



ALASKA FARM BUREAU, INC.

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To Whom it May Concern:

The Alaska Farm Bureau represents 350 farm families throughout the state of Alaska. At our Annual Meeting in November, we voted to pursue creation of a Department of Agriculture for Alaska. The motion passed unanimously.

For almost 30 years, agriculture has struggled to survive in the shadow of oil and gas. We do not resent or regret the attention that those natural resources receive, for we agree that at this time they drive the economic engine of the state. Unfortunately, after adequate attention has been focused on those resources, there is simply no more time in the day for DNR managers to address the vital importance of agriculture in Alaska.

We import almost all our food and as a result our food supply is in a precarious state in the event of any number of possible disruptions to transportation. We believe agriculture can do much to increase our food security – not only on the road system, but in remote rural communities as well.

A strong agricultural base is absolutely vital to Alaska for several reasons. Enhancing food security is just one. Improving rural communities by creating jobs and work allows rural residents to remain in their communities. Many secondary jobs are created when there is a strong agriculture industry, including jobs in transportation, processing, and marketing.

Most dollars from the sale of agricultural products stay in the community and state. Economists use a multiplier of 8 for such sales compared with about 2 or 3 for oil and gas. The result of this turnover is a stronger economic engine.

I could continue with the social benefit to remote rural villages, beset with alcohol, drugs, and violence. Millions of dollars are spent for intervention programs that treat the symptoms, but do not address the cause. I believe agriculture establishes a connection with the land and gives people a reason to live and work, and builds pride by providing for themselves.

The end result is that given the importance of agriculture to the social and economic health of Alaskans, there must be a more streamlined method of charting the course and accomplishing the mission of feeding Alaskans, than under the current system. The multiple layers of bureaucracy through which plans,

budget, and initiatives must pass under the current structure provides too many opportunities to sideline critical functions because while they may meet the needs of the agriculture industry, they do not meet the priorities of DNR. Consequently, valuable resources to the state never make it to the cabinet level where agricultural resources can be coordinated among agencies to meet socio-economic needs.

Many are concerned about the cost of creating a new department. We believe that properly structured, the cost of a Department of Agriculture need not be significantly more than the current division. The discussion we should be having is whether the value of the new department, in efficiency, purpose, and widespread benefits to urban and rural residents alike, will make it a bargain for Alaska.

We believe it can.

Sincerely,

Bryce Wrigley,
President, Alaska Farm Bureau