

From: [House Resources](#)
To: [La Creatia Wilson](#)
Subject: FW: Redact please: Alaska Department of Agriculture
Date: Thursday, February 13, 2025 2:32:24 PM

From: Tom Boutin [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, February 13, 2025 12:03 PM
To: House Resources <House.Resources@akleg.gov>
Cc: Sen. Shelley Hughes <sen.shelley.hughes@akleg.gov>
Subject: Alaska Department of Agriculture

Good morning,

I very much oppose establishing an Alaska Department of Agriculture because of the required 13 new positions and annual cost of \$7 to \$10 million (as reported in the Alaska Beacon). I very much regret opposing an initiative originating with Senator Hughes by the way.

I grew up farming and logging. I've milked plenty of cows, and I think that on a bet I could climb on an old Farmall C, and start it and run it, all while blindfolded. I worked full time at the largest dairy in northern NH for 4 years. I helped people hay every summer from the age of 5 thru the summer I moved here at age 23; 52 years ago. Haying one year without a bailer, at age 9, I think, I had the same problem as the young fellow in Robert Frost's 'Death of the Hired Man.' I both logged and hayed, and sugared too, come to think of it, with the big strawberry roan for whom I am named. As a teenager I boarded for a year with a farm family that operated a sawmill, logging and farming with them, and when I left they may have been just as suspicious of Frenchmen as when I had begun. I owned a John Deere log skidder and a John Deere crawler, selling them before I threw my saws in my truck to drive here and move directly to a large logging camp on Prince of Wales Island.

New Hampshire had two separate logging and farming cultures, one French and one Yankee. I know there were many people who moved back and forth between the two, as I always did, but I cannot remember knowing any. French was the language of the dairy where I spent 4 years, and that dairy employed about 50. I lived in one logging camp in which I was the only fellow who could speak English, and I had to interpret everything the Black girl said when we watched Star Trek on the tiny television.

Farming is a culture. Even states that have huge agricultural industries like Iowa and Nebraska have their own farming cultures. Alaskans have never had much of that culture. (FDR attempted to establish a farming culture here, as we all know, and there is little today to show for the effort. Governor Hammond made another attempt, and we know how that ended.) By the way, comparisons with Rhode Island fall short in that while Rhode Island produces only slightly more farm income than Alaska does almost half of the claimed Alaska income is in aquaculture. The entire state of Rhode Island is only twice the size of Chugach State Park, or 1/6 the size of the Chugach National Forest.

Throughout 2023 and 2024 the state of Alaska was under pressure to keep up with new SNAP enrollments, but during the same period the media claimed there were two job vacancies for every Alaskan looking for work. I don't believe any Alaska Commissioner of Agriculture, despite his/her 12 underlings, can entice Alaskans to originate farms or decide to work in agriculture. It's entirely evident that government cannot even persuade people to leave food stamps and go to work (if in fact government even wants fewer people on SNAP). Convincing people to work in agriculture would be a much steeper hill, and government regularly fails at less difficult tasks.

The Alaska economy, and especially our economic outlook, is very troubled. Oil production dropped 80 percent while our population doubled. Now we focus on how to support the huge state and municipal government (not to mention the 30 to 50 thousand Alaskans who work for nonprofits that depend on government grants) we built when our oil reserve situation was much more positive. Please refrain from increasing the size of government and the number of state departments until Alaskans are once again producing much more of anything the world wants to buy. One way or another Alaska will reduce government to a size the economy can support.

Thank you for your time. Thank you for all the hard work you do for Alaska.

Tomas Boutin
Juneau