

To Representatives Drummond & Josephson:

Thank you for your interest and concern regarding both the raw milk issue as well as the wildlife protection issue. I'd like to bring a couple of things to your attention regarding HCR 23.

First and foremost, we along with other domestic sheep and goat producers in Alaska are in unanimous agreement that the health and well-being of Alaska's wildlife is of paramount concern. Our state would not be what it is today without the abundance of our native species. However this particular resolution has the obvious and unmistakable stamp of the Wild Sheep Foundation, whose sole concern is to use their vast resources to further their own hunting agenda at the expense of all other interests. Clearly the "wildlife" that spurred the creation of this resolution are Dall's sheep, the "foreign pathogen" referred to is *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae*, or M. ovi for short, and the "domestic animals" are sheep and goats. So I will focus my comments on what is the obvious underlying intent of the resolution.

The livestock community, with the support of DNR, the State Vet's office, and ADF&G has been actively engaged in dealing with the WSF for the past two years now. Our first inkling of the M. ovi issue was when Dr. Gerlach notified producers on December 23, 2015, that a proposal (Prop 90) had been filed seven months prior (in May of 2015) requesting that the Board of Game remove sheep and goats from the Clean List, essentially making them illegal to own in Alaska. It came as quite a shock to hobby farmers, small-scale meat and dairy producers, and 4-H participants that their farming activities were in danger of turning them into outlaws. With very short notice a letter-writing campaign was launched, which sent a very clear message to the Board of Game that this was a much larger issue than they might have imagined. Due to an overwhelming public response, the BoG wisely chose to defer any action and allow the livestock community a reasonable period of time to respond and take definitive action.

The Alaska Farm Bureau immediately formed a working group where all affected parties could discuss reasonable solutions to what is best described as a "potential problem" in Alaska. Bear in mind that any Bighorn Sheep statistics you've been shown from the lower 48 describe a scenario which is 180 degrees different from the situation in Alaska. (Open-range grazing of huge commercial herds in proximity to wild sheep habitat, vs. small hobby-sized herds which are contained with fencing on private property, far removed from wild sheep or goat habitat.) Through a grass-roots effort aided by the Alaska Farm Bureau and the State Vet, we have organized a testing program which has provided data for a science-based prevalence study of M. ovi in domestic herds. Voluntary participation has netted a sampling of nearly 30% of Alaska's domestic sheep and goats thus far, and the effort is currently on-going. Continued education and outreach, with no funding or assistance from any government or NGO organization is being sustained through social media and personal contact. This level of active engagement from the farming community convinced the Board of Game to unanimously vote to "Take No Action" on the proposal at their November 2017 meeting, while encouraging producers to continue their efforts to expand the prevalence study.

Most producers are now at least aware of the issue, and those who have not yet tested their herds are being encouraged to do so by other breeders. Peer pressure alone has driven other bio-security health testing within the community to a nearly universal compliance level, and is starting to have the same effect with M.ovi testing. The biggest concern for producers is the extremely high cost of testing for M. ovi. Fortunately the Farm Bureau was able to create a grant to pay for vet calls for all of the collection visits during the initial phases of the 2017 study, but those funds have now been exhausted.

Because the WSF did not achieve their first hoped-for success with the Board of Game (who, to their credit, took the broader spectrum of scientific facts into account when considering their decision) they have now taken their single-minded crusade to the legislature, as they have repeatedly promised to do. HCR 23 is the first step on WSF's well-planned and well-funded agenda, with their stated goal of requiring mandatory, legally-enforced, state-wide testing of all sheep and goats. Before throwing your full weight of support behind this resolution and what will promptly follow on its heels, you need to think through the logistics and costs of such a program. Who will pay for the testing (as high as \$300 per animal, including lab costs and vet fees)? Who will pay for enforcement? What agency will oversee the record-keeping, and guarantee individual confidentiality? No state agency currently has the budget or staff to pay for all of the associated expenses, or send agents from farm to farm demanding to see "Your papers, please."

I am asking you to look at the larger picture before acquiescing to the innocuous-sounding requests of the WSF lobbyists. I wish the farming community had the financial resources to meet WSF on their own turf, but their funds come from a large and deep-pocketed national organization whose goal is to use Alaska as a precedent setter to accomplish their nation-wide agenda. We can't compete for your attention at that lobbying level--our only hope is that you will recognize the underlying objectives in WSF's long-range plan for Alaska and the western United States.

Respectfully submitted,

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