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Commissioner

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Natural Resources

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STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

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## **Marja Smets & Bo Varsano of Petersburg Win 2023 Farm Family**

**(Petersburg, AK)** – Alaska’s “Farm Family of the Year” for 2023 is Bo Varsano and Marja Smets, who own and operate Farragut Farm located near Petersburg. The award was established in 2000 by DNR’s Division of Agriculture and the Alaska State Fair to honor an Alaska Grown farm family that best epitomizes the spirit of the industry that year, and to showcase hard-working Alaskans committed to agriculture through nominations by their peers.

“Bo and Marja being recognized with this award is especially impressive when you consider that they’re first generation famers who only started Farragut Farm in 2010,” said Bryan Scoresby, Director of the Division of Agriculture. “I’m personally inspired by Bo and Marja’s future goal of providing fresh carrots to all the school districts in Southeast Alaska!”

Farragut Farm is located in the remote Farragut Bay, approximately 35 miles north of Petersburg by boat. There are no roads or other forms of development on this land, so Bo and Marja use a 27-foot catamaran to bring their produce to market with a 4 to 5 hour boat trip. They sell from their farmstand in Petersburg to local customers as well as wholesale to schools, grocery stores and value-added food producers in Petersburg, Juneau and Wrangell.

“We love providing locally-grown vegetables to Southeast Alaska residents because there are not that many farms in our location, so the fresh produce is much appreciated,” said Marja Smets, who grew up in Wisconsin and moved to Alaska 23 years ago. “That’s one of the reasons we founded the Southeast Alaska Farmers Summit and continue to help with planning and execution of the biennial agricultural event.”

Marja and Bo co-manage the organic farm together, doing most of the work themselves. Marja is responsible for crop planning, marketing and accounting, while Bo takes care of repairs, maintenance, tool building/creation and efficiency enhancement projects. They farm on just over one acre of land, using hand tools and building their farm’s soils by sourcing local amendments such as seaweed, compost and fish scraps.

“I love farming in Alaska because we can spend our days outdoors in such a beautiful part of the world,” said Bo Varsano, who was raised in Massachusetts and has lived in Alaska for 30 years. “We enjoy the freedom to set the rhythm and flow of our days, make a living from home and the creative problem-solving of challenges inherent in farming.”

Bo and Marja hope to continue to provide healthy, fresh vegetables to their customers for many years to come, and are currently focusing on expanding their garlic and carrot crops.

The Alaska Farm Family of the Year for 2022 included Martha Merry, Amy Seitz and Jane Conway of Lancashire Farm in Soldotna. For a complete list of previous winners over the past 23 years visit: [https://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag\\_FFY.htm](https://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag_FFY.htm).

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

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