

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, INTERNATIONAL
TRADE AND TOURISM

March 27, 2007

5:35 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Carl Gatto
Representative Andrea Doll
Representative Bob Lynn
Representative Kyle Johansen
Representative Mark Neuman

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Mike Doogan
Representative Vic Kohring

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 132

"An Act designating the first Tuesday of May as Alaska Agriculture Day."

- MOVED HB 132 OUT OF COMMITTEE

PRESENTATION BY ALASKA STATE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE: OVERVIEW OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 132

SHORT TITLE: AGRICULTURE DAY

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S) REPRESENTATIVE GATTO

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|----------|-----|---------------------------------|
| 02/14/07 | (H) | READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS |
| 02/14/07 | (H) | EDT, RES |
| 03/27/07 | (H) | EDT AT 5:00 PM CAPITOL 106 |

WITNESS REGISTER

VICTORIA NAEGELE, Volunteer Director
Alaska Agriculture in the Classroom;
Information Specialist

Alaska Association of Conservation Districts
Palmer, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 132.

ACTION NARRATIVE

CHAIR MARK NEUMAN called the House Special Committee on Economic Development, International Trade and Tourism meeting to order at [5:35:25 PM](#). Representatives Gatto, Lynn, Johansen, and Neuman were present at the call to order. Representative Doll arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 132-AGRICULTURE DAY

[5:35:55 PM](#)

CHAIR NEUMAN announced that the first order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 132, "An Act designating the first Tuesday of May as Alaska Agriculture Day."

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REPRESENTATIVE GATTO, sponsor of HB 132, Alaska Agriculture Day, presented the bill. Representative Gatto informed the committee that HB 132 declares the first Tuesday in May as Alaska Agriculture Day.

CHAIR NEUMAN asked about the proposed events on Agriculture Day.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO replied that schools will be involved through field trips to operational farms in their communities. In addition, school activities may include starting seeds in the classroom and planting seedlings on Agriculture Day. Children will then be encouraged to continue exploring horticulture at home. Representative Gatto noted that Alaska has very few young people who want to work in farming, or perhaps as veterinarians, in the future.

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CHAIR NEUMAN noted that agriculture adds \$50 million annually to the state's economy.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO added that the \$50 million estimate does not include private gardens and may be a low estimate.

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REPRESENTATIVE LYNN commented that Alaska has many great natural resources. He opined that agriculture is a forgotten and small resource, but it can become more significant to the economy with support.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO shared his vision of children learning to recognize the origin of the food purchased in retail stores.

CHAIR NEUMAN stated that he works extremely hard to obtain more recognition of the value of Alaska's agriculture.

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REPRESENTATIVE JOHANSEN commented on the need to encourage youth to be involved in agriculture, and asked what agriculture means to the community of Palmer.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO replied that Palmer is "cosmopolitan" by Alaska standards, although farmers and their equipment are commonly seen downtown. The Mat-Su valley is recognized as the historical site of the beginning of agriculture in Alaska during the rural colonization in the 1930s. Exhibits at the Palmer Museum recreate the lives of the colonists, and the community celebrates its history with fairs and parades. Representative Gatto continued to say that Palmer is a recognized farming area and agriculture is a large part of the community.

CHAIR NEUMAN noted that the University of Alaska experimental farm has been severely depleted due to the lack of funding.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO explained that the University of Alaska sold a portion of its property to support the university. He expressed his belief that much of the farmland will be replaced by residences. However, the opportunity still exists to purchase the agricultural rights to the land to prevent changes in land use.

CHAIR NEUMAN stated that he strongly supports the preservation of farmland.

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REPRESENTATIVE GATTO relayed that there is a golf course nearby, also.

REPRESENTATIVE JOHANSEN asked if land-loss is a trend in the Palmer area.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO answered yes; there is a very strong trend toward converting farmland to homes.

CHAIR NEUMAN expressed his concern that fertile land is sold for home sites.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO asked about the availability of farmland in Juneau.

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REPRESENTATIVE DOLL shared her understanding that Juneau farmland was mostly dairy land, and that the dairy is no longer there.

REPRESENTATIVE GATTO opined that loss of agricultural land occurs statewide.

CHAIR NEUMAN commented that a state economist observed that the loss of agriculture can not be recovered.

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VICTORIA NAEGELE, Volunteer Director, Alaska Agriculture in the Classroom; Information Specialist (Alaska AITC), Alaska Association of Conservation Districts (AACD), began her testimony by giving a brief history of Alaska Agriculture Day. Alaska AITC is a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) program funded by the Alaska Farm Bureau and the AACD. Alaska Agriculture Day was first observed in 2006, after passage of a legislative resolution. This bill will make the first Tuesday in May a permanent and official observation and will give Alaska Agriculture in the Classroom and other organizations a recognized occasion to celebrate the state's agricultural history and its potential. Ms. Naegele informed the committee that activities in 2006 included school presentations by 4-H Clubs and an open house at the Palmer Future Farmers of America club. In addition, money was raised for scholarships and school events were held around the state. This year there will be a literacy project. Ms. Naegele concluded by calling the committee's attention to the importance of reconnecting Alaska's students with the sources of their food, fiber, and shelter. She urged the committee to support HB 132 and overall efforts to support agricultural literacy in Alaska.

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CHAIR NEUMAN asked what Southeast committee members can do to promote agriculture in their communities.

MS. NAEGELE replied that while there is a limited amount of agriculture in Southeast, it is important for children to know about industry and agriculture in other parts of the state.

CHAIR NEUMAN closed public testimony.

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REPRESENTATIVE LYNN moved to report HB 132 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes. There being no objection, HB 132 was reported from the House Special Committee on Economic Development, International Trade and Tourism.

[5:53:19 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Economic Development, International Trade and Tourism meeting was adjourned at 5:53 p.m.