



ALASKA FARM BUREAU, INC.

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March 8, 2021

Representative Geran Tarr
State Capitol Room 126
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Representative Tarr:

Thank you for your efforts to expand agriculture opportunities for Alaska's farmers and ranchers through measures like HOUSE BILL 22 - SHARED ANIMAL AND RAW MILK/PRODUCTS. Alaskans spend roughly \$2 billion on food each year, most of which are imported products. Expanding opportunities for farming businesses will positively impact Alaska, improving our food security and diversifying our economy.

Alaska's agriculture industry is leading the nation in percent of growth in number of farms, also the percent of beginning farmers and ranchers. Although we are experiencing significant growth, agriculture is still a young industry in Alaska that is developing markets and working on infrastructure needs. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted just how vulnerable Alaska is to any disruptions in the food supply chain and the need to increase local production. Building a strong food system in Alaska would make us more food secure as well as increasing stability to local economies.

Taking steps, like in HB 22, will expand opportunities for our farmers, encourage growth in dairy production and improve access to local foods. This bill adds stability to the herd share program by putting language in statute and allows for expansion by giving share owners access to value-added products, such as cheese or butter.

The Alaska Farm Bureau fully supports your efforts in securing and expanding the herd-share program through HB 22 and look forward to working with you on expanding opportunities for our farmers.

Sincerely,

Scott Mugrage, President
Alaska Farm Bureau, Inc.

March 1, 2021

Dear Rep. Tarr:

My name is Suzy Crosby, and my husband and I own and operate a small farm in the Matanuska Valley. Our focus is dairy goats, and our herd share program provides goat milk to consumers from Willow to Girdwood.

We greatly appreciate your passionate support of the herd share bill, which would expand the definition of herd share to allow other value-added dairy products in addition to fluid milk. As you recall, SSHB 16 came tantalizingly close to passage – unanimously approved by the House in 2019, heard in the Senate Resources Committee in March of 2020, but ultimately derailed by the pandemic shutdown shortly thereafter. Thank you for re-filing the bill as HB 22.

Food security has been a topic of lively conversation among Alaskans for many years, and never more so than in the wake of a pandemic that cleared store shelves across the state during last year's pandemic panic buying. (I must add that during that time, despite bare shelves in the dairy section, our herd share owners never missed a drop!) For that reason and more, Alaskans are increasingly seeking locally-sourced products, and hoping to join several other states such as Maine and Wyoming in expanding legal food choices, particularly in the area of milk and other dairy products.

HB 22 would offer benefits to consumers:

- Freedom to make their own food choices without restriction
- Having a variety of dairy options in addition to milk
- Many consumers prefer ready-made vs. DIY
- Access to digestible products for those intolerant to commercial dairy
- Opportunity to obtain specialty farmstead cheeses not available in stores
- Growing preference for unique locally made/artisan food

HB 22 would offer benefits to producers:

- Allow for best usage of seasonal surplus milk
- Farmer can buy more hay per gallon of milk (goats eat even during their dry period!)
- Products can be frozen and stored for later use with no loss in quality
- Specialty products would still be available in winter when fluid milk production drops

HB 22 would offer benefits overall:

- Strengthen Alaska's fragile food system
- Prevent food waste
- Expand Alaskan agriculture by offering a new business opportunity for farmers

This is a timely moment to take action by allowing value-added milk products as proposed by House Bill 22, thus codifying and augmenting what is already allowed under AAC 3.20.19. Prompt passage would provide a perfect opportunity to make the best possible use of upcoming surplus summer milk, by turning it into other highly sought-after dairy products such as cheese, yogurt, and kefir.

Please.... Free the cheese! Thank you for your support.

Respectfully yours,



Cottonwood Creek Farm
Wasilla, Alaska



Preserving farmland for future generations

February 16, 2021

Dear Representative Tarr;

Thank you for your continued service to our great State during this 32nd Legislative Session. I appreciate your dedication and am always grateful for your efforts to promote our agriculture industry.

As you know, Alaska Farmland Trust envisions a thriving agriculture industry that improves the food system for the benefit of all Alaskans. On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Alaska Farmland Trust, I am writing to express our support of HB 22. Thank you for once again drafting this legislation that will reduce barriers and allow for increased opportunity, enabling Alaskan producers to innovate and diversify their income streams.

The pandemic has resulted in more Alaskans seeking out local food and agriculture products. I heard from dozens of Alaskan farmers & ranchers that the demand in 2020 for their products was higher than they had *ever* experienced. As many Alaskans are focusing on becoming more resilient and less reliant on outside imports, any opportunity for industry expansion should be embraced.

HB 22 provides for safe, traceable access to Alaskan dairy products that are in high demand. It provides producers the ability to increase sales and reach new customers which ultimately makes our food system and our agriculture industry stronger.

Should you have any questions, need testimony or further evidence of support, please don't hesitate to contact me at amypettit@akfarmland.com or (907) 355-2706.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Amy Pettit".

Amy Pettit
Executive Director