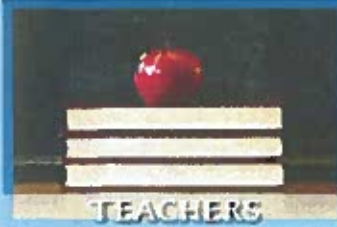


# ALASKA *Agriculture in the Classroom*

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Agriculture  
in the  
Classroom



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## ALASKA GROWN

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### WHY IS ALASKA GROWN SO IMPORTANT?

Products grown or raised in Alaska are allowed to carry the state's Alaska Grown label. That means the foods were not imported from another country, or brought in from another state. They were raised right here in Alaska.

Why is that important? Only a very small percent of Alaska's food is grown in Alaska. The highest percentages of homegrown products include potatoes, some other vegetables, dairy products and meat. The rest of the food consumed by Alaskans is brought in from other states and countries. Alaskans called the Lower 48 or Continental United States "Outside." Perhaps they do that because Alaska (and Hawaii) is so far from the Lower 48 states. It is 1,414 miles from Anchorage to Seattle, "as the crow flies." That is about as far as from Chicago, Illinois, to Phoenix, Arizona. Even Ketchikan, the southernmost city in Alaska, is 600 miles from Bellingham, Washington. From Barrow, Alaska, to Tampa, Florida, it is more than 4,000 miles. That's a long way for orange juice to travel, even with the faster means of transportation available today.

Buying Alaska Grown doesn't just mean fresher foods, it can also mean foods grown with fewer pesticides, herbicides and other chemicals. Because there are fewer diseases and crop pests in Alaska, many farmers use fewer chemicals. Some other countries buy Alaska Grown products specifically because of this benefit.

But there is another great reason to buy Alaska Grown. It helps Alaska farmers, ranchers and food processors, and Alaska's economy. Agriculture is the sixth-ranked industry in Alaska, behind oil, tourism, fishing, timber and mining. Though the nearly \$53 million in total agricultural receipts in 2004 sounds small compared to other states, it is still important.

And it is important to keep a local food supply. It's good eating and good for Alaska. So look for the Alaska Grown label. It is the pride of Alaska's agricultural producers.

[Click here](#) for more information on Alaska Grown.



To try some Alaska Grown Products, go to [Alaska Food & Farm Product Directory](#).

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# THE STATE OF ALASKA GROWN

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Robert DeBerry

Posted: Thursday, July 19, 2012 6:40 pm | Updated: 12:39 a.m. Fri Jul 20, 2012.

Mary Lochner

There's a new crop of farmer's markets this summer. There are 44 around the state this year, up from 33 in 2011. That's up from just 13 in 2005, making Alaska the state with the greatest overall increase in the number of farmer's markets during the last half-decade.

It's a trend that has Kristi Krueger, project assistant for the Alaska Grown marketing team in Alaska's Division of Agriculture, feeling rosy about farming's future in the state.

"The indication we're getting from farmers is pretty positive," she said. "About as fast as people can grow it, people are buying it."

The growing interest in buying Alaska-raised meat and crops has been nourished by the local food movement, sometimes called the farm-to-table movement. There are a lot of reasons cited by activists for buying local. Food bought from local farms has a smaller carbon footprint, because it takes less fuel to transport it to market. It's fresher when it arrives. It puts money back into local economies. And, less tangibly, it restores the human connection between the grower and buyer.

In Alaska, there's the issue of food security, as well.

"In the 30 years I've been here, I've seen transportation disrupted so many times," said Delta Junction farmer Bryce Wrigley, "and when that happens, we only have three to five days' supply of many items in the grocery stores. I'd like to help us get to the point where we're able to provide a certain percentage of a balanced diet so we could extend our ability to take care of ourselves."

## ALASKA GROWN

Gold Nugget employee Enn Sturdivant boxes heads of lettuce in the Butte. (ROBERT DeBERRY/Frontiersman)

Food dependence

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Wrigley's a big believer in moving Alaska toward self-reliance when it comes to food. As president of the Alaska Farm Bureau, he helped start the Alaska Food Independence Project, which eventually grew into a multi-organization group called the Alaska Food Policy Council. The partnership between governmental agencies, non-profits, and farming organizations develops strategies for increasing food security in Alaska.

Wrigley said there's a wide-open field of business opportunities for Alaska agriculture just waiting to be sewn with entrepreneurial endeavors. He points out that Alaskans import nearly all their food from out of state. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Services Agency, Alaskans spend an annual \$2.5 billion on food.

"Most of that money goes Outside, where our food is coming from," Wrigley said. "If we were to get just 30 percent of that food market, and fill that with products grown in Alaska, that's \$750 million a year we'll be turning over and over in the Alaska economy."

Potentially, there's a lot of future ag land out there: the state estimates the acreage of Alaska's farmable land at between 8.1 million and 18.4 million acres, including land for grazing.

#### Markets and processors

The state needs two things to stimulate agricultural growth, Wrigley said: first, the development of new markets, and second, the creation of new food-processing facilities.

Thanks to Alaska's short growing season, those two factors are somewhat mutually dependent. It's difficult for farmers to expand food production for major buyers such as restaurants, grocery stores and school districts when what they offer is only available for part of the year.

That's something the state's Farm-to-School program is working on, with a pilot program to create the perfect locally grown potato wedge.

The Anchorage School District serves 20,000 lunches per day, and some of those meals include a two-ounce serving of a potato dish. The district serves up locally grown potatoes when they're available. But even though they tend to store well, Alaska potatoes aren't available year-round.

In a partnership with the Anchorage School District, the Alaska Chip Company and VanderWeele Farms, the potato wedge pilot project will explore ways to process the product, such as by flash freezing or through a nitrogen-flushing fresh system, so that it could be available to school kids all year.

"We've got to come up with a wedge that's seasoned just right, and mostly cooked," said Krueger at Division of Agriculture's marketing team. "So when it's delivered to ASD, all they have to do is open the bag and put it in the container, and heat it up for 15 to 20 minutes."

Krueger said there are a few local food processors coming on line. The Alaska Rhubarb Company is planning to make rhubarb chunks that restaurants and hotels could use for desserts. The Alaska Flour Company started making and selling the state's only locally made barley flour in late 2011 (available at Natural Pantry, for those local-foodies who are interested). Delta Junction farmers planted wheat for the first time this year, and the company will start selling flour made from wheat later this year.

Farm-to-table enthusiasts might point out that's not the kind of local food that's in the spirit of their movement. But processed food could help expand Alaska's overall agricultural production, increasing the amount of available in-season fresh product, as well.

Wrigley points out that, from a food security perspective, food-processing facilities are necessary to strengthen the state's self-reliance.

"If the food supply grown in Alaska is available all year," Wrigley said, "it doesn't matter when a disaster happens at that point, because it's on the shelf. It's available."

Other innovative approaches to developing markets for Alaska-grown food include the production of biofuels. Delta Junction farmers are working with the U.S. military to develop barley production for biofuels that would be used on bases, Wrigley said. If the deal goes forward, it could increase the Delta Junction's output from 5,000 acres of barley each season to 20,000 acres. Delta Junction has 50,000 acres of farmland that are currently idle, he said.

In many communities around the state, farmers have started using high tunnels for their crops, some with the help of USDA grants. A high tunnel, unlike a greenhouse, is unheated. It does offer some protection from the cold, allowing for a longer growing season, but in comparison to a greenhouse, it is relatively inexpensive to build and maintain.

#### A logistics problem

Rising fuel and petrochemical prices are eating up Alaska farmers' profits, however, making it difficult to pay for transportation and fertilizer.

At Palmer Produce, co-owner Jerry Huppert sees oil and gas prices hitting farmers from every angle. Palmer



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Produce is a food distribution company that carries locally grown food to retailers such as Carrs Safeway and Fred Meyer. It uses a refrigerated trucking fleet to keep the food fresh.

"That's what's driving up the cost of the (food) product, is the cost of fuel," Huppert said. "And it drives up the cost of fertilizer. Everything gets higher. The oil companies have record profits, and here we are just trying to break even."

Palmer Produce always tries to price its product to match vegetables shipped up from outside, Huppert said. So it's mostly the farmer that's eating the added expense. Huppert is also a farmer himself, raising mostly potatoes.

"I've been farming over 40 years," he said. "I don't do it 'cause it's fun. You do it to make a living. If you can't make a living, there's gonna be less farmers around. They gotta be able to make up the expense."

As fuel prices go up, the price of food shipped in from far-away locations goes up too, potentially making the price of locally-grown food more competitive. But in Alaska, that's not necessarily true. If it costs more to truck food from Seattle to Anchorage, then it also costs more to transport it among the hundreds of communities that dot Alaska's 585,412 square miles.

Farming and ranching is booming everywhere from Nenana to Kodiak, but unlike many Lower-48 counterparts, there aren't a bunch of major metropolitan areas nearby to market agricultural products to. With few food processors, there's minimal in-state infrastructure for distributing local food to markets.

"There isn't a food hub or a central processing location that farmers can go to, to get things out," Krueger said. "And we're such a big state. I'm sure Kodiak beef would be a big hit in Fairbanks. But even getting it to Anchorage is a challenge. It's a logistics problem."

#### Disappearing farmland

Paul Ruppert, the elder Ruppert farmer at Palmer Produce, has been in the game for decades, and he sees a simple equation reducing Alaska agriculture's production potential in the future.

"We need more land, and more farmers," he said.

An aging farmer population is affecting U.S. agriculture nation-wide. According to the USDA, the average age of the Alaskan farmer was 45.8 in 1982, and has risen steadily ever since. The age of the average farmer was 56.2 in 2007, the last time an agricultural census was taken.

At the same time that Alaskan farmers age and fewer young farmers get into the business, Alaska's best farming land is disappearing, Ruppert said.

The state's estimated 8.1 million to 18.3 million acres of farmable land might seem like a lot. But it includes potential pastureland for grazing, not just land for crops. And, Ruppert said, some of the state's arable land is made of shallow soil only suitable for growing hay and grasses. The good, deep rich soil needed to grow vegetables and grain is harder to come by, he said, and once it's gone, it's gone.

"The best land there was in agriculture in Alaska was there in the Matanuska Valley," Ruppert said. "I would say almost 80 percent of that land is in subdivisions."

There was some good deep soil out in Sand Lake in Anchorage, he said, but that's all houses now. The shallow soils out in Point MacKenzie could be used for hay and grass, and the state was supposed to have set it aside for agriculture uses. But then, over time, he said, the state has cut the parcels down to sizes that lend themselves more to the development of ranches for personal enjoyment, rather than for production of crops. Meanwhile, Ruppert said, the railroad is building a route right through the middle of Point MacKenzie's ag land, where they'll also build a switching yard.

"They could've avoided it," Ruppert said. "The state itself is the biggest abuser of using the land for other than agricultural purposes. If you can't get the state to protect it and live up to it, there's not much hope."

Still, Ruppert said, there is some hope for the future of Alaska agriculture in the fertile soils of Nenana Valley near Fairbanks, but it'll take commitment and legislative oversight to protect it for future generations.

"It has the deeper soils," Ruppert said. "The state should set a high priority to protect that for future use. I think the day will come when it'll be needed, and I think it'll be the most important thing people will have at that time for using the land, is to feed themselves."

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## Why does Alaska produce so much less food than 50 years ago?

Alaska Dispatch | October 26, 2012





Courtesy Jennifer Kehoe

**Local movements** to reclaim Alaska food production have been on the rise in recent years, but Alaskans still have a long way to go. In 1955, 55 percent of the food consumed in Alaska was produced in the state. Today, however, the amount has shriveled to just 5 percent, according to the [Redoubt Reporter](#).

“In 1955 we were pretty self-sufficient, but from 1955 to 2010, we have gone from being self-reliant and independent to completely vulnerable, completely dependent on the next plane,” Danny Consenstein, director of the Alaska Farm Service Agency of the United States Department of Agriculture, told the Redoubt Reporter.

Why does Alaska produce so much less of its food in 2012?

The Redoubt Reporter cites a complex web of factors, including decreased fuel costs and a heightened supply chain that allowed for cheaper and more convenient food than one could grow in a family garden. Increased convenience led to demand for non-seasonal items, such as exotic fruits from across the world, while large corporations began to dominate the market over local business.

Yet as fuel prices increase, and concerns over carbon emissions and food security follow suite, Alaska is **looking to produce** more of its own food.

“We have gone from being self-reliant and independent to completely vulnerable, completely dependent on the next plane,” Consenstein tells the Redoubt Reporter.

Increased food production will mean a healthier, more stable and economically sound state, he says.

One U.S. Department of Agriculture [survey](#) notes that Alaskans spend \$2 billion annually on food, but only 2-3 percent of that food comes from within the state.

“Imagine if just 10 percent more stayed here...That 10 percent is like \$200 million dollars that would be bouncing around local communities,” Consenstein told the Redoubt Reporter.

Read much, much more from the [Redoubt Reporter](#).

Read more about eating local in Alaska [here](#).

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## Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development Division of Community and Regional Affairs

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### GRANTS SECTION

#### NUTRITIONAL ALASKAN FOODS IN SCHOOLS

The Nutritional Alaskan Foods in Schools was first funded as a pilot program in fiscal year 2013. The program's purpose is to encourage every Alaskan school district to purchase nutritious Alaska Grown/caught/harvested foods. The Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development, Division of Community and Regional Affairs (DCCED, DCRA) administer the appropriation and distribute the money to the individual school districts.

The fiscal year capital bill (SB 18) has once again awarded \$3 million dollars to the program in fiscal year 2014.

- Fifty-three percent (53%) of the funding will be allocated according to the 2012-2013 school year Average Daily Membership of each school district.
- Forty-seven percent (47%) of the funding will be allocated according to the 2012-2013 School District Cost Factor.

The sum of these two amounts equals the total funding available to each school district for reimbursement of purchases under this program. [Click here for the list of school districts and their individual allocation amount.](#)

Each school district is responsible for making its purchases and submitting a reimbursement request and documentation to DCCED, DCRA. The request and documentation must detail the quantity purchased, cost, proof the products were Alaska Grown or caught/harvested in Alaskan waters. Once approved, reimbursement payments will be paid to the school districts up to the amount of the school district's allocation. School districts will have until June 30, 2014 to purchase items and July 15, 2014 to request reimbursement.

Each school district must enter into a grant agreement prior to requesting reimbursement of funds. [Click here for a sample grant agreement.](#)

Food items which qualify for reimbursement under this program are:

- Finfish or shellfish caught or harvested in Alaskan waters
- Livestock raised in Alaska
- Vegetables, berries and fruits grown in Alaska
- Poultry and poultry products grown in Alaska
- Grains harvested in Alaska
- Milk produced from livestock in Alaska



#### [How does the Alaska Grown Certification Program work with the Nutritional Alaskan Foods for Schools program?](#)

It works great! The State of Alaska, Division of Agriculture launched the Alaska Grown agriculture products certification program in 1986; it is designed to highlight and promote farm products in the marketplace. Farmers and producers are required to fill out a one-time, no cost application in order to join the program. The application is available online at: <http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/Marketing/AKGrownApplication.pdf>

Food offered under the Alaska Grown logo are eligible foods for the Nutritional Alaskan Foods for School program.

Check out this [information](#) for purchasing tips!

#### Grant Documents And External Resource Links

- [Signatory Authority Form](#)
- [School District Information Form](#)
- NAFS Financial Report Reimbursement Request Form: [PDF Version](#) [Word Version](#) [Excel Version](#)
- [Financial Report/Reimbursement Request Form Instructions](#)
- [Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute](#)
- [Alaska Grown Source Book](#)
- [Resources for School Food Service Professionals](#)
- [Fiscal Year 2014 Capital Bill Citation](#)
- [Alaska Farm to School Program](#)

#### For more information about NAFS Grants contact:

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Anchorage, AK 99501

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"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

— Margaret Mead

## Community

### Eat Local

**Are you hungry for more renewables? Good news! You can eat renewable too! Help strengthen Alaska's food system by eating local meats and vegetables.**

Alaska is geographically isolated and has a limited growing season, which makes Alaskan's heavily dependent on food imports. Approximately 95% of the food we eat comes from outside Alaska. Our food imports are based on a transportation system reliant on unstable fossil fuel prices. Additionally, Alaska is vulnerable to natural disasters (such as large-scale earthquakes and volcanic eruptions) that threaten food shipments into the state. According to the Alaska Farm Bureau, if Outside food sources were cut off, Alaska would only have a 3-5 day food supply. [MORE](#)

To find farmers markets in your region check out the Alaska Division of Agriculture's ["Alaska Grown Source Book"](#).

#### Quick Facts:

Alaskans spend an estimated \$2.5 billion per year on food. ([Alaska Food Policy Council](#))

Alaska agriculture supplies approximately 5% of the state's food needs while 95% is imported from other regions around the globe. ([US Department of Agriculture](#))

If Alaskan's doubled local food purchases from 5% to 10 % the multiplier effect of \$250 million in food dollars would remain in Alaska. ([Alaska Food Policy Council](#))

Primary concerns following the Alaska 1964 earthquake and tsunamis were food and water access. ([National Research Council](#))



### Recycling

A limited market for recyclable materials has made the implementation of recycling programs difficult in Alaska. However, many options for recycling do exist in Alaska's major communities. Because Alaska does not have a sorting facility, it is important to properly sort your recyclables by material. Curbside recycling is available in some areas of Anchorage. For more information on curbside recycling in Anchorage contact [Alaska Waste](#).

For more information about what you can recycle and where to recycle it, refer to the following pages:

[Alaska DEC Solid Waste Program](#)