

Brasier Farms

2 ½ Mile Tanana Loop road

Delta Junction, Alaska, 99737

907-895-4961

Honorable Representative Thompson

Honorable Representative Kerttula

Thank you for sponsoring HB 191 establishing a state department of agriculture and food.

We have been an Alaska producer of Potatoes, Livestock , Forage, and Grain for 38 years.

The people of Alaska need a Department of Agriculture in order establish a vital food source for the security of the state. Food security is even more evident in light of the current events in the world today.

The Agriculture industry of the state needs a cabinet level position to keep the Governor and Legislature advised of the needs of the industry with out Multi tiered process which is now in place.

Thank You

Lyall Brasier

Subject: Department of Agriculture Letter
Date:

Kodiak Game Ranch
Box 1608
Kodiak, Alaska 99615

March 14, 2011

Representative Steve Thompson
Representative Beth Kerttula

This letter is in support of developing and reinstating a Department of Agriculture in our state. A Department is needed especially to sustain Alaska's food supply. The fact is that in the event of a catastrophe, the food supply for our citizens would last at the most just a few days!

Whereas the DNR has higher priorities than agricultural programs, a Department of Ag. would concentrate on Alaska's food source.

We need to reinstate a Department of Agriculture as we had in the past. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Bill Burton
Kathy Burton
Buck Burton

Kodiak Game Ranch

Attn: Rep S. Thompson
Beth Kertula

Re: HB191

As a farmer in Point Mackenzie, I would like to go on record in support of HB 191. I believe the attention to agriculture in this state has been sadly lacking. In fairness I attribute this to DNR having so many responsibilities, that by the time agriculture is looked at, there is little leadership and direction from the top. We need to ALL be moving in the same direction.

This lack of attention can be seen from a lack of a true plan for the needs of Alaskans and its farmers. I think there are things in this bill that I do NOT agree with, but the one thing that this bill does, is address the inattention to Agriculture and allows agriculture to have a "seat at the table".

Sincerely,

Lynn Gattis
Gattis Farms
907-373-0300

PS I plan on testifying tomorrow on this bill

To Whom It May Concern:

I have been involved with the agriculture community in Kodiak since 1963 when we purchased a cattle ranch at Kalsin Bay. We took a big hit in the 1964 tidal wave loosing many of our purebred Scottish Highland cattle we had shipped all the way from Colorado. We revived and added a large lease and cattle from the adjoining ranch a few years later that resulted in a cattle ranch encompassing 50,000 acres of lease and we ran nearly 1000 head of cattle. At that time agriculture was at it's peak with seven large cattle operations on the road system on Kodiak.

I remember when the transition was made from the Department of Agriculture to the Division of Agriculture and the great concern the ranchers had about that change. The fear at that time was that the emphasis on support for agriculture in Alaska would be greatly diminished. The timing of this was also coupled with the Native Land Claim Settlement Act that allowed for native selection of lands that encroached on some of the lease hold interests. Those fears have come to reality in the place agriculture has been able to hold in the state.

I strongly support the switch back to the Department of Agriculture. Agriculture in our state needs renewed emphasis and support if we are to increase the level of production to serve our needs. I recently saw a statistic that said we produce 3% of our food. I have recently taken part in the USDA hoop house project which is very exciting in trying to increase local production of vegetables. Please support the move to the Department of Agriculture.

Sincerely,

Marie Rice
10746 Bells Flats Road
Kodiak, Alaska 99615
(907) 487-2589
mariejrice@gmail.com

Alaska Diversified Livestock Association
8850 North Simineo Circle
Palmer, Alaska 99645
Website: www.adlainc.blogspot.com
January 31, 2011

Dear Legislature and Governor's Office,

Please note that I was directed in our last Alaska Diversified Livestock Association meeting to write a letter of support in creating an Alaska Department of Agriculture. From our territorial history, it was apparent that Alaska form a department for agriculture. It was created under the territorial constitution. Things changed along the lines of this department when statehood was developed. This was an unfortunate step and we would like to see us reinstate a Department of Agriculture to supply resources for Alaskans for food, fiber and fuel using the truest renewable resources, farm products. Why is this change important you might ask. In Alaska in 1987 there were 1026732 acres of agriculture land in production. In 2007 there were 881585 acres of land in production, a decrease of 15% or > 145,000 acres. When looking at the agriculture we produce here as compared to the rest of the United States we rank 50th in almost all areas. (<http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/>) This is not because of lack of producible land, lack of water or acceptable growing season. There needs to be a change in the political outlook for agriculture in Alaska.

The Alaska Diversified Livestock Association has been in creation since 2001 when we felt it was imperative to form such a group to bring unity and a voice from livestock producers such as ourselves. We are encouraged with the public's interest in Alaska in regards to eating locally, alternative energy projects and Alaskan-made fiber. Our businesses are thriving although the prices of fuel have drastically affected our profit. The cost of fertilizer and fuel are challenging aspects of our raising feed for our livestock. However, we have faith and preserver. We continue to be a strong organization and meet twice annually to discuss our livestock business needs.

When asked what the legislature and Governor's Office can do for Alaskan agriculture, our answer is: "The same thing you do for oil, gas, fisheries, and other resources in our land. We want to sit at the table with and conduct business about our product and available food, fiber and fuel for all Alaskans. We simply want a seat. We want a cabinet level seat. We don't want to be a division under a department. Nearly every state in the union has a cabinet level department or agency. With our unique geographical location, it is paramount that we return to the original Department of Agriculture that was in our first State Constitution in 1945."

Should you need further information from us, feel free to contact us anytime. Thank you for supporting Alaskan agriculture.

Regards to all of us who eat Alaskan food, wear Alaskan fiber and fuel with Alaskan products,

Ruby K. Hollembaek

Ruby Hollembaek, President, ADLA, Inc.

Jane Pierson

From:

Sent:

To:

[REDACTED]
Monday, March 14, 2011 3:15 PM
Jane Pierson

I have been involved in Agriculture all my life and in Alaska for the last fifty years. I was appointed to various Ag Councils and Boards. It became very apparent early on that Agriculture was about the fifth step child of DNR. Food production and the necessary research for the Northern latitude that is required will never happen as it should without a Department attention.

I own Palmer Produce, Inc. which wholesales Alaskan produce. Additionally, my family are involved in commercial production of vegetables and potatoes. HB191 is a very important bill for everyone who eats and works in Alaska.

Palmer Produce, Inc.

Paul A. Huppert

While I am not averse to essentially separating the Div. of Ag into its own department to improve efficiencies, I do have some concerns. Foremost, in my mind, is who is on the slate to chair this new Department? As it stands right now, there is a razor thin line between government and the commercial producer when it comes to Ag (and all its programs, grants, loans, leases, etc) in the state. The key being: Commercial farms and producers. Nowhere do I see an avenue for a home gardener, hobbyist, small greenhouse, herbalist or any small operation considered or even contacted for input on this bill. And no expectation that the concerns of the "small farm" or home gardener would ever be included.

A defined mission or goal for a new Department would go a long way toward gaining support for the bill as it stands now.

Regards-

T Heider
Su Valley Farm
Wasilla

**March 15, 2011 Testimony on HB 191: Dept of Agriculture & Food
before the House Economic Development, Trade and Tourism Comte**

I am Gayle Eastwood. My husband and I have been importing different species of trees, to see what species would live here in Southeast. After the trees survive for a number of years, we would sell the trees. In Delta Junction, we have a ranch where we farm Hay, specifically Brome and Timothy, for sale. We can sell Alaskan Grown hay cheaper than we can buy and import that hay which is grown in either Canada or the Lower 48.

Thank you for listening to everyone and also to me.

I am here to testify on behalf of HB 191. In 1945, the Territorial Legislature created a Department of Agriculture. It was headed by a Territorial Commissioner, and was created to promote and develop agriculture here in Alaska. In 1953, they, further, authorized One Million Dollars to create the Agriculture Revolving Loan Fund (ARLF), which continues today, with a maximum cap of one million Dollars per loan. The ARLF was created to assist farmers in controlling animal diseases, plant pests, and other agricultural endeavors.

Alaska is only one of two states, Rhode Island being the other, in which there is not a Cabinet level Department of Agriculture. We DO have agriculture, and not just garden grown vegetables. In the Barley Project of Delta Junction, we have farmers who grow barley, wheat, oats, canola and potatoes. These are grown on a commercial scale. We also have farmers who raise sheep, cattle, yaks, bison, and other animals for commercial sale.

In Southeast Alaska, we also have farmers, on a smaller scale, who raise sheep and cattle, to name a few. We have nurseries where flowers and vegetable starts are started for others to have in their home vegetable gardens. Juneau and Petersburg have Farmers Markets during the summer.

A Department of Agriculture will benefit all these farmers and consumers, by assisting the farmers to improve their products thus providing a locally produced product reducing the freight costs of importing food stuffs from outside and increasing the vitamin content of fresher food.

If the Division of Agriculture remains in the Department of Natural Resources, the above would be greatly reduced. Being the "poor relation",

with oil and gas, coal, and other “natural” resources taking the majority of the time and money, designated by the legislature in the budget, agriculture would be on the “short end of the stick” for allocations.

Please approve the Department of Agriculture.

Gayle Eastwood
P.O. Box 1185
Petersburg, Alaska 99833
907-772-4307 or cell 907-518-4244
gaylewind@juno.com

Or

HC 62 Box 5312
Delta Junction, Alaska 99737
907-723-1132

Jane Pierson

From: Rep. Steve Thompson
Sent: Monday, March 21, 2011 12:33 PM
To: Jane Pierson
Subject: FW: HB 191

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

From: Leslie Seddon [<mailto:seddon5@mtaonline.net>]

Sent: Friday, March 18, 2011 3:49 PM

To: Rep. Steve Thompson

Cc: Rep. Beth Kerttula; Rep. Chris Tuck; Rep. Bob Lynn; Rep. Alan Dick; [Representative Bob-Miller@legis.state.ak.us](mailto:Representative_Bob-Miller@legis.state.ak.us); Rep. Tammie Wilson

Subject: HB 191

Dear Representative Steve Thompson and other supporting Representatives,

House Bill 191 has recently come to the attention of many small, personal and/or family farmers in Alaska. I have spent three days reading the bill in its entirety and tracing it back to its roots. After much debate and discussion with two farming groups, we have come to the conclusion that this bill is exactly as stated to streamline the existing powers and duties of the DEC and DNR into one Department of Agriculture and Food.

It was pleasing to review the existing duties of educating the public about agriculture since we feel it is imperative that non food producing residents of our state share in the burden of providing for themselves. Even the city dwellers (no longer in the school system) would benefit from revisiting the skills of victory gardening. More emphasis on this education would increase self-reliance and decrease the dependency on government.

Unfortunately, it also adds verbiage that we cannot support as new legislation on page 2, lines 24 through 26 in regard to inventorying and reporting of stored food for the sake of food security. As you must have anticipated, we are against any such infringement of personal rights. The language in which the bill is currently written does not exclude the small, personal or family farm from government scrutiny. (I was not able to locate any definition of 'farm' in Alaska state law.) We would like to see these lines removed from this bill as they are objectionable and are not a part of the efforts to create (recreate) the Department of Agriculture & Food.

Finally, we are questioning the overall purpose of forming this department. Other than opening a final link in the chain of command for Federal intrusion, what benefit will it serve more than a few Alaskans?

I would appreciate any enlightenment on the above in regards to the proposed HB 191. I will be sharing your responses with the farming groups and am looking forward to hearing from you.

Thank you for your time,

Leslie Seddon
Wasilla, AK

Mat-Su/Alaska Farm Bureau

1100 South Colony Way, Palmer, Alaska 99645 746-0044 Fax 907-357-6777

May 9, 2007

Governor Sarah Palin
Office of the Governor
Sent via Fax to 907/465-3532
Juneau, AK 99811

Dear Gov. Palin:

The Mat-Su Chapter of the Alaska Farm Bureau watched with alarm as Alaska agriculture was forced to the brink of irrelevance by the Murkowski Administration's missteps. So far, the overreach and mistakes of that Administration seem to have been stemmed in Alaska's other industries.

Not so, however, with agriculture. Within the secret confines of what I truly hope are the most dysfunctional parts of state government, the Division of Agriculture, the Board of Agriculture and Conservation, and the Creamery Corporation Board continue as if an election hadn't occurred.

We are disappointed that our small industry has not yet experienced a change in leadership and approach. Perhaps after May 16, some small attention can be turned to the problems of an industry that, without a fast course correction, is poised to lose entire sectors.

The State of Alaska's agriculture leadership under the Murkowski Administration went about "helping" farmers by putting them out of business, suing them for trying to help themselves in marketing, presiding over the final failures of publicly owned processors, and dividing a weak industry against itself.

The late Earl Clabo, one of our most stalwart members and one of your most enthusiastic supporters, spearheaded the circulation of a "white paper for change" before the last election. It was signed by representatives not only of this organization, but of all the organizations involved in Alaska farming production. We thought it was a reasoned, thoughtful and restrained call for action. We submitted it to you in October, in a productive discussion with John Bitney. Please take another look at it.

Below, I will briefly outline the broad areas where the Mat-Su Chapter's initiatives and concerns over the past three years have been ignored or attacked.

1. Alaska Grown.

Reams of paper and hundreds of thousands in legal fees have been needlessly expended. Since the Agricultural Revolving Loan Fund pays the state's expenses in suing our chapter over this issue and Alaska Grown is not an ARLF asset, we believe these fees have been illegally expended as well.

To win its anti-farmer point of view, the Division has resorted to two rounds of personal attacks and attempts to instigate changes in leadership within the chapter. It has threatened and misrepresented and unethically called on others within the farming community to lobby against the chapter and marketing self-rule. Now, it is backtracking from a negotiated settlement agreement.

What is this issue that commands so much in state money and state employee ethical lapses?

Simply, the state feels it must own and micro-control every aspect of the Alaska Grown program, down to the tee-shirt sales that our group has slowly built up with our own work for over 21 years.

The state acknowledges that the program and its logo were developed together with the farmers. The state acknowledges that its own function is to certify that the farm products so stamped are of good quality and are grown here in Alaska. So why interfere with our promotional efforts?

Every other industry in this state is given the courtesy of a belief that industry representatives can best run an industrywide marketing program. Only farmers are considered too infantile for this.

A survey of other "Grown" programs across the nation shows that the only ones which can be said to work are the ones where the industry runs the program.

It is the farmers who make such programs work, and is we who have made the tee-shirts work.

Our recommendation: This suit should end immediately, while the state and the farmers begin an industry relationship like that with the Alaska Travel Industry Association.

2. Dairy Concerns.

Here the present Division leadership was not originally to blame; it is only their response to a long-standing problem that gave them ownership over the current debacle.

The mistake that triggered the decline of the dairy industry in Alaska was made in the 1980s. The state refused to sell the creamery back to a farm cooperative. Instead, it chose to retain ownership and control over Matanuska Maid.

Then, Matanuska Maid compounded the mistake by steadfastly holding to an industrial milk sales model, in a state where there is no industrial milk production.

Predictably, this model resulted in a steady decline of local milk production. It is now just a small fraction of the amount it was 20 years ago.

We have monitored and cajoled about this situation for the past several years, with increasing frustration in the last two years.

The current director pledged to us before his selection that he would see that the balance between processor and producer was redressed. He has broken this pledge.

His and the Board of Agriculture's response has ranged from the silly to the sinister. The silly was to advocate the dairy "industry" go back to one- and two-cow "farms" selling raw milk; never mind that that happens to be illegal. More sinister were the successful destruction of the two most recent attempts to dairy at Point MacKenzie, through targeted adverse loan actions and unfair pricing.

Just a week ago we learned that while the farmers have been stonewalled and blamed relentlessly, Matanuska Maid has secretly run up \$700,000 in losses over the past two years. Its industrial model of importing milk and starving the locals is at last revealed as a failure.

The state was warned over and over that a policy of favoring a processor while starving the farmer was wrong, and contrary to its fiduciary responsibilities of preserving ARLF farm collateral.

Once again, the farmers were ignored and the concerns of our chapter ridiculed. Once again, the state chose to stick by state control over private production.

Our recommendation: Dairy industry policy in this state must be based on the necessities facing the actual dairy farmers in this state. Matanuska Maid has had over 20 years to try this, and has failed. Solutions to the problem of inadequate farmgate milk prices must be sought in the private sector, where the U.S. Department of Agriculture has recently invested in two innovative approaches.

3. Slaughterhouse.

Here, the current leadership simply decided to abruptly abandon the processing business after more than 20 years of state ownership. This decision was, commendably, modified to take proposals for private ownership of the plant.

Then, the one bidder was rejected. The stated reason for the rejection was that the person could not get non-ARLF operating funds to run the plant, and the plant could not be used as collateral.

Since we are not privy to the details, we cannot say whether this is the real reason or not. However, we note that the U.S. Department of Agriculture has a method of releasing grant assets for use in securing operating loans, without losing its interest in ensuring that projects are completed.

It seems to us that wise management might have adopted this approach.

Instead, the plant is still being operated by the state, but the meat prices to the producer have been lowered even further and the charges to the producer raised.

Once again, the farmer is blamed and penalized, while the industry becomes more miniscule.

Not only were we as a chapter and farmers ignored, but even farmer members of the Board of Agriculture were restrained from speaking freely on the slaughterhouse issue or voting on it.

Our recommendation: The slaughterhouse, just like sustainable dairy processors, must base its pricing policies on the needs of the farmers it serves. The current unstable, farmer-punitive system will never work. Either the privatization of the plant through gradual conversion to cooperative farmer marketing should begin, and/or the Department of Corrections should contribute added training dollars to the operation.

There are other missteps and lapses, and corresponding future opportunities, many of them discussed in the "white paper for change" previously mentioned.

Two of the examples given above heavily impact the Southcentral dairy and meat industries, and the third denies all farmers in the state a share in their own collective marketing symbol.

The rigid, secretive, dictated ways of the present have reached their logical conclusion: Failure.

It is past time for a fresh, farmer-centered approach to the business of farming in this state.

Please help.

Sincerely,

Karen Olson,
Executive Director