



ALASKA DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE NEWSLETTER

Issue 7 | February 2025

Farmers' work never stops, even during Alaska's coldest months



By Director Bryan Scoresby

What do you do in February, the coldest part of the winter on the farm? The winter months are a time to prepare and plan

for all the heavy work in the summer months when farmers execute their plans.

In January, we held a listening session to learn the farmers' perspective on where the Division of Agriculture can focus its efforts to help farmers. My notes for that session show the top issues were: 1. Availability of Land, 2. Access to Capital, 3. Marketing Assistance, and 4. Sharing of Information.

Here in Alaska, we have land sales for agriculture-designated lands; the last sale was in 2022 in Nenana. By request, state land can also be leased for agriculture. Capital (loans) can be obtained from several entities, such as the Agriculture Revolving Loan Fund, Farm Service Agency, and Agriculture Rural Rehabilitation Corporation, which are traditionally the go-to places in Alaska. AgWest Farm Credit has come to Alaska and is promoting its agriculture loans, such as land acquisition, operating funds, equipment loans, and housing for

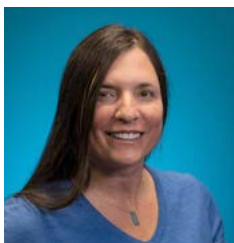
the farmers and staff. There are other lenders that I have met and heard about that have existing loans in Alaska, too.

Marketing is always a challenge with an opportunity to sell the products grown and made here. The Division launched the statewide Alaska Grown agriculture products certification program in 1986. Designed to highlight and promote agriculture and aquaculture products in the marketplace, the program continues to be a successful tool for the Division and Alaska's Agricultural industry. We promote and encourage Alaskans to participate in the \$5 Challenge by spending five dollars of their weekly grocery budget on an Alaskan Grown product. When we look for, ask for, and buy more Alaska Grown products, the demand increases. With increased demand, farmers who can grow more will, and the opportunity exists for a new farmer to enter the industry to grow more of the food you want.

In January 2025, Alaska Beacon published a story about Alaska Grown-labeled products from a recent study showing that a head of Alaska Grown lettuce is worth \$1.90 more than a head from elsewhere. The study confirmed that Alaskans are

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\$5 Challenge is now year-round



By Mia Kirk

With this new year, we are promoting a new campaign for the Alaska Grown \$5 Challenge. When this campaign started, it promoted Alaska Grown products for six months out of the year. We are extending that campaign because Alaskans can purchase year-round with so many more options. So, what can you purchase year-round? There are various Alaska Grown shelf-stable products including vegetables, meat, milk, eggs, honey, oysters, nursery stock, etc. You will be surprised how much is available in our local retail outlets. If you cannot find an Alaska Grown product when shopping, we encourage you to ask for it!

Another way to support the \$5 Challenge is to seek out restaurants that have Alaska Grown products on their menu. We have designed a new logo (hot off the press in this issue!) to help Alaskans recognize these locations. We hope to have logo materials available in the next month, so if you are a restaurant owner or know of a restaurant with Alaska Grown products on their menu that may be interested in this program, please email dnr.alaskagrown@alaska.gov.



Did you know that February is Potato Lover's month? Potatoes are a vegetable available year-round for Alaskans. This may be the month to try a new, weekly recipe! You can support Alaska potato farmers in the \$5 Challenge year-round campaign, and it is only one of many available products! We will continue this promotion each month through our social media outlets, highlighting various products in support of the Alaska Grown Year-Round \$5 Challenge.

Are you in the mariculture industry and would like more information on Alaska Grown, grants, and the Agriculture Revolving Loan Fund (ARLF)? We will have Alaska Grown and ARLF at the annual Mariculture Conference in Sitka, Alaska, on February 18-20. Please stop by the booth and visit with our staff!

Have you heard of the DNR internship program? This is an opportunity for high school, undergraduate, and graduate students to contribute to their academic and career development while contributing to the state. We hope to have opportunities this year with our marketing program in our Palmer office. If you know of a student interested in learning more about the internship program and how to apply, please visit the DNR internship website at <https://dnr.alaska.gov/commis/pic/intern.htm>. We would love to see Alaskans interested in supporting agriculture applying for this opportunity!

The Alaska Plant Materials Center prepares for upcoming growing season



By Casey Dinkel

The new year has been off to a roaring start at the Alaska Plant Materials Center (PMC). During the cold winter months, PMC staff take full advantage of the time to prepare for the upcoming growing season. In just one month, we have processed 15,000 lbs. of certified grass seed for several farmers. This grass seed will be utilized for future revegetation projects with the Department of Transportation, remote mines, and stream bank stabilization.

We have also made significant progress on the design and construction efforts for the new seed cleaning line. This new fully integrated seed cleaning line is on schedule to be installed by late fall 2025. We are very excited to see this new seed cleaning line come to fruition and to be able to provide a much faster and more efficient cleaning service to our current and future farmers.

In addition to seed cleaning, PMC staff has been diligently growing plantlets in tissue culture for our disease-free seed potato program. These plantlets will be kept in tissue culture rotation until late spring, when they are moved to greenhouse production to fill orders.

The PMC is recruiting for a Microbiologist II to lead the disease-free seed potato program. Another Recruitment we have been actively seeking to fill is our Agronomist I revegetation & soil conservation specialist. This recruitment position has recently closed, and we are reviewing several excellent candidates. We plan to have the Agronomist I position filled by the



end of February.

Next, our state seed analyst has been busy testing dozens of samples for purity and germination. The state seed analyst at the PMC handles all purity and germination seed testing in accordance with our state seed regulations. Every grass, grain, tree, shrub, or forb seed lot that enters the PMC for cleaning is run through this laboratory. The number of samples will usually increase as we approach the active growing season.

Last but certainly not least, January has occupied us in many other areas, such as green housework, farm machinery maintenance, seed orders/sales, and our 2025 field layout and design. Staff and I are more than excited for the new changes that will take place this year on the farm, and as one would expect, we can't wait to get into the field and get our hands dirty.

Work: *Continued from page 1*

willing to pay more for locally grown food.

Sharing information happens in several ways. Participate in one of the many events as a member or guest during winter or summer. The annual Farm Bureau meeting was held last November. The annual Farmers Union meeting is coming up later this month. The UAF extension service has field days during the year and gives reports on research that is ongoing. The local chapters of the Farm Bureau and local Soil and Water Conservation District meet somewhere in your area and are an excellent source of information. There was a Farm Forum in Fairbanks in January and another in Delta on February 22. The most significant value taken from any of these events is getting acquainted with other farmers in your area to talk to. Most farmers are willing to share their knowledge with you, and the event puts you and them together. Membership has its privileges, as it keeps you informed when events are planned.

BAC Subcommittee meeting to discuss possible regulation updates

The Board of Agriculture and Conservation (BAC), through the Division of Agriculture, will hold a meeting on Tuesday, February 18, 2025, at 9 a.m.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/98010263916?pwd=wmq8k2OxCKwbRyFqNrNixb0XW9pJLJ.1>

Meeting ID: 980 1026 3916,

Passcode: 8GCU57

Dial in by phone

+1 253-205-0468, 98010263916# United States, Anchorage.

Phone conference ID: *323616#

2025 CALENDAR

3 Months At-A-Glance

FEBRUARY

- 10** SCBG Letter of Intent due by 5 p.m.
- 11** BAC meeting
- 14** Valentine's Day
- 16-22** National FFA Week
- 17** Presidents' Day, Alaska Division of Agriculture offices will be closed.
- 18-20** 2025 Mariculture Conference of Alaska, Sitka
- 20** Give FFA Day (a 24-hr donation campaign)
- 22** Delta Farm Forum, Delta Junction
- 25** ARLF Application entry deadline for March BAC meeting

MARCH

- 3** SCBG qualifying projects can apply
- 7** National Cereal Day
- 11** BAC meeting
- 17** St. Patrick's Day
- 20** Spring Equinox
- 25** ARLF Application entry deadline for April BAC meeting
- 28-29** 2025 Alaska Food Festival and Conference, Kodiak
- 31** Seward's Day, Alaska Division of Agriculture offices will be closed.

APRIL

- 1** National Sourdough Bread Day
- 4** BAC meeting
- 10** National Farm Animals Day
- 15-19** 49th State FFA Convention
- 22** Earth Day