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Commissioner John Boyle
550 West 7th Ave, Ste 1400
Anchorage, AK 99501

Re: Support for Executive Order 136, re-establishing an Alaska Department of Agriculture

Dear Commissioner Boyle:

Alaska Farm Bureau's mission is to improve the economic well-being and expansion of agriculture and to enrich the quality of life for all Alaskans. Our farming and ranching members set our policy positions and priorities based on what is needed to expand our farming and ranching businesses. For decades, Alaska Farm Bureau members have been expressing the need for an Alaska Department of Agriculture. This move would elevate the needs of Alaska's agriculture industry, building programs and services important to growth.

We have potential for a strong agriculture industry that will benefit our state. Alaska is experiencing growth in number of farms, while it's declining nationally. We have a high percentage of new and beginning farmers, as well as attracting farmers from other states; they see our potential here. It's the perfect time to build off the momentum we have with increased consumer demand, market interest and farmers wanting to expand.

This topic should be of importance to everyone, as agriculture does impact everyone. I hope this proposal receives proper consideration and support as agriculture is a viable and important industry to Alaska.

Do we really need a Department of Agriculture?

Yes. Having a cabinet-level seat will help bring issues of our farmers and ranchers to the forefront when policies and budgets are being discussed. Being a division within DNR, agriculture's priorities tend to get pushed to the back, even in years with a Commissioner who values agriculture, it does not receive the focus the agriculture industry needs.

Having a higher-level office will also assist greatly in developing markets. A commissioner will be able to build relations and have ongoing conversations with larger markets (grocery stores, state institutions, and export for some products) promoting the benefits of Alaska Grown. It has not been easy for our farmers to navigate these larger markets on their own, and it is these markets that are needed to significantly expand our agriculture industry.

Why now?

This is a step that is long overdue. Had a Department of Agriculture been established years ago, helping to expand production, perhaps our grocery store shelves would have been more stable getting through COVID, and all the other disruption that result in empty shelves. The agriculture industry could be a larger contributor to the state's food security and economy; increased production, attracting more support businesses, providing more jobs. We can't change the past, and we can't guarantee what the future will bring.

Establishing a department now will start to build stability and capacity in the programs and services that help our farmers and ranchers. Starting a Department of Agriculture now, we can capitalize off the momentum we have. Growth in the agriculture industry will increase food security, diversify the state's economy and make us less dependent on the supply chain.

Why is this proposal only adding administration?

While, on paper, it may look like this proposal is just "growing government" and only adding administration, these positions will help increase capacity and bring more clout to our agriculture industry. As mentioned before, a commissioner and deputy commissioner will assist with reaching larger markets. Administrative and IT staff will help take some of the workload off program staff so they can focus more on developing resources for our farmers and ranchers. This will also build capacity to seek funding sources outside of state dollars. We see this as a fiscally responsible way to stand up a Department of Agriculture and start building a better support system to grow Alaska's agriculture industry.

The Alaska Farm Bureau strongly supports Executive Order 136, re-establishing the Alaska Department of Agriculture. We know there are some with concerns around this proposal; growing government, increasing spending, and even questioning if there should be state resources to help Alaska's farmers and ranchers. Alaska agriculture is an industry that has huge potential, and, as with any industry, state support is necessary to more quickly and fully realize our potential. We appreciate the work that has gone into this proposal, and hope for the support to let it pass.

Respectfully,



Scott Mugrage, President
Alaska Farm Bureau