

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



REPRESENTATIVE GERAN TARR

## **HB 217 - Alaska Food Freedom Act Sponsor Statement – Updated 1-30-18**

Across the country a “food freedom” movement is increasing opportunity for citizens to produce, buy, and sell locally grown, home-made and home-processed foods. House Bill 217 does four things:

1. Amends Alaska’s food “exemptions” to put in statute “cottage food exemptions” to say that Alaska citizens have the freedom to produce, buy, and sell local, fresh and homemade foods directly to consumers without a permit, if properly labeled “This product was made in a private kitchen that is not inspected by a state or local agency”
2. Allows farmers to sell those products through in-state online purchasing mechanisms
3. Allows Commissioner of Natural Resources receipt authority - to be able to charge and collect a fee for promotional merchandise like ties and bags related to the Alaska Grown trademark
4. Gives the State of Alaska and municipalities the freedom to purchase more Alaska grown agricultural products, by increasing the procurement differential from 7% to 15%

### Background:

More than 95% of Alaska's food is imported, yet farmers are ready to increase production. According to the Alaska Division of Agriculture, 67% of Alaska farmers surveyed would increase production if they had more market options. HB 217 seeks to increase market opportunities for direct producer to consumer sales. Additionally, a warming climate, and innovative season extension technologies - like high tunnels - are also increasing production opportunity.

The AK Farm Bureau and AK Division of Ag in 2017 launched a statewide campaign to encourage every Alaskan to spend just \$5/week on Alaska Grown products, year-round, which would generate \$188 million for Alaska's economy. Participating retailers include Carrs-Safeway, Walmart, Fred Meyer, and Save-U-More. With expectations of further market growth in 2018, Bell's Nursery plans to increase production of tomatoes and cucumbers by 20 percent and the Alaska Flour Company added products to 23 additional retailers throughout the state.

Alaska's Farmers Markets are also growing. In 2005 the Division of Agriculture listed 13 markets in Alaska. In 2014 that number grew to 37, and in 2017, there were 41, with more in planning stages. Market sales include:

- Tanana Valley Farmers Market (Fairbanks) - \$1.25 million
- Homer Farmers Market (Homer) - \$500,000
- Kodiak Farmers Market (Kodiak) - \$100,000
- Mountain View Farmers Market (neighborhood market in Anchorage) - \$19,000

The Alaska Chamber recognized the economic potential of our agriculture industry with an endorsement of Alaska Food Freedom at its 2017 Fall policy meeting in Sitka. These efforts are good for our health and good for economy. They support small business owners and increase food security in Alaska. I urge your support for House Bill 217.