

Corri A. Feige  
Commissioner



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PRESS RELEASE

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## **Halibut Cove shellfish farmers are Alaska's Farm Family of 2020**

**(Palmer, AK)** – Alaska's Farm Family of the Year for 2020 is the Bates family of Halibut Cove, whose determined operation of their shellfish farm in Kachemak Bay embodies the innovative, resilient spirit of Alaska agriculture even in the face of a global pandemic.

"Alaska agriculture is a growing, evolving industry, and nothing reflects that more clearly than the selection of oyster farmers as Farm Family of the Year," said Dave Schade, director of the Division of Agriculture. "Greg and Weatherly Bates have embraced the opportunities of aquaculture in Alaska, and their success in this new market sector points to a prosperous future for them and other farming families, as well."

The Bates both grew up the coastal culture of a seashore Rhode Island town, and after successfully managing a growing oyster farm there together they married, then honeymooned in Alaska. Falling in love with the state and its opportunities, they moved north in 2007 and started Alaska Shellfish Farm. With the help of their children, Rockwell and Vera, their growing family operation produces and sells oysters and mussels, and recently expanded into the evolving kelp market.

When the COVID-19 pandemic closed off national markets, they met the challenge by refocusing on local sales, even loading oysters on a small boat tied to shore for sale to locals on honor system, according to those nominating the family, who added that "Weatherly and Greg are the hardest-working, most compassionate young couple we have ever met."

The "Farm Family of the Year" award was established in 2000 by the Alaska Division of Agriculture and the Alaska State Fair with the intent to honor an Alaska farm family that best epitomizes the spirit of the industry that year, and to show appreciation for hard-working Alaskans committed to agriculture, including Alaska's growing aquaculture segment.

With the COVID-19 pandemic driving many normal activities online, the division used online resources to increase the accessibility of the award and the visibility of the

industry it supports, Schade said. Nominations, including the winning nomination, arrived online.

The Alaska Farm Family of the Year for 2019 was the St. Pierres of Ester, Alaska. Previous winners include the Olsons of Soldotna, and the McCollums and Pinklemans of Delta Junction.

**CONTACT:** John Whipple, (907) 761-3874, [john.whipple@alaska.gov](mailto:john.whipple@alaska.gov)

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