

April 13, 2010

The Honorable Barack H. Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

**"Other than foraged foods, ocean caught wild fish are the only truly natural organic food available in our changing world."**

*Chef Michel Nischan, author of Taste, pure and simple.*

As chefs, restaurateurs, and owners of food-related businesses, we are writing to enlist your help and support to protect one of our last great remaining natural food sources – the wild Pacific salmon of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Basin of California.

We applaud the leadership both you and First Lady Michelle Obama have provided to improve America's food safety and promote healthful, nutritious, local food. We urge your continued leadership in this area – in part by ensuring the future of healthy, abundant, self-sustaining and harvestable populations of wild salmon in the Sacramento-San Joaquin system.

As recently as 2002, the Sacramento produced nearly 1.5 million fall chinook salmon. In 2009, it produced barely more than 39,000. Although there are other contributing factors, major reasons for the collapse include salmon eggs dying in low, warm water and the young salmon that do hatch dying in huge numbers as a result of excessive pumping from the Sacramento Bay-Delta.

For the last several years, fishing closures and cutbacks driven by the Sacramento-San Joaquin system have strangled ocean fisheries and fishing communities from California to Washington. In 2008 and 2009, the collapse of Sacramento runs caused an unprecedented shutdown of the commercial salmon fishing season along one thousand miles of coastline, resulting in economic disaster for communities along the coast and spikes in the cost of salmon that put this delicious, wholesome food out of reach of many accustomed consumers. The 2010 salmon season was heavily restricted, and while 2011's forecast shows improvement, many coastal businesses still face economic ruin – if science-based salmon restoration efforts are derailed by political pressure.

Fresh, northwest troll-caught salmon is a popular, healthy mainstay on our restaurant menus and in our display cases in the summer. If salmon-fishing bans continue, our customers accustomed to ordering fresh, wild salmon will continue to find it scarce. Farmed salmon, which lacks the health benefits of wild-caught fish, degrades our coastlines and harms the health of the natural species, is just not an acceptable alternative – to us or our customers.

The continuing decline of salmon populations of the Sacramento-San Joaquin is not the fault of fishing or fishermen. The primary cause of the decline is the failure of federal and state managers to send enough cool, clean water down the rivers, or address the impacts of pumping in the Sacramento Bay-Delta.

Fortunately, federal agencies began implementing peer-reviewed, science-based plans to restore the Bay-Delta's threatened and endangered fish populations in 2008. These plans also provide considerable benefit to the non-endangered, commercially valuable Sacramento chinook salmon that our customers demand. Those benefits have begun to show in 2011, as the young

Sacramento fall chinook salmon protected from excessive pumping during the 2008-2009 outmigration are now returning with an estimated adult abundance of 729,893.

Unfortunately, although these restoration plans still allow pumping - but prevent the devastating extremes of the past - they are under intense attack by powerful water interests and their allies in Congress. We need your help to keep these plans in place and keep Sacramento-San Joaquin salmon restoration on track.

In addition, we urge you to re-commit responsible federal agencies to the 1992 Central Valley Project Improvement Act. Please ensure this vital federal effort is reformed, re-energized, and on track to achieve the crucial – but as yet unmet – salmon abundance goals established by this landmark legislation.

Wild salmon is one of the unique, authentic heritage foods of the Pacific West, intricately tied to centuries of Salmon Nation culture and tribal traditions. It represents perhaps our last great wild meal. We urge you to make every effort to reverse the declines in the Sacramento-San Joaquin fishery and preserve our fishing seasons – for next year and the many seasons to come.

Sincerely,

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San Francisco, CA

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Chez Panisse  
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