards to protect community-based fishermen, and have continued to warn that large multinational corporations will own the rights to fish if we don't do something to stop the unabated consolidation. Safe to say, we were right.

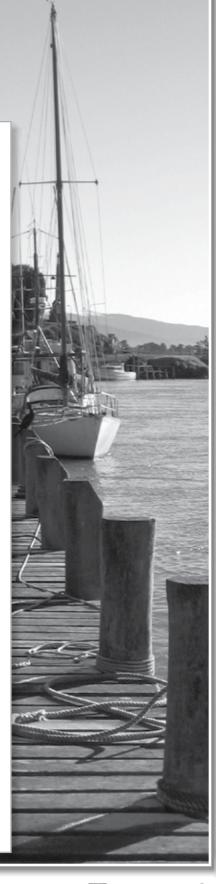
We now have a moment to seize the opportunity with legislators that are prioritizing consolidation issues, the largest fleet owner in New England- the Codfather - in prison, and a clear 'ocean grab' taking place. Plus, we're amid a watershed decision moment where NOAA (the government agency in charge of fisheries) will soon reallocate the Codfather's large mass of quota back into the community. Without intervention, Wall Street equity firms like this one will benefit from this reallocation and the big will get bigger. We're calling for policy safeguards to do damage control while we continue working toward reclaiming the Ocean Commons - one of our last sources of food that is held in public trust.

Here's where we need your help. Between now and the end of February we want to elevate this story and connect our collective narrative points to the media, newsletters, social media, etc. Therefore:

- 1) If you know a reporter please make a pitch.
- 2) If you have a social media presence please share and connect.
- 3 If you have an email following please spread.
- 4) If you can write an Op-Ed, please do!

You can connect with us on social media on Twitter at @WhoFishsMatters, on Facebook at Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance, or on Instagram at @WhoFishes-Matters. Please use #stopwallstreetfisheries and #weownit (shout out to New Economy Coalition for this one!)

If you'd like to get involved or have questions, contact Amy MacKown, amy@namanet.org. $^{\mathrm{AM}}$





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