

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



REPRESENTATIVE ZACK FIELDS

Fairview • South Addition • Forest Park • Downtown • North Star

Sponsor Statement: HB 140

Alaska has many unique challenges when it comes to its food system. Approximately 95% of Alaska's purchased food is imported, accounting for around \$2 billion in sales sent out of state each year. Distribution systems are complex with 85% of communities accessible only by air or water.

The Governor's Food Security and Independence Task Force, the Food Strategy Task Force, and the Alaska Farm Bureau have all advocated for the creation of the Department of Agriculture as a step towards increasing food security. Establishing a department will ensure that the people and communities who grow our food have a seat at the table, now and in the future.

Creating a department will also give our program personnel the administrative support they need so they can dedicate their time to producers, not paperwork. A department dedicated to the needs of our producers will be able to address regulations or statutes that need reform and remove barriers to entry whether that is access to capital or retail markets.

Previous agriculture projects in Point MacKenzie, Kenny Lake, or Delta Junction, haven't struggled to find success because we can't grow food or animals in Alaska. We know that we can. Alaska has the potential to create much more robust and self-sufficient food systems, and the creation of a Department of Agriculture will help us achieve that goal.

Agriculture is at the core of what it means to be Alaskan. Some of Alaskans' favorite events every summer are those like the Alaska State Fair and the Tanana Valley State Fair that showcase our agricultural industry. Our University was founded in 1917 as an agriculture and mining college. The Mat-Su valley was settled by farmers in the 1930s and remains a hub of agriculture today.

A Department of Agriculture would help support our hard-working farmers with a coherent strategy involving marketing, cooperatives, research, and all the well-known tools utilized in other states that we need to take our industry from where it is to where we need to go.