



ALASKA DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE NEWSLETTER

Issue 22 | May 2026

Despite many challenges, Alaska's agriculture industry ripe with potential



By Director Bryan Scoresby

The winter was cold and windy, and with spring here, the ground is still wet. Not so much from rain or heavy snow, but from the rain last fall that saturated the soil. As the frost melts, the saturated soil keeps us from getting into the fields and working.

Many farmers across the state are anxious to get into the field and begin their operations. Tilling the soil prior to planting, fertilizing the fields, and completing the planting are the goals. My hay fields were wet, but I was able to broadcast and spread the fertilizer. I am aerating my fields for the first time ever, hoping that the effort will be worth it. My research tells me it will be. This summer, when hay is cut, dried, baled, measured, and samples are taken for testing, I will know whether quality has gone up, down, or stayed the same, subject to weather.

When we look at our agriculture industry, many see opportunities waiting. The infrastructure needed in the middle of the supply chain is often missing. Farmers who supply products to the retail sector handle processing and arrange

delivery themselves. Congratulations to them for figuring out the extra steps, adding value, and making the sale.

I talk to many people across the state who are trying new things in agriculture. Your efforts and willingness to step into areas that are often new to Alaska are admirable. Innovation and risk-taking are inherent in any farming enterprise, especially in a state where producers are continually adapting to unique climates, markets, and growing conditions. I am also aware of two new farmers entering the industry this year, and I want to personally welcome them to Alaska agriculture and the community we all care deeply about.

Alaskan farmers currently produce only about 5% of the food consumed in the state. That means there is still 95% of the market available for growth and opportunity. Rather than competing against one another, most producers are working within an industry that has tremendous room for expansion. Anyone in sales—including farmers—would welcome the chance to build within a market that still has such significant untapped potential. The opportunity for agriculture in Alaska remains strong for those willing to invest, innovate, and grow.

Agriculture Day kicks off growing season, Farm Family of the Year nominations



By Mia Kirk

Alaska Agriculture Day fell on May 5 this year, and to mark the occasion, the Alaska Division of Agriculture opened nominations for the 27th

Farm Family of the Year. This award celebrates an Alaskan farm family that truly embodies the spirit of our industry and recognizes the dedication of those committed to agriculture and mariculture across the state.

Alaska Agriculture Day itself was created during the 25th Legislature and officially added to state law on July 3, 2007, designating the first Tuesday in May as a day to honor the many contributions of Alaska's agricultural community. Although the Farm Family of the Year award predates Alaska Agriculture Day, pairing the two has become a natural and meaningful fit. Don't forget to submit your nomination; the application period is open through June 12.



Scan this QR code to nominate your favorite farm family of 2026!

Grant Opportunities Update

The Specialty Crop Block Grant opened on April 21 and will close on May 20, 2026. The timeline is shorter this year due to circumstances outside our control at the state level, so please help spread the word. This grant supports projects that strengthen the competitiveness of Alaska's specialty crops in domestic or international markets. Amanda Swanson, Grants Supervisor, hosted a webinar on April 27; you can [view the recording](#) and access information and the

application on our [website](#). A [stakeholder survey](#) is also available to gather feedback from Alaska's specialty crop producers, processors, and distributors on this year's funding priorities.

The Peony Disaster Relief Program has extended its application deadline to May 31, 2026. We've received many questions from producers, and we hope the extended timeline provides additional opportunities to apply.



NenTot Tuesdays and Throwback Thursdays

Beginning May 5, Agriculture Lands Specialist Erik "Moe" Johnson is hosting NenTot Tuesdays on our [YouTube channel](#). Each Tuesday through June 2, viewers can tune in to expert-led sessions in preparation for the upcoming land sale, which runs from June 10 to September 30, 2026. Topics already recorded include Alaska Mapper & Web Soil Survey, Farm Conservation Plans, the 2026 NenTot Ag Auction Parcel Review, NenTot Water and Wells, and Wood Bison. We've also started reposting "Throwback Thursday" recordings from the first NenTot land sale in 2022, still highly relevant to this year's offerings.

Also, Coffey Farm is sponsoring the 5th Annual Nenana Ag Expo to be held on Saturday, June 6, from 10 to 4 p.m.

PMC plans for growing season, pleased with new seed cleaning line



By Casey Dinkel

With spring finally here, our field operators were able to start disking and prepping fields for planting on the 13th of May.

Due to the delayed spring, our foundation grain was planted two weeks later than in spring 2025. Long winters and delayed springs are just part of farming in a far north climate. We will do our best at the PMC to get crops in the ground quickly, fertilize, and start irrigation. The delayed planting will hopefully be offset by a warm, extended summer/fall.

Most of our foundation grain varieties should be mature and ready for harvest starting the last week of August and into the first couple of weeks of September. Since we can control water with irrigation and nutrients with fertilizer, we trust Mother Nature to provide a warm summer for plants to reach maturity. Once plants are mature and ready to harvest, we will look for short dry periods in the fall to harvest grains and potatoes. Native grass seed will be harvested in July and August, allowing PMC staff to collect seed prior to grain and potato harvests. Alaska's growing season is fast and furious, with very tight planting and harvest windows. However, it is what we look forward to every year. With some planning, teamwork, and lots of elbow grease, we look forward to dirty hands and plentiful yields this growing season.

The PMC's large commercial seed cleaning facility is up and running smoothly. At the end of April, several PMC staff members trained with West Coast Companies from Oregon. This training session is the first of two courses, with the second course tentatively scheduled for the last week of

June. During the first training, staff learned how to operate our scalper, air screen cleaner, disc machine, and indents. We put the equipment through its paces as we learned about the operation, flow, and process limitations of our new cleaning line. After working through some minor start-up kinks, the new cleaning line performed beyond our expectations!

Once dialed in, the new cleaning line processed native grass seed five to seven times faster than our previous cleaning system. The average cleaning rate for our lightest grass seed was 300 lbs. per hour of clean seed at sack-off. Additionally, grain moved through the line three to four times faster than the old cleaning line, with staff processing roughly 150 bushels per hour. This rate can be increased to 250 bushels per hour as we gain familiarity with the cleaning line. With this new, highly efficient cleaning line, we will be able to process seed much faster than ever before. This will allow us to provide a faster and more efficient cleaning service to our grass and grain seed farmers throughout the state.

Last but not least, Mickenzie Erickson and several staff members have been working hard in the tissue culture lab propagating over 7,000 in vitro potato plantlets. Additionally, staff have prepared nearly 142 potato varieties for our in-field maintenance block. We anticipate planting our maintenance block of potatoes on or prior to the 26th of May. Ideally, we would like soil temperatures to be 50°F or higher before planting spuds. With the delayed spring, soil temps have been above 50 at daytime highs, but still in the low 40s at night. At our current rate, fields need to dry out for the next week to 10 days before we can work the soil and prep for planting. Until the soils warm up and dry out, we will be staged and ready to plant crops at the PMC.



Drizzling rain and cold temps were no deterrent to Alaskan farmers and attendees at this year’s Drive Your Tractor to Work Day, in Palmer on May 4. Pictured below, Division of Agriculture Director, Bryan Scoresby waves at spectators. Over 50 tractors participated in the parade, which started at the Alaska State Fairgrounds and ended in downtown Palmer.



2026 CALENDAR

3 Months At-A-Glance

MAY

4	Drive Your Tractor to Work Day
5	Alaska Agriculture Day
10	Mother’s Day
20	World Bee Day
25	Memorial Day
29	Learn About Composting Day

JUNE

3	National Egg Day
18	Sustainable Gastronomy Day
21	Summer Solstice

JULY

4	Independence Day
5	America’s Potluck
19	National Ice Cream Day