

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPT. OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION
DIVISION OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

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The Honorable Paul Seaton
House of Representatives
Alaska State Capitol, Room 102
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

Dear Representative Seaton,

During a hearing of the House Resources Committee on March 26th, 2012 the committee heard testimony on House Bill 191 which creates a new Agriculture and Food Department. During the hearing you asked if the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) had any recommendations for improvements for the draft legislation.

DEC has been working to offer more support to Alaska's agricultural community over the last two years. An essential part of a viable agricultural industry in Alaska is safe food. We have formed a working group with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Division of Agriculture, and the University of Fairbanks, Cooperative Extension Service to identify ways we can work together and improve the support we provide Alaska's growing industry.

During my testimony, I mentioned an unintended consequence of separating the state's food safety regulatory authority across two agencies. DEC currently permits approximately 170 food processors that are not seafood related. These operators are preparing jams, jellies, bottled water, sandwiches, tortillas, salsa, cakes, cookies, BBQ sauce and many other things. As CS HB 191(RES) is written, it is difficult to determine what food products are considered agricultural and would be regulated by the new department and which would stay under DEC's purview.

While this issue can be resolved through edits to the legislation, it is representative of the larger problem of dividing food safety responsibilities across two agencies. It is problematic on a national level and in other states that are organized this way.

Thirty years ago, the Alaska seafood inspection program, State Veterinarian's office, and retail food inspection program were in three different agencies. It

was inefficient and confusing causing a reorganization and centralization of all food safety programs within one agency.

Food safety principles are consistent throughout the industry. The inspectors require the same training and perform the same tasks. Alaska struggles to achieve adequate inspection frequencies as is, further dividing these responsibilities across two agencies will increase the State of Alaska's challenges of ensuring safe food products.

Past experiences in Alaska have confirmed it is better to locate all food safety programs in one agency. Please let me know if you need any additional information.

Respectfully,



Kristin Ryan
Director

Cc: Representative Eric Feige
Representative Peggy Wilson
Representative Alan Dick
Representative Neal Foster
Representative Bob Herron
Representative Cathy Munoz
Representative Berta Gardner
Representative Scott Kawasaki
Representative Steve Thompson