

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



REPRESENTATIVE GERAN TARR

## **H.B. 238**

### **“Alaska Grown Preference”**

#### ***Sponsor Statement***

Alaskans spend \$2.5 billion annually on food, and if Alaskan grown products were 30% of that market, local economies would grow by \$750 million a year. This bill increases the Alaska Grown purchase requirement by municipalities, the state, and school districts from its current 7% to 12%. The purchases involved are those of agricultural and fisheries products. The bill also requires the legislative audit division to conduct audits for the legislature regarding performance as relates to compliance with the purchasing requirement. The first audit would be completed and available to the legislature for the First Regular Session of the Twenty-Ninth Alaska State Legislature.

Alaska is the largest state in the Union, but fewer than one million of its 365 million acres are farmed and 82% of farmers farm on less than 500 acres. Only 5% of Alaska’s food is grown in Alaska, compared to 55% in 1955, with the highest percentage being dairy products, meat, potatoes, hay, and a few other types of vegetables. Only 3% of farms sell more than \$500,000 per year, while 82% sell less than \$50,000. An important side effect of the small amount of production is that if transportation to Alaska is cut off, the State only has 3-5 days’ supply of many food items in our grocery store.

Increasing the in-state purchasing would encourage farmers to invest in and enlarge farms. Improving the local farming economies would also help overcome the hurdle of increasing fuel costs, which leads to higher fertilizer costs and less competitive pricing. Furthermore, increasing opportunities would encourage more young farmers to stay in the market, considering that the median age of farmers is now hovering around 57 years old and rising. Finally, enforcement of these purchase preferences is a priority of the Alaska Food Policy Council, a statewide organization with a broad mix of agricultural-related companies, state

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agencies, and consumers. In sum, providing a larger market for farmers and enforcing this market size allows farmers to increase production and sales and makes Alaska more self-reliant.

Alaska grown foods are fresher, travel fewer miles, and put money back into local economies. There are fewer diseases and crop pests in Alaska, meaning that local foods have fewer chemical contaminants, and other countries favor Alaska grown food because of this. I ask for your consideration and support for increasing the Alaska preference and creating an auditing process to ensure its enforcement. We must take steps to increase support for our farmers, improve local economies, and create healthier communities.