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HB 298: Alaska Food Strategy Task Force

Sponsor Statement

HB 298 establishes the Alaska Food Strategy Task Force, a multidisciplinary task force on Alaska's food systems and sovereignty with the goal of improving food security for the long-term benefit of Alaska's communities, economy, and environment. Sitting members will come from various communities and interests and be representative of Alaska's diverse population.

Alaska faces both significant challenges and opportunities with respect to food systems and food security. We are a geographically remote state with expansive borders but have millions of acres of arable land. We rely heavily on food imports, but also have thriving traditions of hunting, fishing, and gathering and a robust seafood industry. We are increasingly susceptible to shifts in hydrological regimes and forest fires but are also home to an abundance of fresh water and have a future of extended growing seasons.

The Alaska Food Strategy Task Force seeks to take advantage of our strengths and provide sound, data-driven policy recommendations to grow our food system. It will do this by providing policy, legislation, and implementation strategy recommendations for strengthening Alaska's food systems in six integrated focus areas:

- 1) sustainably growing the agriculture industry;
- 2) sustainably growing markets for locally grown, locally harvested, and locally processed foods;
- 3) enhancing the climate for food and beverage businesses;
- 4) minimizing food waste and diverting it from the waste stream;
- 5) improving connectivity, efficiencies, and outcomes in state-run programs affecting food availability and access; and
- 6) ensuring food security in rural and urban communities.

HB 298 was created in collaboration with stakeholders such as the Alaska Food Policy Council, the Alaska Farm Bureau, and the Food Bank of Alaska, who want to grow Alaska's food system and economy. It looks to find long-term solutions and untapped economic potential for our state. I hope you can join me in supporting this bill and urge you to reach out to my office with any questions or concerns.