

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



REPRESENTATIVE GERAN TARR

HB 217 - ALASKA FOOD FREEDOM ACT - Sponsor Statement 3.22.18

Across the country a “food freedom” movement is increasing jobs in the farm-to-table industry, allowing citizens to produce, buy, and sell locally-grown, home-processed foods. HB 217 seeks to increase direct sales from farmers to consumers in the following ways:

1. Allows the Division of Natural Resources to have receipt authority - to be able to charge and collect a fee for promotional merchandise related to the Alaska Grown logo;
2. Encourages what other states are calling “agri-tourism” – to bring people to farms for various activities. Defines “farm touring” as an activity that has protection from civil liability;
3. Allows direct sales from farmers to consumers for certain Alaska Grown food and value-added food products with appropriate labeling; allows online sales of food and value-added food products; defines farmers’ markets;
4. Encourages the State of Alaska, municipalities and schools to buy more Alaska Grown agricultural and fisheries products, by providing more flexibility in procurement rules.

Background:

More than 95% of Alaska's food is imported, yet farmers in Alaska are ready to increase production. From 2007 to 2012, direct sales in Alaska grew by 32% - 13 times the national average. In 2017, the Farm Bureau and Division of Agriculture launched a statewide campaign to encourage every Alaskan to spend just \$5/week on Alaska Grown products, year-round, to generate \$188 million for Alaska's economy. Retailers include Carrs-Safeway, Walmart, Fred Meyer, and Save-U-More. With expectations of further market growth in 2018, Bell's Nursery plans to increase production of tomatoes and cucumbers by 20 percent and the Alaska Flour Company added products to 23 additional retailers throughout the state.

Alaska's farmers markets are growing. In 2005 the Division of Agriculture listed 13 markets in Alaska. In 2017, there were 41, with more in planning stages. Market sales include:

- Tanana Valley Farmers Market (Fairbanks) - \$1.25 million
- Homer Farmers Market (Homer)- \$500,000
- Mountain View Farmers Market (neighborhood market in Anchorage) - \$19,000

The Alaska Chamber recognized the economic potential of Alaska's agriculture industry with an endorsement of Alaska Food Freedom at its 2017 Fall policy meeting in Sitka.

Increasing direct sales from farmers to consumers is good for our economy and good for our health. I urge your support for HB 217 - the Alaska Food Freedom Act.