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The Alaska State Fair Pumpkin Fairies pose with Dale Marshall's 2,035-pound winning pumpkin. Photo credit: Christy Allison

A Message from Director Scoresby

Our story continues at the Alaska Division of Agriculture. Last month, we had the state fair in Palmer, which required a lot of work from our marketing side and a lot of fun for those who attended and participated.

We, at the Division of Agriculture, sponsored the Great Alaska Pumpkin and Giant Cabbage weigh-offs. Fairgoers came to see if a state or world record would be broken. The Master of Ceremonies, with their encouraging words, questions, and jokes, made the event exciting. I spoke briefly, giving a sponsor minute, promoting Alaska Grown and the \$5.00 challenge.

The livestock events at the fair, with primary participation by youth in 4-H and FFA, brought new interest and fans to watch the mighty fine-looking market-ready beef, hogs, sheep, goats, turkeys, chickens, and rabbits. The Saturday livestock sale had 123 entries, and the total sale was over \$590,000 for an average of about \$4800. Many thanks to all the generous buyers who came, supported the kids and purchased the animals. I know many kids participate to learn skills and earn money for their future education. When we talk about food security, a sure way for your family to be secure is to fill your own home freezer.

Another event at the fair was a bill signing by the Governor. HB251 included two provisions the division supported to enhance our ARLF loans. The first item was reducing the quorum criteria from 5 of 7 to 4 of 7. This simple change will make it easier for the ARLF to conduct business during the busiest times. The second was increasing our loan limits from \$1 million per person to \$3 million. This limit has been in place since the mid-1980s. In addition, the Governor signed another bill designating the first Wednesday in October as 4-H Day.

I asked the staff to promote the \$5.00 challenge by adding a simple call to action to their e-mail signature. Now, every email from the Division of Agriculture displays the \$5.00 challenge logo in the signature line. Meanwhile, we updated our social media cover photos with the question, "Have you spent your \$5 yet?" As a result, we received way more likes, shares, and comments than we ever imagined.

Harvest at the PMC is underway. The staff have harvested two of six small grain plots so far. Rain has been a real damper to harvest more and faster. Our biggest goals are to increase the foundation and breeder-level seed volume to sell to farmers. We are always looking for new varieties to trial.

Our grants team is gearing up to announce the next round of micro-grants. Last round, we awarded about 550 out of 1750 requests, so about one in three who applied was awarded. This program is one we love to do that helps families increase their own food security. The next round of micro-grants will open for applications around the end of September for 60 days. Look for it on the division website.

Our inspection team has been providing needed services all over the state: H-gap (food safety) audits for producers whose product goes directly into the grocery store, certified seed potato field inspections, beehive inspections as part of the honeybee and pest and disease survey, and pest detection activities for invasive moths.

We field phone calls all the time from people interested in coming to Alaska to begin or continue a farming operation. We welcome all who want to come and produce more. What Alaska needs to grow its industry is more farmers, more produce, more livestock, more research, more processing, more agribusiness-type industries, and more workers willing to work.

Visiting with you, the producer, is the highlight of our field experience and a refreshing break from the office.



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