



# The Division of Agriculture Activities

May 27, 2010

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<http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag>

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To remove your name from our e-newsletter list, [click here](#).

Questions or Comments?  
[E-Mail](#) me or call 907-761-3858.



## [A Note from Governor Sean Parnell](#)

On Alaska Agriculture Day, I signed HB 70 into law. This bill establishes the Farm-to-School Program within the Department of Natural Resources and was created to facilitate increased procurement of Alaska-grown products by schools. This bill works hand-in-hand with the current law that requires all agencies receiving State monies to purchase agricultural products harvested in the state if they meet the guidelines required by the Alaska Product Preference Program.

I encourage you to join the Alaska Product Preference Program. By joining this program, your company and products will be listed on the Alaska Office for Economic Development website. This is significant as, when State monies are used, Alaskan products receive preference. Alaskan agricultural products will receive a seven percent price preference, meaning your product is priced within seven percent of similar available "outside" product; and the State institution must therefore purchase your product instead.

The Department of Corrections has partnered with the agricultural community and has increased local purchasing and consumption of Alaska grown products. Producers have seen increased sales which benefit all Alaskans through more local job opportunities, and by keeping Alaska's dollars in our local communities.

As Governor, I am committed to growing Alaska's economy and supporting local businesses. That is why I support the Alaska Grown Product Preference Law and appreciate State agencies following the Alaska Product Preference Law as outlined in AS 36.15.050.

Governor Sean Parnell

## [Director's Note](#)

June is finally here. The longer days are definitely a welcome sight and once again Alaska has fully awakened from its winter slumber. It never ceases to amaze me how seemingly overnight the fields turn from brown to green, the perennials come alive, the leaves appear – Alaska is truly amazing!

Those longer days bring many demands, but I encourage to take a few minutes and read, or at least skim, the newsletter in its entirety. This will help keep you informed and up to date on issues and events in the industry and the division. This month you will find information on the Agricultural Land Sale in the Northern Region, nominations being sought for "Farm Family of the Year – 2011", and the BAC is asking for comments concerning Mt. McKinley Meat & Sausage and much more. Your participation and input is crucial.

Have a safe and happy Memorial Day weekend.

Franci

"Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous and they are tied to their country and wedded to its liberty and interests by the most lasting bands." –Thomas Jefferson, Letter to John Jay (Aug. 23, 1785)

## [Calendar Events](#)

- ▶ June 8-10 - Fairbanks Ag In The Classroom(AITC), for more details go to [AITC Online](#).

## Plant Materials Center

[http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag\\_pmc.htm](http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag_pmc.htm)

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## Plant Materials Center

### Summer in Alaska at the Alaska Plant Materials Center!

What more can you ask for? Beautiful long days, warm weather, green grass, colorful flowers, sandhill cranes in the fields, and smiles make the Alaska Plant Materials Center the place to be right now!



What is happening at the PMC? Within this past month, we burned about 40 acres of grass to jump start the crops, remove non-wanted insects, and cut down on the amount of weeds. Eleven growers purchased 3,512 pounds of 17 different kinds of certified seed during the spring seed sale. Inventory and data records to maintain accurate information about what seed is available and what needs to be planted are compiled from this sale. Seed germination tests and results are rolling in and out of the seed lab as current viability and purity tests are required

for seed lots here at the PMC, Alaska Seed Growers' Association, and public agencies. Many people from throughout Alaska are calling to find out where to obtain personal seed. If it is native Alaskan seed, we direct them to our [Native Plant Source Directory](#).

Planting in the fields has begun. Weal and Thual barley are the first crops we planted. Sounds easy to say, but, to plant, the fields need to be disked, tilled, furrowed, and packed. For good stands of grain, water is also needed. Plans for June include removing plant blocks that are too old or weedy, tilling to control weeds, setting up the irrigation system, problem-solving the unexpected, planting plugs or seeds of new seed lots, and controlling insect pests.

Landscaping is in full swing also. Most of the plants in the Ethnobotany Teaching Garden are greening up or flowering. Weeding, fertilizing, pruning, and mowing are basic maintenance for all the beds. Interpretive labels are cleaned up and new ones printed for visitors to identify and learn about the many different types of plants the PMC grows.

The potato program sold seed potatoes to many growers throughout the state this past month. New seedlings are in test tubes, growing steadily before they are planted in pots in the greenhouse. The potato field is being tilled and fertilized for this year's crop of tubers.

The invasive weed team is identifying areas in the State to target removal efforts. Record keeping, presentations, multi-agency communications, surveys, and databases keep some people in their offices when the preference is to be outside working on projects.

The rural seed project is in the information gathering and communication stage. Presentations to interested villages, planning, need assessments, and designing classes on basic agronomic techniques are critical first steps towards making this a viable endeavor.

Revegetation resources for Alaska are continuing to be developed for agency efforts. A Coastal Revegetation Manual for Alaska is in the design and writing stage. Several revegetation projects for the summer are planned and waiting to be implemented.



The unseen backbone of the Plant Materials Center is the administrative work of budgets, reports, payroll, purchasing, paying bills, and coordinating the multitude of agency and service-providing contractors, as well as greeting visitors and answering phone calls. This daily effort enables all of the PMC programs to run smoothly.

The staff at the PMC welcomes you to visit us this summer to learn about and enjoy the world of plants in Alaska.

## Marketing Staff

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## Marketing

### Farm Family of the Year Nominations Needed – Deadline June 30th

The Alaska State Fair and the agricultural community want to applaud the efforts of Alaska farmers by honoring one family that epitomizes the spirit of the vibrant industry. We need the public's help in nominating friends and neighbors for the 11th Annual Farm Family of the Year award. The Alaska State Fair established the award in 2000 to honor an Alaska farming family and show appreciation for all the hardworking Alaskans committed to agriculture and aquaculture in the state.

Past recipients from the south central area include: the Huppert family, VanderWeele Farms, Havemeister Farms, the Rempel family, P&M Gardens, the Lewis Farm and the Oberg-Kenley Family.

From the northern region we've honored: Calypso Farm, Wrigley Farms, and the Peterson family at Insanity Acres.

The Farm Family selection committee will accept nominations and select a family using the following criteria;

- Production of quality Alaska Grown products (not based on quantity);
- Community involvement (civic organizations, school, sports, church);
- Involvement in agricultural industry organizations (local, state and federal, etc.) and,
- Overall farm family image, farming history, and unique or special production.

Nominations should offer details about the family and how the family members fulfill each criteria.

Nominations should be mailed, faxed or e-mailed to:

Amy Pettit-Farm Family  
Division of Agriculture  
1800 Glenn Hwy, Ste 12  
Palmer, AK 99645

FAX: (907) 745-7254  
E-mail: [Amy.Pettit@alaska.gov](mailto:Amy.Pettit@alaska.gov)

The award, sponsored by the Matanuska Valley Federal Credit Union, will be presented at the Fair Board Reception on Governor's Day, August 26, 2010. Please contact Amy with any questions.



## Land Sales & Grazing Leases

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## Land Sales & Grazing Leases

### Division of Agriculture Land Sale

The Division of Agriculture is having a summer land sale.

The Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Mining, Land and Water in cooperation with the Division of Agriculture will be holding a sale of agricultural land by outcry auction. The sale will include 7 tracts in Interior Alaska. These tracts range from 22 acres to 301 acres and will be subject to development requirements and agricultural covenants. These parcels will be sold to the high bidders. Minimum bids have been established by fair market value appraisal and range from \$8,300 to \$63,300.

Auction #457	2010 Agricultural Land Auction
Place of Auction:	DNR, Public Information Center 3700 Airport Way Fairbanks, AK 99709
Date of Auction:	Tuesday June 29, 2010
Time of Auction:	1 PM.
Parcel Locations:	Two Mile Lake (Nenana) Salcha (2 miles south of Salcha River Bridge) Kobe (Near Anderson)

The brochure describing the parcels of land for sale will become available to the public on May 25, 2010. Printed copies of the brochure will be available at the Anchorage and Fairbanks DNR Public Information Centers and the Division of Agriculture offices in Fairbanks and Palmer. In addition, the brochure will be available at locations around Nenana, Salcha, Fairbanks, call 907-374-3716 for specific locations. The Auction #457 Brochure will also be available [online](#) beginning May 25, 2010.

Potential purchasers are encouraged to thoroughly review the sale brochure and personally inspect the parcels prior to the auction.

Bidding will start at the appraised fair market value as listed in the brochure. High bidders at auction must be prepared to put down 5% of their bid and \$100 document fee immediately after close of bidding on their parcel.

For more information on bidder qualifications and auction procedures, please see the brochure or contact any of the DNR Public Information Centers or the Division of Agriculture offices in Fairbanks or Palmer. For more specific information concerning any of the parcels please call the Division of Agriculture Fairbanks office.

#### **DNR Public Information Center**

3700 Airport Way

Fairbanks, AK 99709

Phone: 907-451-2705 (Dial 0 after 10:00am)

or

550 W 7th Ave., Suite 1260

Anchorage, AK 99501

Phone: 907-269-8400 (Dial 0 after 10:00am)

#### **Division of Agriculture**

1648 S. Cushman, Suite #201

Fairbanks, AK 99701

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## Inspection Staff

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## Inspection Section

### How Clean Are Your Greens?

The FDA announced another recall of salad greens in May, this time on prepackaged romaine sold under the “Freshway” Brand. Nineteen people in at least three states reported illnesses resulting from the E. coli O145 strain, including eleven people requiring hospitalization; three with potentially life-threatening symptoms. The romaine packages implicated in this most recent incident were not sold in grocery stores, but rather, to wholesalers, public food-service establishments, and grocery store salad bars and delicatessens. This incident again stresses the importance of safe food production, handling, and preparation practices.

Consumer Reports Organization created a buzz earlier this spring when it reported the results of a food safety study it conducted on pre-packaged salad greens. The study, which included 208 bags and clamshell packages of “prewashed” and “triple-washed” salad greens, marketed under 16 brand names, concluded that many of them contained high bacteria counts.

The salad greens in the study did not contain the very dangerous strain of E. coli O157:H7, listeria, or salmonella (although a previous 2008 study of 4000 samples by the US Department of Agriculture did find salmonella in two of those samples). But bacteria levels in the Consumer Reports study were high enough to warrant concern from the public.

While Federal regulations limit the amount of bacterial contamination in many commodities, including meat, milk, drinking water, and some processed foods, there are no such standards in effect for produce. However, industry experts consulted by Consumer Reports suggested that for leafy greens, an unacceptable level of total coliforms or enterococcus is 10,000 or more per gram of produce. In their study, in which all the samples were within their “use-by” date, Consumer Reports found that 39% of the samples exceeded that level for total coliform bacteria, and 23% for enterococcus. These bacteria, while not always harmful in themselves, can be indicators of poor sanitation and even fecal contamination in food.

Lab results in the study varied widely among samples, even within the same brand, from undetectable levels of bacteria to more than 1 million per gram. Those with higher counts often contained spinach, and were from one to five days from their use-by date. Packages six to eight days from their use-by date had less bacterial contamination.

#### **What Can You Do?**

If you buy pre-packaged greens, or any packaged produce for that matter, be sure to purchase packages that are as far from their “use-by” date as possible. And be sure to keep food properly refrigerated, to inhibit bacterial growth.

Always wash produce before serving, even if the package states that it is prewashed. Studies have shown that washing fruits and vegetables with a solution of 3 parts water and 1 part vinegar or lemon juice can remove up to 98% of bacteria.

Avoid produce that is old, bruised, or damaged, and cut off areas where bacteria may have entered through the skin. Also cut off the stem and blossom ends of whole produce items, as these are areas where bacteria and pesticides can accumulate.

Remember that some strains of E. coli produce heat-stable toxins as a byproduct of their growth. Those toxins can stay in food and make you ill even after the bacteria themselves have been killed. That makes it especially important that food not be subjected to temperature abuse, even if it is cooked before eating.



## ARLF Land Asset

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## Asset Management

### Mt. McKinley Meat & Sausage: A Thing of the Past or a Stepping Stone into the Future

#### **The Past**

The Alaska Agricultural Action Council financed the construction of Mt. McKinley Meat & Sausage (MMM&S) in the early 1980s. MMM&S was privately operated from 1983 until 1985. The Agricultural Revolving Loan Fund (ARLF) obtained possession of the facility in 1985 through a settlement agreement as a result of a loan default.

Under an agreement between the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Department of Corrections (DOC), MMM&S was reopened in December 1986. DOC operated the plant for the Division of Agriculture, using it as a training opportunity for inmates while continuing to provide a slaughter facility for Alaskan farmers and residents. DOC and MMM&S revenues funded the MMM&S facility operations until 2001 when budget shortfalls occurred. In 2001, the ARLF began to assume some of the financial obligations of operating the plant and as time passed the financial obligations of the ARLF increased. In 2003, DOC indicated their plans to cease operations at MMM&S unless the ARLF would provide funding of \$350K for personal services and provide funding for all operational losses.

As a result, the Division of Agriculture (Division) completed a detailed review of the operation of MMM&S to ascertain actual operating costs. This report made recommendations that would increase the efficiency of the plant while in State ownership and further recommended that the State eventually transfer the facility to the private sector. The December 1, 2003 MMM&S report with Review & Recommendations can be viewed or downloaded on the Division's website [here](#). On December 1, 2003, operation of the plant was taken over completely by the Division. The operational efficiency of the plant was substantially improved through increasing revenues, decreasing expenditures and implementing items identified in the 2003 study.

#### **The Present**

The Board of Agriculture and Conservation (BAC) is responsible for the administration of the ARLF. The last official action taken (December 2006) regarding the continued operation of MMM&S included keeping the facility open and remaining receptive to evaluating any alternative proposal to operating or privatizing the facility. This decision was based on many positive services and support provided by MMM&S to the agricultural industry, some of which are included below:

- MMM&S is the only USDA Inspected slaughter facility in South Central AK;
- Purchases, Slaughters and Markets Alaska Grown livestock;
- Custom Slaughters/Processes Alaska Grown livestock;
- Slaughters and Processes Alaska Grown 4-H/FFA livestock;
- Provides an outlet for the slaughter/purchase of cull livestock;
- Supplements Alaska Grown product w/locally purchased product to increase MMM&S revenue;
- Provides slaughter, processing, USDA/HACCP education for those involved in the industry;
- Provides education, training and work opportunities for DOC inmates.

#### **The Future**

The BAC, the Division, the DNR and members of the agricultural industry have discussed the future of MMM&S at length on many occasions. The Division has made three attempts since 2000 to facilitate transferring the facility from State ownership to private or Cooperative ownership without success. The BAC is responsible for the administration of the ARLF, including the future direction with regard to MMM&S operations. ARLF funds are being utilized to supplement operational costs at MMM&S and have done so since the 2003 transition to the Division. The BAC has continually recognized and supported the industry need for a USDA kill floor in Southcentral Alaska. The operational efficiency of the plant has been substantially improved since the report was issued, but the plant continues to operate at a deficit. MMM&S losses have averaged about \$110,000 annually over the last 3 Fiscal years (2007-2009). Operation expenses at MMM&S are not expected to decrease and most likely will continue to increase as wages, utilities, facility maintenance, etc. continue to increase.

There is support for continued MMM&S operations. The BAC recognizes that the value of the services provided far exceeds the losses incurred. We believe inmate training is instrumental in providing inmates increased opportunities for gainful employment upon their release from incarceration. However, the issue comes back to the operational losses and who should pay for the services provided. Based on the BAC's direction, the ARLF continues to provide financial support until a private enterprise or cooperative offers an alternative solution. The Board of Agriculture and Conservation would like to receive your comments. Written comments can be submitted to the board by emailing [Ray Nix](mailto:Ray Nix) or by mailing comments to:

Board of Agriculture and Conservation  
Attention: Ray Nix  
1800 Glenn Highway #12  
Palmer, Alaska 99645

## Fairbanks Office

907-328-1950

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## Pest Detection

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### Update on Forest Health Conditions in Alaska Released

Many of the agricultural pests surveyed for in Alaska are also pests of the forest ecosystem. Each year, a summary of several of our pest surveys are included in the Forest Health Conditions Report, which is released by the U.S.D.A. Forest Service, Alaska Region, State and Private Forestry, Forest Health Protection (FHP) program. The most recent report was released this month and can be downloaded from the following links: [FHP 2009 Report](#) (10 MB) & [FHP Alaska Region](#)

The report summarizes information and data collected throughout the state by cooperating partners and provides a review of the current status of invasive insects and plants, plant diseases, and declines across Alaska. Several invasive insects and plants of Alaska are highlighted in this current issue.