

**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.

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