



MEMORANDUM

Department of Natural Resources

STATE OF ALASKA
Division of Agriculture

TO: Board of Agriculture
& Conservation

DATE: February 22, 2011

FROM: Franci Havemeister
Director

SUBJECT: Director's Report
February, 2011

Agricultural Revolving Loan Fund (ARLF)

Staff has been processing 3 loan applications, 4 loan disbursements, 1 loan default, 3 AGO assignments, 2 loan closings, 1 loan servicing, 1 closed file, ARLF financial services reports, ARLF interest rates and ARLF Procedure Manual.

Inspection

- Staff completed 20 FFV 301 inspections representing 9939 packages & 534,799 pounds of product
- Staff completed 5 FFV 300 commercial inspections representing 622 containers.
- Staff discussed and addressed several calls from the public regarding Phytosanitary certificates.
- Staff conducted 7 grocery store visits to check grade on potatoes and discuss quality issues.
- Staff participated in 8 full day webinar based inspector training sessions in preparation / support of participation in the New Inspector Training School.
- Inspection staff has been busy covering inspections during the absence of staff at training.
- Staff conducted farm visits to discuss potato issues and check grade on local potatoes.
- Staff provided assistance with shipping point inspections and to ensure phytosanitary requirements are being met on seed potatoes to be exported to China at the Brasier farm in Delta junction. These inspections consisted of identifying and following inspection sampling protocols, tolerance percentages and allowable defects. In addition to this, grade defects were discussed with the crew and any concerns were addressed. Verification of van trailers, tagging and container requirements were also noted for the phytosanitary certification.

Regulatory

- Staff is completing the State of Alaska, Quality Manual which is a USDA Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) requirement for state signatories of the State National Harmonization Program (SNHP) for Seed Potatoes. The SNHP Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) requires that states provide USDA APHIS a Quality Manual in Article 5, Cooperator Responsibilities. Article 5 sec. 6 reads that the cooperator state will "provide to APHIS a quality manual describing seed certification procedures, pest tolerances and testing methodologies, together with mechanisms for ensuring compliance. The quality manual shall consist of the most current certified seed potato standards for each certifying entity and a brief handbook outlining the various standards and protocols for disease testing."
- Staff attended the Alaska Pest Risk Committee. The Committee discussed the USDA/APHIS proposed rule "Importation of Wood Packing Material From Canada" that would amend the current regulation which would remove the exemption that allows wood packing material from Canada to enter the US without first meeting the treatment and marking requirements that apply to wood packing material from all other countries." In addition to this, a USDA Firewood Risk Analysis Assessment was discussed that identified Anchorage, Alaska as having imported over \$28,000 in firewood from Canada in 2009. The committee is also seeking participation in a multi agency operation (as per one of the work plan objectives for 2011) at Haines and Alcan. More information on this will be discussed at the April meeting.

- Staff provided the Kodiak Soil and Water Conservation District (KSWD) a newsletter item on Potato Late Blight and the requirements for potato seed certification for the Winter newsletter. KSWD requested this information due to the recent concern of potato seed sources for the new hoop house growers.
- Staff discussed potato labeling requirements with local wholesaler and inspected final label to ensure it met the State's requirements.
- Staff fielded several calls related to Organic Certification in Alaska.
- Staff reviewed and approved USDA permits for interstate movement of plant products into Alaska.
- Staff is continuing to work with Alaska Seed Potato producers on the export of seed potatoes to China. Staff has provided consultation and phytosanitary seed certification and marketing information to a broad group involved in making this export to China happen.
- Staff has been conducting hiring and recruitment activities for a plant health position.
- Staff has been working with other states to address projects proposed under the Farm bill. It is still unclear if congress and USDA will be able to get acceptable funding language in the continuing resolution bill. As the 2011 field season approaches we need to begin initiating plans to complete proposed 2011 projects.

Marketing & Development

- Staff is developing a strategic plan for the Farm to School (FTS) program with input from expert mentors in FTS efforts in other states. Staff is organizing an advisory group with representatives from Department of Environmental Conservation, Child Nutrition Services, and Division of Agriculture, to develop guidelines for school food service professionals to utilize school garden and local foods in the school meal programs.
- In January, marketing staff prepared for and hosted the first FTS Summit. There were 52 people in attendance (in person and via webinar) representing a wide variety of stakeholders (school food service, farmers, state agencies, community members, and university).
- Staff attended meetings and received mentoring from the Oregon Department of Agriculture, FTS program manager and the National Farm to School Network, western regional lead. Oregon State is a leader in the FTS movement and has a wealth of information to offer.
- Staff has met with numerous stakeholders to discuss potential collaborations and ideas for the FTS program including: Ag in the Classroom, producers and distributors, school food service professionals, representatives of the farming community, and more. Staff has toured 3 schools in the Fairbanks district to gain a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities the FTS will face.
- Staff has attended webinars and teleconferences hosted by the National Good Food Network (NGFN), Alaska Community Agriculture (ACAA), Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP), and National Farm to School Network (NFSN).
- Marketing staff continue to work with the Directors office as well as representatives from the Dept's of Commerce and Health & Social Services to address questions and concerns regarding the Product Preference Program and the utilization of Alaska Grown products in State institutions.
- Staff has been working with other agencies in the development of an Egg Handling guidance document to provide greater information to producers, consumers and others.
- Staff attended and spoke at the Greenhouse Nursery Conference and the Alaska Peony Growers Association winter meeting.
- Staff continues to work with the Alaska Farmers Market Association (AFMA), hosting teleconferences and coordinating meetings.
- Staff approved two new farms for the Alaska Grown program.

Northern Region

- Staff held a meeting with Delta Farmers, Director Franci Havemeister and DNR Deputy Commissioner Ed Fogels at Division of Agriculture office in Fairbanks to discuss options for preventing or reducing crop damage by Delta Bison and for getting legislative support for bison fencing.
- Staff attended the Alaska Greenhouse and Nursery Conference in Anchorage.
- Staff gave a presentation on how to interpret soil sample analyses at the Peony Growers Conference in Anchorage.
- Staff served as Science Fair judge for ICS school in Fairbanks.
- Completed inspection of 100.775 tons of certified seed potatoes shipped to China.
- Completed inspection of 16 tons of certified seed potatoes to be sold to the Dept. of Corrections and Nurseries in Anchorage.
- Staff attended Land Sales and Contract Administration Unit Training in Anchorage.
- Staff had meeting with DNR Division of Mining Land & Water (DMLW) concerning a joint effort to sell state agriculture and settlement lands along the Elliott Highway.
- Staff held discussions DMLW section chief concerning updates to the land sales procedures manual.
- Staff gave a presentation to the Denali Borough concerning agriculture land sale in Kobe North
- Staff assisted farmers with updates to their farm conservation plan

Plant Materials Center

Seed Cleaning & Conditioning

- Staff has processed approximately 18,000 lbs. of clean seed so far this season.
- Staff is just finishing up the Nortran Hairgrass in the Seed House and will move on to the Alpine Bluegrass lots next.
- The Small Lot Facility has finished the last of the spruce cone cleaning for the season which produced over 13 lots and 50 lbs. of clean spruce seed.

Rural Village Seed Production Project (RVSP)

- Staff members traveled on December 7-8, 2010 to the Native Village of Hooper Bay. Assistant City Administrator, Cecil Riffe, contacted our staff some time back and due to the community's unique location, The Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge, our team was highly interested. This area will pose a challenge, however, we speculate that it will potentially open many doors for rare and hard to find riparian and wetland revegetation species. In addition to meeting with the Hooper Bay City Council, ET. Al., RVSP staff met with Hooper Bay's corporation board, The SeaLion Corporation, in Bethel, Alaska. Upon leaving that meeting, RVSP staff felt confident the Corporation board would approve of the project.
- January 4-5, 2011: RVSP staff members traveled to Aniak, Alaska to meet with the Traditional Council. RVSP staff has been in contact with Traditional Council members, Wayne and Angie Morgan, and their office is excited about the opportunity to work with the RVSP. The Aniak Traditional Council represents serious potential for a long lasting business relationship in the seed production arena. The council has ownership of the Aniak KNA Farm. Many agricultural projects have taken place on the farm, supporting the local community. However, the space available is exactly what the RVSP is looking for in rural Alaska. RVSP staff is excited about this opportunity to work with the Aniak Traditional Council and form a quality business plan in the coming months.
- The RVSP team will be choosing a date in April 2011 to invite members from the communities to the Plant Materials Center for a 2 day workshop and training session. This will be a great time for local representatives to get hands on experience with seed cleaning machines and ample time to discuss project specifics with our trained staff.
- Currently, budget details for the communities have officially signed on with are being created. RVSP staff has grouped the 6 communities into either large or small scale projects, depending on the size the local council would like to attempt in the first season.
- The Native Village of Manley Hot Springs is the most recent RVSP candidate to be awarded funding for the 2011 spring/summer season.

Publications Update

- Staff completed the Annual Report published in January; and available on Plants.Alaska.gov.
- Plants.Alaska.gov is being updated to conform to the DNR's new look and feel. Content pages are being added and updated in this format.
- Staff is working on a training manual to support the Rural Village Seed Production Project.

Invasive Weeds and Pests

- Staff presented information about gravel pit surveys completed and weed free gravel certification to the Alaska Rock Products Association and Alaska Miners Association.
- Staff completed final reporting for the spotted knapweed grant funded through USFWS with American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds.
- Staff attended Alaska Pest Risk Assessment Committee meeting.
- Staff attended the Alaska Greenhouse and Nursery Conference.
- Staff released the strategic plan for public comment. The comment period close February 25th.

Soils Laboratory and Erosion Control

- Soil field collection is still currently on hold until spring break-up. However, an effort to expand the chemical testing capabilities for the micro and trace nutrients is currently being worked on.
- In December the soils lab added a texture analysis machine in order to accurately separate clay, silt, and coarse to fine sand. This tool will provide needed texture data for assisting in agronomic and soil erosion control efforts.
- In January and until spring break-up the soils laboratory will be preparing for several spring and summer projects, such as the rural village seed project, various erosion control projects, and soil collection for various seed growers.

Plant Materials Center Revegetation Program

Interior Revegetation Guide

- The Interior Revegetation & Erosion Control Guide is proceeding nicely. The climate, geography, impacts, and introduction sections have been completed and are ready for incorporation into the guide.
- Staff is working with individuals from around the state to assist with case studies that can be included into the guide.

Forage Manual

- Staff held a meeting in January with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) about putting together a forage manual for Alaska. This manual will assist the public in choosing plant species for pasture and hay use.
- Included in the manual will be approximately 30 grass and legume foraging species. Each species will be detailed in-depth.

Foundation Seed

- Pesticide Permit is in the review stage with DEC. Primary changes from previous years include posting no-trespassing signs around the perimeter of the approximately 150 acres of cropland which will be treated with pesticides. These signs will go up April 15 and come down Sept. 30. The number of pesticides to be used is also being drastically reduced.
- Staff participated in the Greenhouse and Nursery Conference in January. Nurseries and growers were contacted to establish whether they wanted to be included in the updated Native Plant Source Directory.
- Grain and grass seed markets are being monitored to enable accurate pricing of our seed for the April sale.

Other PMC Activities

- Aleutian Shield Fern's are beginning to produce prothalli.
- All the seed in the Seed Storage Building are now in tubs to prevent mouse damage.