The Division of Agriculture Activities

June 01, 2011

Find us on the web at:
http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag

Director's Office

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To remove your name from our e-newsletter list, click here.

To be added to our e-newsletter list, click here.

Questions or Comments?
E-Mail or call 907-761-3864.

Directors Note

Spring has sprung and summer is almost officially upon us. It still amazes me how quickly we turn from brown and dormant to green and thriving. It is a busy time of year for all Alaskan's, but I encourage you to take a few minutes and read through the newsletter to stay up to date on local agriculture events, issues and topics.

Once again, it is time to nominate a farm family that epitomizes the spirit of Alaskan agriculture. The Alaska State Fair is looking for nominations for the Alaska Farm Family of the Year award. If you know a special family or families that fit that description, please send your nomination(s) to amy.pettit@alaska.gov by June 30th, 2011. For more information about the nomination requirements, go to http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/Index/FarmFMR.pdf.

An outbreak of Equine Herpesvirus (EHV-1) was identified in some horses after attending the National Cutting Horse Association's (NCHA) Western National Championships in Ogden, Utah, on April 30 – May 8th , 2011. The affected horses reside in a number of western states, including Colorado, Arizona, California, Idaho, Utah, Oregon, Washington and Western Canada. Animal health officials in other states are working closely with USDA, NCHA, and local vets to check and monitor horses that attended the event. For more information go to http://www.dec.state.ak.us/press_releases/2011/2011_05_20_Equine Herpesvirus.pdf .

A meeting was held May 12th in Anchorage with the Cooperative Extension Service, Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and the Division of Agriculture. This meeting was scheduled at the request of DEC Director Kristan Ryan, with the purpose of pulling the above agencies together to work cooperatively to assist the agriculture community. It was a timely discussion and one outcome of the meeting was the general consensus that a monthly teleconference with the Division of Agriculture, DEC and the agriculture industry would be beneficial. The first teleconference is scheduled for June 10th at 8:00 a.m. and DEC's State Veterinarian Dr. Bob Gerlach and Environmental Program Manager Ron Klein will be available to answer questions. I encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity and call in at 1-800-315-6338 (pass code at prompt 121#). This is a pilot program, and if industry is interested, will be scheduled on a monthly basis to address issues and questions of concern. If you have a particular topic of interest for future meetings, submit them to me at Franci.Havemeister@alaska.gov. Another development was the decision to include within our newsletter a new section from DEC, addressing agriculture related topics.

Please note that June 19th – 25th, 2011 is Alaska Invasive Weeds Awareness Week. Please do your part to prevent the spread of noxious and invasive weeds and help assure that future generations will enjoy Alaska's pristine environment.

Just a quick reminder, the Agricultural Revolving Loan Fund (ARLF) continues to revolve successfully and has loan funds available to assist with your agriculture endeavors. The Board of Agriculture and Conservation, responsible for the oversight of the fund, and the Division of Agriculture encourages you to utilize this fund, whose main objective is to promote the development of agriculture as an industry throughout the state by means of moderate interest rate loans. For more information please go to http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag_arlf.htm.

I hope you had a safe and enjoyable Memorial Day Weekend!

-Franci Havemeister

"Farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil and you're a thousand miles from the corn field."
-Dwight D. Eisenhower

Agriculture Calendar

- 6/8 - 6/10: **Global Food Alaska 2011 Showcase & Conference**, Kenai (details here)
  Info: 563-0154, 888-339-7429
- 6/10 (8:00 AM): **DEC / Division of Agriculture teleconference** (statewide)
  To Participate: 1-800-315-6338; pass code:121#

As we learn about new agriculture events throughout Alaska, we will add the details to the calendar. If you have an event that you would like to add, please contact Lora Haralson.

Marketing Section

Egg Production Manual, Farmers Markets, Chef at the Market

Calling all Egg Producers!

The Division of Ag is pleased to announce the availability of a new manual for those involved in poultry production. This document, entitled Safe Egg Handling for Small Egg Laying Flocks and Operations, covers a wide variety of topics, with a focus on egg production. You can find it on our web page at http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/Inspection/LPM00344.pdf.

Farmers Markets across Alaska

Farmers markets are opening all over Alaska, with 31 markets so far in 2011. There is at least one regularly scheduled farmers market in each of the following cities:

- Anchorage (7)
- Bethel
- Copper Valley
- Delta Junction
- Dillingham
- Eagle River (2)
- Ester
- Fairbanks
- Gustavus
- Haines
- Homer
- Houston
- Juneau
- Kenai
- Kenny Lake
- Kodiak
- Palmer
- Petersburg
- Sitka
- Soldotna (2)
- Wasilla (2)
- Willow

If you know of a market not currently on our list, please let us know as soon as possible. We are excited to promote and support them in any way possible. There are two exciting developments in the world of farmers market outreach:

Farmers Market Resource Manual

The Division has released a new Farmers Market Resource Manual. We have worked extensively with staff from the Cooperative Extension Service and the DEC Division of Environmental Health to provide a variety of resources and information to help market managers and vendors be successful. You can find the Farmers Market Resource Manual at http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag_FMM.htm.

Wanted: A Few Good Chefs

The Division is seeking Chefs throughout Alaska to apply for funding through the new *Chef at the Market* program. The program has two primary goals: to bring attention and additional customers to Alaskan farmers markets, and to teach consumers new ways to cook and prepare Alaska Grown food products. If you are a chef or market manager interested in learning more, check out the program announcement here.

Farm-to-School Program Unveils New Logo, Availability of Grants:

The Alaska Farm to School (FTS) program continues to grow and develop. We have exceeded our goal of 200 people in the contact database.

Farm to School Facebook Page Launched

Are you on facebook? The Farm to School program has launched a facebook page. We invite you to stop by. You can find the FTS facebook page at this link.

Alaska Agriculture Day

The FTS program was thrilled to be a part of Alaska Agriculture Day. In Fairbanks, we participated by recruiting volunteers and also doing outreach to approximately 150 students. This year, the activity we promoted was working with students to teach them how to identify healthy potato products. Students were also educated about how and why to plant seed potatoes. Feedback indicated that both students and teachers had a wonderful time and learned a lot!

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Marketing Section

Farm to School Grant Program

The Division of Agriculture is soliciting proposals for Farm to School (FTS) projects promoting any activity that connects students, teachers, and school food service staff with products grown and produced in Alaska. The Division of Agriculture intends to award multiple contracts from this solicitation. Maximum state funds to be allocated per project are $1000.

The purpose of the FTS project is:

- to increase the understanding of Alaska youth about how food gets from its original form to the plate;
- to promote better food choices, and
- to encourage availability and preference for food grown and harvested in Alaska.

Applicants should submit proposals using the proposal requirements listed in the application. The entire application package can be found on our web site, at www.dnr.alaska.gov/ag, under "Grants".

Proposals must be received at either the Central or Northern Region Division of Agriculture offices (addresses are listed below) by 5:00 pm on Friday, June 10, 2011.

Main (Central) Office

1800 Glenn Highway, Suite 12
Palmer, Alaska 99645
Fax: 907-745-7242

Northern Region Office

1648 S. Cushman St. #201
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701
Fax: 907-328-1951

New Farm to School Program Logo

Participants in the latest Farm to School summit got a chance to vote on the new FTS logo, and we are very happy to share the winning design. Look for the logo on promotional items, posters and other media.

For more information about the Alaska Farm-to-School program, or if you have any questions, please contact Johanna Herron at Johanna.herron@alaska.gov or (907) 374-3714.

Inspection Section

Inspection Section Welcomes New Agricultural Phytosanitary Inspector

The Inspection Section welcomes recent hire Leo Kazeck to the Division of Agriculture's Inspection section.

Leo was a Plant Services and Fruit & Vegetable inspector in Colorado for over 16 years, and was responsible for many programs involving Agriculture. He also inspected and issued Phytosanitary certificates for a variety of Agriculture products from the Eastern side of Washington State for 2 years. Leo still has a farm partnership in Colorado with goats, cattle, and a natural goat cheese processor.

Leo's extensive agriculture experience and contacts will be a great contribution to the Division of Agriculture. He is looking forward to fly-fishing in "all" Alaskan waters.

The Division of Agriculture's Inspection Section can be reached at (907) 761-3857.

Land Sales & Grazing Leases

http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag_sales.htm

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Northern Region / Pest Detection Section

Terrestrial Mollusk Survey

Large black exotic slugs have been moving North in Alaska. Other than home gardens, very little damage has been reported, and several people have asked "Why are they a concern?" In fact, the main food source of the exotic slugs appears to be dog feces and dandelion seeds. However, in some communities, such as Cordova and Ketchikan, the slugs appear to be moving out into the native vegetation, and we aren't sure what the resulting impacts may be. The slugs usually show up around plant nurseries where potted plants and balled and burlapped trees have been imported. They also seem to be associated with old fish canneries where fish totes and other shipping containers have been offloaded.

European red slug, Ketchikan

There is a European black slug called '*Arion ater*' and a European red slug called '*Arion rufus*'. *Arion ater* has never been reported in the United States, and numerous people have assumed that the exotic black slug moving North in Alaska is *Arion ater*. However, geneticists tell us that the European black slug in Alaska is not *Arion ater*, but most likely a black color cohort of *Arion rufus* (which has been reported in the Western United States for many years) or possibly an ARVC complex, hybrid of the *Arion rufus* and *A. vulgaris* species. The Division of Agriculture has been submitting specimens to a diagnostic laboratory on the east coast to try to sort out this identification.

European red slug, black color phase, Cordova

Photos: C. Knight, Alaska Division of Agriculture

The Division of Agriculture has conducted slug and snail surveys in South-Eastern Alaska in 2007, in parts of South Central Alaska in 2008, in the Anchorage basin and Matanuska Valley in 2009, and Southwestern Alaska in 2010. The Division will conduct further surveys in Southeast Alaska during June, 2011. Slugs are not regulated pests, but may be of increasing concern as they move into Agricultural areas and outward from coastal communities into native vegetation.

Native banana slug, Ketchikan

The University of Alaska Fairbanks Cooperative Extension Service has a publication with more information on slugs, and resources to controlling slugs in your garden. This publication is available online, at www.uaf.edu/ces/publications-db/catalog/anr/PMC-10070.pdf.

For more information about the slug and snail surveys in Alaska, please contact the Northern Region office, at (907) 328 1950, or email Curtis.Knight@Alaska.gov.

Plant Materials Center

http://plants.alaska.gov/

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Plant Materials Center

Purple Loosestrife Replacement Program

Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) has a long history in North America, first arriving in the 1800's as a contaminant of ship ballast and as an ornamental. The plant received notoriety for being a hardy perennial with showy purple flowers. During the 20th century, it became apparent that purple loosestrife was spreading far beyond where it was planted.

Loosestrife has become a major weed of North America, where it invades wetlands forming monocultures - areas dominated by a single species of plant. Loosestrife crowds out native species important to nesting and foraging waterfowl. It grows in standing water crowding out submerged aquatic plants. In the Northern United States and Canada, so much loosestrife is present that many states are using insects to biologically control the species.

Loosestrife seed requires relative high temperatures (60-70 degrees F) to germinate which was thought to prevent it from becoming invasive in Alaska. However, an infestation in Anchorage's Westchester Lagoon in 2005 that caught everyone off guard. Whether due to changes in climate, adaptation on the part of the plant, or both - Purple loosestrife has shown its potential to cause problems in Southcentral Alaska similar to those that it has caused in most of North America.

Every year, a team of invasive plant managers and volunteers visited the infestation in Westchester lagoon to dig plants up before they set seed. The population decreased in density, but at first began sprouting up in completely new areas of the lagoon. In 2009, after several years of control work the loosestrife finally is confined to just a few remaining plants.

Loosestrife is grown as an ornamental plant throughout Alaska. Invasive weed managers recognize that gardeners plant to bring beauty to their homes and share that beauty with their neighbors. The Division of Agriculture, with support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has initiated a "Replace Your Loosestrife Today" project in the Anchorage area.

The Division of Agriculture purchased ornamental plants varieties identified by the Cooperative Extension Service's horticulture staff as alternatives to loosestrife in the garden. These replacement species, Pink Frosted Liatris and Vibrant Blue Delphinium, were chosen because they have similar flowering times and stature. We are offering these replacements free of charge to anyone in the Anchorage area who is willing to dig up and dispose of their loosestrife. So far, the Copper Whale Inn located in downtown Anchorage has taken us up on the offer. More will hopefully follow their lead this summer. If this project is successful in Anchorage we may expand it to other parts of Alaska.

For more information about the Purple loosestrife replacement program, please contact Gino Graziano, at (907) 745-8127, or Gino.Graziano@alaska.gov.

Photo: G. Graziano, Alaska Division of Agriculture

Purple loosestrife infestation in Anchorage's Westester Lagoon, 2007.

Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation:

Division of Environmental Health

Food Safety Update

The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has heard a lot of interest from Alaskan's who want to sell homemade foods at farmers markets or have small community events without having to obtain a permit. Those concerned individuals will be interested in some possible changes to the food safety regulations in Alaska.

The DEC's Food Safety & Sanitation Program is putting the final touches on proposed amendments to the Alaska Food Code (*18 AAC 31*). These amendments would eliminate or reduce permitting requirements for certain public events and identified 'low risk' foods sold directly to consumers. DEC is also modifying the permit exemption language to make it clearer and easier to read.

Low risk foods include food such as baked goods, nuts, confections, dried herbs, and teas that do not contain ingredients susceptible to the growth of pathogens that cause food borne illness. Foods such as smoked meats, canned vegetables and dairy products pose a greater risk for food-borne illness, and would still require a permit to be sold.

Our proposed amendments to the Alaska Food Code also provide for limited exemptions for food served at public events such as fund-raisers and community potlucks. Event coordinators will still be responsible for ensuring that the food is safely made and served.

This page is a new element of the Division of Agriculture newsletter, featuring regular updates from the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation. Food safety and sanitation issues, environmental health, and other matters of concern to Alaskan agricultural producers will be addressed in this section. We welcome the DEC to the newsletter.

The proposed regulations will be announced through a public notice process. The DEC will widely disseminate the notice of proposed regulation changes, so that interested Alaskans will have the chance to review and comment on them within the planned 60 day public notice period.

DEC is also planning on having public workshops for individuals who would like to talk with us directly about the proposed changes. We will review all of the comments received, and do our best to incorporate the feedback into the final regulations, so long as they are protective of public health.

The proposed regulations do not include food service establishments operating within the Municipality of Anchorage that have a permit to operate from the Municipality of Anchorage. For further information on municipal requirements, please contact 907-343-4200.

Alaska DEC looks forward to your review and comments on the proposed regulation change during the comment period. For more information on the Food Safety and Sanitation program, please visit the program webpage, at http://www.dec.alaska.gov/eh/fss/.

Photo: K. Krueger, Alaska Division of Agriculture

Food served at farmers markets in Alaska, such as Palmer's Friday Fling, would be affected by the amendments proposed to the Alaska Food Code

Environmental Health

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