



RE: Support for SB 128 / HB 140 Department of Agriculture

March 26, 2025

Dear Chair Giessel and Members of the Senate Resources Committee,

The Alaska Food Strategy Task Force wishes to express our strong support for Senate Bill 128 and House Bill 140. The establishment of a standalone Department of Agriculture in Alaska has been our number one recommendation of the thirty-seven recommendations we have issued throughout our 2023 to 2025 deliberations.

We recognize this initiative's importance in strengthening food security across the state and growing our agriculture industry. We urge your favorable consideration and support of this legislation.

Alaska's unique geography and climate demand a focused approach to agriculture, one that is currently constrained by its placement within the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). While DNR has served as a steward for many of our state's resources, agriculture requires dedicated leadership to fully realize its potential. A Department of Agriculture, with a commissioner seated at the governor's cabinet table, would empower our farmers and ranchers and elevate the priority of food production in Alaska. With this level of leadership, the department would address issues like soil conservation, pest management, and the promotion of local production and marketing; tackle challenges and overcome obstacles related to land and transportation logistics that ag producers regularly face; and disseminate new research and best practices specific for our northern region to our hardworking farmers and ranchers.

Presently, Alaska imports food to the tune of nearly \$3 billion per year and exports very, very little in ag products. In comparison, Scandinavia (which is at the same latitude as our state) exports more than \$10 billion in ag products. Not only can we reach new markets for ag products grown in our pristine environment and unadulterated, rich soils, but we can and must shore up our resilience for our residents in the event of a supply chain disruption. Alaska is particularly vulnerable due to our being the final link in the North America / West Coast supply chain. It is critical that we increase food security; the department shepherding all the parts and pieces to make that happen – that private ag producers cannot do individually – is the right next step.

To this last point, we would like to refer you to our 2024 white paper entitled, [Why a Department of Agriculture Makes Sense for Alaska](#), subtitled *The Lack of Food Security in Alaska: Tackling It Head-on*, for insights on the five reasons the creation of a department is the best next step:

- Reason #1 Consolidation and efficiencies to better serve industry
- Reason #2 Cabinet-level and legislative focus
- Reason #3 Economic diversification
- Reason #4 Health and vitality of Alaska communities
- Reason #5 Proven success in other states

If a Division of Agriculture were sufficient, as a state we would have already realized the goals of a robust private sector agriculture industry, the growth of food production, increased food security, and the reduction of food dependence from outside sources. Because we have not reached these goals, we firmly believe the creation of the Department of Agriculture is the necessary next step to achieve them. We wholeheartedly support this legislation encompassing the visionary framework and request that you move it through the committee process and onto the floor for passage.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Shelley Hughes".

Senator Shelley Hughes
Chair, Alaska Food Strategy Task Force

**Please note that support for SB 128 and HB 140 does not necessarily indicate support by organizations that individual Executive Board members may represent.*