

John Boyle
Commissioner

dnr.alaska.gov



Department of
Natural Resources

Anchorage, Alaska

STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: Jan. 23, 2024

Blue Market AK Wins 2023 Alaska Grown \$5 Store Challenge

(Palmer, AK) – Blue Market AK is being honored with the 2023 “Golden Carrot” award in recognition of its exceptional marketing creativity and success in promoting Alaska Grown products in the 7th annual Alaska Grown \$5 Challenge campaign.

Blue Market AK incorporated Alaska Grown \$5 Challenge displays in creative and innovative ways to educate and promote the importance of supporting locally produced Alaska Grown Products. Their educational displays included important information about Alaska’s food system to encourage informed purchasing decisions for their customers. A tool used throughout the competition was their Blue Market AK social media page to promote #buyalaskagrown, highlighting the many farms and Alaska Grown products they support. Another promotional tool offered discounts on Alaska Grown products with a quarterly membership sale of “\$5 off of \$5 or more in purchases of Alaska Grown products.”

“Blue Market AK is an exciting and fitting winner of the Alaska Grown \$5 Dollar Challenge this year – they have gone above and beyond in promoting the importance of purchasing Alaska Grown products with their innovative displays and promotions,” said **Bryan Scoresby, Director of the Division of Agriculture**. “Over the last four years, they have contributed to and made a real impact on the community, which is why they were the clear winners of this annual award.”

Jess Johnson and Jen Gordon partnered and founded the Spenard Blue Market AK store in 2019 on the guiding principles of sustainability, transparency, and community. Jess is a committed “localvore”, hobby permaculturalist, and zero-waste enthusiast. Her inspiration for founding the store was frustration with having to travel long distances to procure bulk and reusable packaged, locally grown and made products. Jess would attend many farmers markets for these goods and was a member of several Community Supported Agriculture, Fishery and Milk Programs. Jen is a sailor by trade and was concerned by the number of plastics she encountered in the ocean and on Alaskan beaches, demonstrating the issue of single-use plastics and its effects on the environment. When Jess and Jen met through a mutual acquaintance, a quick connection and partnership was formed. Their business model is shaped around a local food focus and a commitment to eliminate single-use plastics using a “zero-waste” shopping model. The result is a shopping experience that feels community oriented and inviting, supportive of Alaska farmers and producers, and impactful on the amount of food waste that enters Alaskan landfills and waterways.

Approximately 65% of Blue Market AK’s vendors are Alaskan, with bulk and reusable packaged product options ranging from fresh local produce, pantry and freezer staples, personal care items, household cleaners, etc. The store is committed to primarily sourcing produce, meat, eggs, and dairy from Alaskan producers and educating customers on seasonal availability of these products.

Blue Market AK began as a “Little Blue Market Cart” at local farmers markets and then grew into the store they are today in the heart of Spenard. An essential part of this development has been the amazing staff who also contribute to the “local first” focus, including their produce and meat guru, Erica Lujan; baker and artist Emma Shelton; and their in-house vegan consultant Alyssa Schaefer. In addition to their staff, Blue Market AK is eternally grateful to their customers who support their guiding principles of sustainability, transparency and community; driving suggestions for new products and continuing to source local products. Blue Market AK continues to build on its relationship with the community by donating 1% of sales to a non-profit, sharing space for community swap nights and “talk and tinker” workshops.

Director Scoresby will present the Golden Carrot Award to Blue Market AK during a ceremony in the store located at 1406 W 31st Ave, Anchorage on Wednesday, Jan. 24 at 1pm. The public is welcome to attend the ceremony in person, and it will be broadcast/recorded on Facebook Live: www.facebook.com/dnr.alaskagrown/live

The \$5 Challenge is a competition held every year by the Alaska Division of Agriculture’s Alaska Grown Program, where participating retailers build displays of Alaska Grown products from June-November. These displays are evaluated based on creativity, use of the \$5 Challenge and Alaska Grown logo, and the promotion of the challenge via social media or other outlets. The goal of the \$5 Challenge is to raise awareness and support of Alaska Grown products among both retailers and consumers.

The previous “Golden Carrot” winners are the Roaming Root Cellar (2022 and 2021), Palmer Fred Meyer store (2020 and 2019), the Wasilla Walmart store (2018), and the Palmer Carrs-Safeway store (2017).

The Department of Natural Resources' mission is to develop, conserve, and maximize the use of Alaska's natural resources consistent with the public interest.

Media Contact: Lorraine Henry, lorraine.henry@alaska.gov, 907-269-8427

###

STAY CONNECTED:

Alaska Grown Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/dnr.alaskagrown/>

DNR Newsroom: http://dnr.alaska.gov/commis/dnr_newsroom.htm

DNR on Social Media: http://dnr.alaska.gov/commis/social_media.htm

DNR Public Information Center: <http://dnr.alaska.gov/commis/pic/>