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Good Day,

I am writing regarding SB208 and HB296. I support these initiatives with the following concerns and comments.

The proposed leasing statutes seem tight. There are means to address a leaseholder who is not using the land for agricultural purposes. However, there are no such avenues for people who end up purchasing state land outright. To be sure, the requirements are clear and specific for state land sale applications on what the applicant must do. But once the sale is complete, there are no provisions for holding the new owner accountable.

Therefore, I respectfully request the Senate and House committees consider adding further requirements onto these laws. They do not need to be overly restrictive and they must take into account that it can take several years before land is in a condition to produce agricultural products. But, there needs to be a way for the State to assess the progress of the landowner and, if necessary, bring the land back to State control. I recommend that this process include an "incentive" for the landowner in that if the State brings the land back into State control, the landowner does not get reimbursed for the original price. Because there are no accountability controls over post-sale actions, as there are with post-lease actions, the sale of land still lends itself to unscrupulous buyers who will use the land for purposes unrelated to agriculture.

I am a new farmer. I have been farming my land, and some surrounding leased land, here in Wasilla since 2021. My land, and the surrounding land, were cleared for agriculture and homesteaded pre-statehood. I am the first landowner after the original homesteader. It was a very rough start these first several years, due to a drought and then getting the land back into full production. I have had to till under all of my land (and the same will have to occur to the leased land) and restart/replant with grass and root crops. I have yet to cover all farming expenses, with 43% of my expenses going towards property taxes and insurance that ONLY are paid by my farming operations (e.g. there are additional taxes and insurance I pay separately and privately). This demonstrates a significant amount of money from small farming operations goes to payments for insurance and taxes, significantly hampering the ability to increase capacity and production. But that being said, we continue to farm because there is a local need for product by people who understand and appreciate the need for Alaska to be as self-sufficient as possible.

While insurance and taxes hold back my ability to expand, there is nothing more restrictive than access to land, and by access, I mean affordable, cleared farmland. There was an 80 acre parcel just southwest of my land. It had been leased for years by an absentee landowner to another local farmer. This land was undoubtedly originally homesteaded or purchased for very low or zero cost. But when the landowner decided to sell, they placed the price at over \$700,000, putting it outside

the range of myself and only within the range of developers---who snatched it up. This landowner had received property tax benefits for years as a farm. This land is now gone forever. And within my area near Schrock Road, eventually the cleared farmland in this area is going to go the same direction.

When there is cleared farmland for sale, and the landowner has received property tax benefits AT ANY TIME (not just within the last 7 years), there needs to be a process by which that land has first right of refusal for local farmers to buy. And that land needs to be priced as agricultural land, not "private" land. The local farmer should be very easy to identify, locate, and contact. My land is designated by USDA as farmland. I file a Schedule F. I have a State of Alaska Business License and am a registered LLC in the State of Alaska. And I apply for Borough property tax benefits. I could have easily farmed that parcel. It is directly accessible to me. And, most importantly, it was cleared and ready to go. Even if I would've had to rehabilitate it, it is much easier to do that with cleared land than starting from scratch on woodland.

The only reason why I could afford to get into farming as a business was because I am a retired Veteran with a pension and associated TriCare medical benefits for my family **AND** that I had worked and saved for 5 years on the North Slope. This is all important to know. The barriers to entering farming are immense and frankly, they are insurmountable for young people exiting high school or college. And the absolute biggest limitation is access to farmable land and the next is the capital equipment and structures one must invest in---not to mention having your own shelter to live in. When people could homestead, the price for land was out of the equation plus they didn't have insurance or taxes to pay. They might have been "poorer" but all money, whatever they had, could go directly into farming operations.

It is very encouraging that the Senate and House have put forth these bills and the bills in the past to decrease property taxes on legitimate farmers. I applaud your efforts; they are making a big difference. For these two bills, there needs to be some "teeth" added to them to make sure there is some accountability if someone purchases State land and then does not put it into agricultural production. Additionally, if someone does fulfill the intent of putting land into agricultural production but ends up quitting farming, then the land must be sold as agricultural land, at an agricultural price, or else abandoned back to the State. These lands are extremely valuable. If there is any effort made in making new land agricultural and keeping old land in agricultural use, then there needs to be some way to hold landowners accountable and that includes even myself, when I or my heirs cease operations and pass the land onto another farmer.

Please feel free to contact me.

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