



ALASKA FARM BUREAU, INC.

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Representative Steve Thompson
PO Box 70843
Fairbanks, Alaska 99709

Dear Representative Thompson

The Alaska Farm Bureau respectfully requests your support as we pursue the creation of a Department of Agriculture in the next legislative session.

A Department of Agriculture would replace the Division of Agriculture that is currently in the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) where time and attention are focused on oil and gas.

A Department of Agriculture is not a new concept. In fact, the Alaska Territorial Legislature originally created a Department of Agriculture in 1945 and Governor Ernest Gruening named George Gasser as the first Commissioner of Agriculture. His appointment was readily confirmed by the legislature, praised by Alaska newspapers and widely welcomed by Alaskans.

We envision a streamlined Department that would be funded at about the same level that the Division of Agriculture currently is. The Department should focus on development of agriculture as the best way to achieve food security. We need a department that is focused on, and is supportive of the industry. Alaska's citizens deserve one. Alaska's farmers and ranchers must have one to survive.

Food production and food security should be the number one priority in Alaska. There is approximately a 3-5 day supply of food in the state. The majority of all of our food comes from the Lower 48. We are dependent on a food distribution system that has been disrupted several times due to natural disasters as well as those created by man such as longshoremen's strikes and of course, September 11th.

Farmers and ranchers are thwarted by regulations that prohibit the growth of the industry, preventing us from resolving the food security dilemma. Inspection services for farm products, veterinary services, and farmland issues are currently functions of several different agencies and would be more efficient if located in a single department - a Department of Agriculture.

The phrase "If you eat, you are involved in agriculture" is not just a catchy tagline. It is a truism that all of us need to pay better attention to. We look forward to working together to improve Alaska's food security by increasing food production and ensuring that our citizens have access to an abundant, safe and healthy food supply grown in Alaska.

Over the next few weeks we will be providing you with additional information, which will serve to brief you more fully on this issue. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact us. We look forward to working with you on this very important issue.

Sincerely,

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