

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**WEDNESDAY, JULY 15, 2010**  
**Contact: Bill Sieling, Executive Director, CBSIA**

## **Maryland Crab Pickers Not Abused!**

A recently published report by the American University's Washington College of Law entitled "Picked Apart; The Hidden Struggles of Migrant Worker Women in The Maryland Crab Industry" contains accusations of worker mistreatment which are not factual in the Maryland Crabmeat Industry.

This news release will explain and hopefully set the record straight on current h-2b worker labor practices in the Maryland Crabmeat Processing Industry.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Maryland crabmeat processing industry contributes between \$20 and \$30 million annually to Maryland's economy. Maryland's seafood processors hire all the domestic workers they can, as required by law, before they apply for permission to hire h2-b seasonal workers. Prior to the introduction of h-2b worker program in the early 1990's the seafood processing industry in Maryland was on the verge of extinction due to lack of domestic workers. The introduction of the Federal h2-b program was literally a lifesaver for our industry.

An additional economic benefit to Maryland's economy is the fact that each h-2b worker creates 2.54 American jobs in the local economy, according to University of Maryland College Park Resource Economist Dr. Doug Lipton. H-2b workers are critical to the survival of these companies and the Maryland water business. These h2-b position are critical to our continued operation and as a consequence all workers, both domestic and h2-b, are treated with great respect and courtesy.

Maryland seafood processors would much prefer to hire all American workers and continue to recruit all the American workers they can to work in their crab houses.

However, due to the seasonal nature of the work and other economic factors, it continues to be increasingly impossible to recruit local workers for these processing jobs.

**REBUTTAL TO INACCURATE STATEMENTS IN THE REPORT  
ENTITLED “PICKED APART: THE HIDDEN STRUGGLES OF MIGRANT  
WORKER WOMEN IN THE MARYLAND CRAB INDUSTRY”**

- Contrary to statements in the report, all fees required for recruiting for h-2b workers, including appointments, transportation, interviews, etc. are paid by their American employers. Some of these fees include recruitment costs, interview fees, consulate charges, and transportation and subsistence expenses as required. Applicants are repeatedly asked if they have had to “pay” anyone other than the certified American recruiters as a condition of employment by our American recruiters and by the American consulate. All American recruiters must sign a statement to that effect, which is verified by the American consulate before a visa is issued.
  
- Crabs and crab harvests are cyclical and change during the season. For example, we have all heard that crabs shed their hard shell on a full moon. There can also be weather events that stop Maryland watermen from being able to work some days. Consequently there are times when crabs are not as readily available as at other times. Most weeks, during the six-month harvest season, there are 40 hours of work each week processing crabmeat. However there can be weeks with less hours because of fewer crabs and there can be weeks with more hours because of more abundant crabs.
  
- Every effort is made to have a healthy and safe work place for h2-b workers, and if a medical need arises all processors make medical services readily available. Doctors and nurses make routine weekly visits to Hoopers Island providing medical services and prescriptions to workers who need medical attention.
  
- Housing for workers is typically dormitory style in residential type houses and is

provided by the employer at a low weekly rate as required by law. The housing is furnished with all regular household necessities and is ready to move into upon arrival. None of the poor housing conditions described in the report are applicable to the housing provided by Maryland crabmeat processors for their h-2b workers. Poor housing conditions, as described in the report in other areas, would not be acceptable for housing provided by our industry in Maryland

- Most Maryland crab meat processors are located on Hoopers Island in the Chesapeake Bay. Because this island is so remote from any urban areas, employers routinely provide transportation to Cambridge, MD for shopping, medical treatment and for other needs as necessary or upon request by their employees. There is also a food distributor specializing in Hispanic foods that makes twice weekly visits to Hoopers Island.

- Employers treat their workers well and with respect. Workers are happy coming to Maryland every year to work. Most workers return year after year to the same employers at the same crab houses making these statements by the American University Report even harder to understand.

- It is interesting to note that when h-2b visas were unavailable to our industry for the first two thirds of the 2009 crab season, the h-2b workers from Mexico, who had in many cases been coming to Maryland to work in the crabmeat industry for many years, were devastated. Many kept phoning, begging to be allowed to come back to work and decrying the fact they could not come back to Maryland's Eastern Shore to work because h2-b visas were unavailable. This shortage of workers cost Dorchester County's rural economy at least \$10 million in lost revenue, lost wages and lost job to both h-2b and American workers.

- The report states that h2-b workers cannot move from one employer to another employer. This is untrue. H-2b workers can and do move from employer to employer.

Employees are free to seek and change employers if they wish, but their new employers must be certified by the U.S. Department of Labor for h2-b workers,

- *Vibrio Vulnificus* is a naturally occurring organism in Gulf of Mexico waters and is usually associated with the consumption of raw shellfish. This organism is not commonly found in our waters and, in addition, is killed by moderate heat and is certainly not present in a cooked crab. Therefore there is no exposure to this organism in a crab processing plant.

- Also many “facts” cited in the report are from programs, employers, jobs, locations and many other conditions other than those found on Maryland’s crabmeat processing plants in Dorchester County that utilize h-2b workers. These and many other general accusations cited in this report are not factual and are unfounded.

**For more information and interviews please contact:**

**Bill Sieling, Executive Director of the Chesapeake Bay Seafood Industries Association 410 507 3249 or CBSIA@comcast.net.**