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**To:** Senator Gary Stevens

**CC:** Senate Finance Committee; Senate Resources Committee

**Subject:** SUPPORT: SB 208 – Enhancing Agricultural Land Leases and Merit-Based Sales

Dear Senator Stevens and Members of the Finance Committee,

On behalf of the Homer Soil and Water Conservation District (HSWCD), I am writing to express our strong support for SB 208, version T.

Our District plays a unique role in Alaska's agricultural landscape: we provide the technical expertise and local oversight required to review and approve **State Farm Conservation Plans (SFCP)**. We see firsthand the challenges Alaskans face when trying to access state land, and we believe SB 208 offers a pragmatic, merit-based solution to these hurdles.

From the District's perspective, this bill is significant for several reasons:

- **Prioritizing Viability Over High Bids:** With present ag title parcels, the highest-bidder has often locked out qualified, hardworking producers. By shifting toward a merit-based evaluation of agricultural proposals, the state ensures that these new ag parcels are awarded to those with the most viable, conservation-minded plans.
- **Strengthening Land Stewardship:** Sustainable farming requires long-term investment. The provisions in SB 208 that allow for extended leases and a path to ownership encourage farmers to implement long-range conservation practices. When a farmer knows they have a 10-year lease with a path to purchase, they are far more likely to invest in the soil health and water management practices that HSWCD advocates for.
- **Protecting Prime Soils for Food Security:** We view prime agricultural soil as a critical infrastructure asset for Alaska. SB 208 strengthens the intent of agricultural covenants, ensuring that these rare soils remain in production rather than being lost to non-ag development.
- **Technical Partnership:** As a District, we stand ready to continue our partnership with the Division of Agriculture to ensure that the management plans required by this bill are appropriate, site-specific, and geared toward successful Alaskan-grown production.

We urge the Committee to move SB 208 forward. It is a necessary update to our state's land management policy that recognizes farming not just as a business, but as a vital component of Alaska's security and land stewardship.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Kyra Wagner'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Kyra' being more prominent than the last name 'Wagner'.

**Homer Soil and Water Conservation District**

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