

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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REPRESENTATIVE STEVE THOMPSON DISTRICT 10

SPONSOR STATEMENT HB 191 – “An Act establishing a state department of agriculture and food and relating to its powers and duties; relating to the powers and duties of the Department of Environmental Conservation and the Department of Natural Resources; and providing for an effective date.”

HB 191 was introduced at the request of the state-wide Alaska Farm Bureau. HB 191 establishes a new state Department of Agriculture and Food with the intent of using the current Division of Agriculture's budget. Currently, statutes and regulations that govern food, food products, land sales, loans, land development, and animals are spread between the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). HB 191 is an effort to stream-line government by bringing agriculture and agricultural foods products under the purview of one department.

A Department of Agriculture would allow for a singular focus that would enhance agriculture and food security in Alaska. Agricultural policy has been inconsistent and prone to changes with new administrations, retirements, or economic changes. This ever-changing policy has hampered the development of a strong agricultural economy.

In 1974, Governor Hammond stated that “the state needed a renewable resource economic base to sustain Alaska after the oil was depleted.” In 1976, Governor Hammond in an effort to develop renewable sources in the state established the following goals:

- Broaden the economic base of the state through agriculture production;
- Stabilize real food cost by increasing local food;
- Provided alternative job opportunities through expanded agriculture;
- Improve rural life by developing an economic base through agriculture.

Today people want to know where their food is coming from, they want to feel the security of having a farmer growing and storing food close by, they want to be at the farmers market on Saturday buying food from their neighbor.

Under a Department of Agriculture farming can expand to meet the needs of Alaska's residents, providing meat, milk, vegetables and grains for the table. Alaska's biomass can be used to heat homes and power cars, and fiber can be used to manufacture goods. Agriculture is a renewable resource that provides independence and industry into the future for the State of Alaska.