

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



REPRESENTATIVE GERAN TARR

Sponsor Statement

HB 46

“Alaska Grown Preference”

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 for municipalities, the state, and school districts from its current 7% to 15%. The purchases involved are those of agricultural and fisheries products. The bill also gives the division of agriculture receipt authority to promote and market products with the popular Alaska Grown logo.

Alaska is the largest state in the Union, but fewer than one million of its 365 million acres are farmed. Approximately 82% of farms are on less than 500 acres and 82% of farmers sell less than \$50,000 annually, while only 3% of farmers sell more than \$500,000 per year. Only 5% of Alaska’s food is grown in Alaska, compared to 55% in 1955. The most common items grown and sold in Alaska are dairy products, meat, potatoes, hay, and a few other types of vegetables. If transportation to Alaska is cut off, the State only has 3-5 day supply of most food items.

Increasing in-state purchasing would encourage farmers to upgrade farms. Furthermore, increasing opportunities would encourage more young farmers to stay in the business. This is important considering that the median age of farmers is now hovering around 57 years old and is 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 agencies, and consumers. In sum, providing a larger market for Alaska Grown products allows farmers to increase production and makes Alaska more self-reliant.

Alaska Grown foods are fresh, 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. I ask for your consideration and support for increasing the Alaska Grown preference and allowing the Division of Agriculture to increase their marketing program. We must take steps to increase support for our farmers, improve local economies, and create healthier communities.