The Division of Agriculture Activities

November 03, 2011

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

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Directors Note

The days are shorter, the nights are longer and winter has officially arrived in Alaska. We all breathe a sigh of relief to have survived another busy summer. Whether your summer months are spent driving a tractor or fixing fences, the winter darkness always brings rest.

September and October have flown by, and I was fortunate to have had the opportunity to visit four of the six farm bureau chapters around the state. I requested input on the update to the Division's long range plan, called Building a Sustainable Agriculture Industry, which is available at http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/Index/BuildingaSustainableAgricultureIndustryFINAL.pdf.

In an effort to increase industry involvement, I will be forming a Division of Agriculture Advisory Panel. This panel, representing the many sectors of the Alaskan agriculture community, will be a source of valuable insight to the division as we move toward fulfilling our mission: to "*promote and encourage the development of an agriculture industry*". I look forward to working with this group in the near future.

The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is seeking assistance to develop standards for animal care in Alaska. Please see the DEC section on page 6 for information and website links. Please take advantage of this opportunity to participate in the public process on this important issue.

Many events and meetings are planned in the upcoming month so please also take the time to check out our calendar and note of the upcoming dates.

Happy Thanksgiving!

-Franci Havemeister

"To own a bit of ground, to scratch it with a hoe, to plant seeds and watch their renewal of life - this is the commonest delight of the race, the most satisfactory thing a man can do."

- Charles Dudley Warner.

Agriculture Calendar

- Sat. November 5th: **Alaska Farmers Union Annual Conference** - Elks Lodge, Homer
  Contact: Don (907) 495 5462
- Sat. November 12th: **Alaska Farm Bureau Meeting**: Lands End Resort, Homer
  Details: http://akfb.fb.org
- Mon. November 28th, 1:00pm **Board of Agriculture & Conservation Meeting**: Palmer
  Location: Division of Agriculture Conference Room, 1800 Glenn Highway, Suite 12
  Details: http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/BAC/BACNotice112811.pdf

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

Taste tests confirm: Alaska Grown tastes better!

We all like to assume that Alaskans prefer to eat Alaska Grown products. Two recent (non-scientific) studies have overwhelmingly confirmed this assertion.

- At the 2011 Alaska State Fair in Palmer, the Alaska Farmland Trust conducted a "**Grown Here vs. Flown Here**" taste test each day of the Fair. One thousand eight hundred and sixty-two people participated in the taste-test, with the Alaska Grown item being selected or preferred 65% of the time. The eight different items taste-tested included celery, cauliflower, strawberries, milk, tomatoes, broccoli, radishes, and carrots.
- On October 24th Rabbit Creek Elementary students participated in a Farm-to-School Challenge activity and taste tested Alaska Grown carrots as well as carrots imported from the Lower 48, with the results showing a two to one preference for the Alaska Grown carrots! (Read more about this in the Farm-to-School report.)

What does this mean for you? Use the Alaska Grown logo! Make sure you have signed up for authorized use of the logo and then promote it. Let your customers know that your product is Alaska Grown.

More information about the Alaska Grown program is available online, at dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag_AKGrown.htm. If you have any questions, please contact Amy Pettit at Amy.Pettit@alaska.gov or (907) 761-3864.

Alaska Farm-to-School Program Update

Lessons from the best:

Reflections on Colorado Farm-to-School initiatives

Alaska is still very new to the farm-to-school world, and we are eager to take advantage of knowledge from established programs in other states. Last month, the Alaska Farm-to-School program had the opportunity to learn from two very successful farm-to-school efforts in Colorado; Boulder Valley District and Durango School District. We selected some insights to share.

Advice from School Food Service Directors:

- Start by finding the value in what you want to do differently. Why do you want to serve local food? Some popular reasons include: fresh products, teaching kids about their food, potential cost savings, supporting the local economy, helping the environment by reducing food miles, and decreased reliance on imported foods. Change takes effort and you must find value in it.
- Try a *vegetable bar* instead of a *salad bar*. Start involving younger kids; get vegetatable/salad bars in the elementary schools first.
- Consider purchasing 'distinguished chef' jackets to boost morale and encourage staff recognition.
- Change is most effective in steps. Student preferences shift slowly when new foods are introduced. For example, when moving from cold to hot cereal, start with cream of wheat, move to oatmeal in a year, and then try cracked wheat the following year.

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Alaska Farm-to-School Program Update

- Keep in mind that changes are often easier for the children than for adults. They are ready when you are!

Advice from Food Producers:

- Again, it is crucial you see value in selling your product to the schools. Why sell to the schools? Common reasons include: Offering a superior product, increasing market share, increased visibility in the community, and growth of the business or organization. Schools often have a very small budget and already run a complicated program to feed kids. Try to find out what would make things work most smoothly for them.
- Working with schools takes planning and communication. Be prepared to lay out what you can offer, when it is available, how much is available, and how price competitive you are relative to other suppliers.
- Start small. Establish a system that works well as the first priority.

Kay and Dave James, owners of James Ranch, supply 100% grass fed beef to local schools

- The owners of the James Ranch near Durango, Colorado find it very important to be able to provide 100% grass-fed beef to the school. The school can't pay the regular prices, so the owners compromise and sell meat to a few schools at a price that just covers the cost of processing and distribution. The James Ranch considers it a donation, and are able to afford it because of their strong business and otherwise profitable endeavors.

Food Day

For those of you who missed it, October 24th was National Food Day. There were exiting things happening all over the state. UAF hosted a fun event with Iron Chef Surf vs. Turf Cookoff Challenge, Food Jeopardy, a Taste of Alaska and much more!

In Anchorage the Farm-to-School program held a carrot taste-testing at Rabbit Creek Elementary. Almost 350 students participated in the blind taste test, choosing Alaska Grown carrots 2 to 1 over carrots from the lower 48.

The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Obesity Prevention Program was a co-sponsor of the program. Local chefs Clayton Jones and Allison Arians also generously volunteered their time and expertise to help host the event. Thanks are due as well to VanderWeele Farm, who graciously donated and delivered carrots for the event.

Christine Duprow, a teacher at the school, was the driving force behind the Taste-test idea. Her class was treated to a special carrot dish after lunch, prepared by Chef Clayton Jones. This was a wonderful food day event and students had a lot of fun. The event was also a great opportunity to engage kids about the local food system and educate them about their foods origin.

If you have any questions about the Farm-to-School program, contact Johanna Herron at Johanna.herron@alaska.gov or (907) 374-3714. You can also contact Kristi Krueger at Kristi.Krueger@alaska.gov, or (907) 761-3858.

From left to right: Diane Peck, Christine Duprow, Allison Arians, and Clayton Jones enjoy Alaska Grown carrots from VanderWeele Farm

Land Sales & Grazing Leases

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

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Farm-to-School Challenge

The Farm-to-School Challenge ends at 5pm on Friday Nov. 4th. Anybody that participated in a farm-to-school activity with school kids during the 2011-2012 school year is eligible to apply. For details go to: dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag_challengeFTS.htm.

Farm-to-School activities can be simple: a class lesson about the changes in color of a pumpkin, using the school garden for a lesson in math or science, students tracing the distance travelled by ingredients in their lunch or an art project about food. It is likely that there are Farm-to-School project going on in every school, and we would love to hear about them.

For updates, news, grant opportunities, and announcements join our listserv at: list.state.ak.us/soalists/akfarmtoschool/jl.htm

Inspection Section

Bacterial Ring Rot in Potatoes

Ring rot disease is caused by the bacterium *Clavibacter michiganense*. It causes disease only in potatoes. The disease affects the vascular ring of the potato tuber, thereby resulting in a "ring" of tissue breakdown, which is obvious when the potato is cut crosswise at the stem end.

Symptoms

In severely affected tubers, the vascular ring of the tuber is brown to black, and can contain oozing flesh or empty spaces where the tissue has disintegrated. Dry cracks are often seen on the surface of the tubers. In mild cases, the vascular ring may show only broken brown or black lines, or a yellowish discoloration. In tubers, symptoms may occur either before harvest or in storage. Tubers can be tested to confirm the presence of the disease.

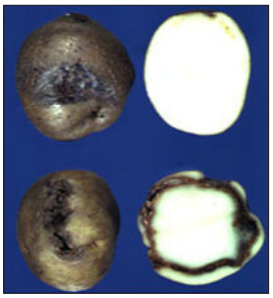
Foliar symptoms usually appear late in the growing season, or may not appear at all. Leaves showing symptoms have yellow areas on leaf margins or between veins which later turn brown, giving the leaves a burned appearance. Stems of plants, when cut at the base, produce a milky excretion when squeezed. Commonly, only one or two stems on a plant develop symptoms.

Cause

Ring rot bacteria are introduced through wounds in the tuber, so the disease is often transmitted from diseased tubers to healthy seed during seed-cutting. Ring rot bacteria can survive for up to five years on many surfaces - harvest and processing machinery, bins and crates, burlap sacks, etc. While the bacteria do not survive in soil in the absence of potato debris, they can survive from season to season in volunteer potato plants, even in temperatures well below freezing. The bacteria can also be transmitted by insects, or through irrigation water or equipment.

Disease Management

1. In order to prevent the spread of disease, plant only certified disease-free seed potatoes.
2. Do not use seed potatoes from a lot in which ring rot was found.
3. Wash and disinfect all cutting and planting equipment before handling seed potatoes, and periodically disinfect knives while cutting seed.
4. If infection by ring rot is confirmed, a thorough disinfection must be done. Dispose of all infected tubers, away from potato production areas. Clean all surfaces of storage areas and all equipment with a strong detergent and a high-pressure washer. Follow up with a disinfectant. Do not plant potatoes for two seasons in any field in which ring rot has been found.



Brown, cheesy decay of the vascular ring of a potato tuber characteristic of ring rot. Severely diseased tubers may show lightly sunken, dry, cracked areas on outer surface.

Ring rot symptoms of the vascular ring often appear only as a broken, sporadically appearing dark line or a continuous, yellowish discoloration

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http://plants.alaska.gov/

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Plant Materials Center

Rural Village Seed Production Project Update

The Rural Village Seed Production Project (RVSPP) has seen many personnel changes over the last year. Unfortunately, we once again have to say goodbye and good luck. **Brianne Blackburn** has been one of the most influential members of this program since its inception. She is not going far, though; she has accepted a position as the Invasive Weed & Agricultural Pest Coordinator here at the PMC.

The RVSPP welcomes Natural Resource Specialist **Rob Carter** to the team. Rob has travelled to some of the participating villages already, and looks forward to seeing some of the progress already made in communities across Alaska.

Speaking of progress; Metlakatla, the easternmost and southernmost RVSPP cooperator, has seeded and is now tending a crop of Bluejoint Reedgrass and Tufted Hairgrass! Congratulations, Metlakatla!

The RVSPP also welcomes the newest cooperator, Manley Village Council/Bean Ridge Corporation in Manley Hot Springs! This is the northernmost RVSPP participant community, located on the Tanana river in Interior Alaska. We look forward to assisting the community in establishing a sustainable native seed production project.

The western Alaskan community of Aniak has been wild harvesting several species and will be drying, cleaning and storing their harvest this winter.

Hooper Bay, the westernmost partner village, has been busy ordering supplies and

equipment, as well as scouting areas to wild harvest next year.

Chignik Lake has identified a wonderful area for cultivating and will be preparing the area for planting in the spring. Supplies and equipment have been purchased.

Pedro Bay, on the north-eastern shores of Lake Illiamna, has made great strides in developing an area for native seed production. A previously wooded plot roughly 5 acres in size has been cleared of vegetation and is ready for planting in the spring. A building for equipment storage and seed cleaning has also been constructed. Pedro Bay's RVSPP staff continues to demonstrate the initiative and work ethic necessary to make their project a success.

For more information about the Rural Village Seed Production Project, visit plants.alaska.gov/rvspp, or contact the Plant Materials Center at (907) 745-4469.

Photo: Dawn Pringle | Metakatla Indian Community

Emergent Bluejoint reedgrass and Tufted hairgrass crop at a planting site in Metlakatla

Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation:
Division of Environmental Health

Upcoming DEC Animal Care Standards Workshops

The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) State Veterinarian Office is hosting a series of public workshops to develop animal care standards. DEC was tasked by the legislature with the development of animal care standards, to guide private veterinarians and law enforcement as they investigate animal cruelty cases. These standards will be part of a comprehensive revision of the state Animal Health Regulations (18 AAC 36). They will establish what constitutes adequate feeding, watering, and environment for common livestock and domestic animals.

Workshops are open to the public and anyone interested is invited to attend. A working draft of proposed Animal Care Standards can be found at: dec.alaska.gov/eh/docs/vet/ACS/animal_care_stds_5-16-11.pdf.

The first workshop was held on Thursday, October 27th in Anchorage. It was well attended, both in person and via statewide teleconference. This workshop established five animal categories for focus groups:

- Avian (to include poultry),
- Captive/Exotic (reindeer, elk, musk ox, zoo/exhibition animals, llamas,
- Domestic Pets (working/sled dogs, performance animals, mice),
- Horses,
- Livestock (bovine, swine, sheep, goats)

Future workshops will focus on one of the animal categories at a time. A general standards group will also be developed after all of the animal categories have been considered separately. The dates and times, workshop agendas, as well as summaries of previous workshops, will be posted on our website at: dec.alaska.gov/eh/vet/AnimalCareWorkshop.html.

Photo: Jay Fuller | Alaska DEC

A herd of cow elk at the Northern Lights Elk Ranch in Palmer, Alaska

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