



Division of Agriculture Activities

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AK Division of Agriculture Website:
<http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag>

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Online Directory

<http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/Marketing/NewFoodFarmProductDirectory.xls>

*Is your farm in the newest directory?
Check online and find out!*

Click on the link below to view the application for the Agriculture Innovation Grant (AAIG) Due April 3rd!

<http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/>

Land Sales & Grazing Lease Staff

http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag_sales.htm

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Note from the Director

Thank goodness it is almost April. I am sure there are a few people who treasure the last snowfalls of winter – but I am not one of them. Spring never comes soon enough in my opinion!

It has been a busy March – the Division has participated in several conferences state wide and will be hosting a Direct Marketing Conference in April. The next Board of Agriculture & Conservation (BAC) meeting is scheduled for April 2nd at 4:00pm at the Division of Agriculture's conference room. For those unable to attend, we provide a call in number, 1-800-315-6338, and enter 12# at the prompt. As always, there is opportunity for public comment at the beginning of the meeting.

Two bills were introduced in Juneau this year that may impact agriculture. The first is HB 70, which is a Farm to School program. This was heard in House Resources Committee this past week and moved forward into Finance. This bill would increase procurement and use by public schools of food grown in the state, support efforts to advance farm-to-school activities, and much more. For more detail you can find the bill <http://w3.legis.state.ak.us/> and input HB70. The second bill is HB 12 which would establish the Alaska Council on Invasive Species. This bill creates a 14 member board which would be housed in the Department of Fish and Game. Though, not housed within the Division, this board would include a member of a Soil & Water Conservation District, a member of a conservation organization, a person engaged in commercial production agriculture and a person engaged in the commercial landscaping or horticultural nursery business. This bill can also be found at the above website, and input HB12.

Please continue to send in your pictures of Alaska agriculture with descriptions and dates. These pictures will help us build a power point overview of the Division and the industry.

Happy Easter!

Franci

Land Sales and Grazing Leases

The topic of how much agricultural land is in Alaska has come up more than once during the multitude of agriculture conferences this spring. It always prompts a lively discussion because there are as many answers put forward as there are people talking! The problem is in the definition of "agricultural land". Just because you can grow grass on a parcel, should it be considered agricultural land and therefore subject to a perpetual covenant restricting its use to agriculture?

We've all heard the argument that all state land should be sold fee simple, which means without any post patent restrictions. That logic is that the high bidder will determine the best use of the land while bringing in the most money for the state. If a farmer thinks a parcel is worth buying and farming at a certain price, and someone else thinks a non-agricultural use of the land warrants a higher price, then the state should take the higher bid and the market will determine the best use of the land.

Alaska chose not to go this route and instead realized the importance of reserving some of its land for strictly agricultural purposes, knowing that this would not bring in the most money to the state at the time of sale. The problem was then to determine which land to save as agricultural land. Most of the state's land near population areas and roads is covered by one of several Area Plans. These area plans classify the state land within the plan boundaries into several categories, e.g. mining, forest, remote recreation, wildlife habitat, agriculture, settlement and many more.

At this very moment, DNR is going through the process of revising the Tanana Basin Area Plan involving more than 12,000,000 acres. They have sent out requests to the various state agencies wanting to know what should be changed and what should remain from the current plan. Of course, each agency wants to hold on to as much as they can and add land to their sphere of influence. The Division of Agriculture would also like to keep what is currently classified as agriculture and include some other lands as well. Most of the additional land would come from lands currently classified as Resource Management. This was a classification originally used to identify lands with multiple resources available; the best one to develop would be determined later. Several of these Resource Management areas listed Agriculture first as a potential resource. In the current revision of the Tanana Basin Area Plan, they are thinking of getting rid of some of these Resource Management designations and finally making a determination as to which resource would be in the state's best interest to develop. The Division of Agriculture is fighting to get as much of this Resource Management land turned into agricultural land as is suitable. Our plan is to work with the Division of Lands people to identify potential areas where we could work together. The idea is to get an area now classified Resource Management, with agriculture listed as one of the resources, reclassified as agriculture/settlement. All land within the new classification that had soils suitable for agriculture would be sold as agricultural land and the land not having soils suitable for agriculture would be sold fee simple. This would allow us to get more agricultural land into development than if we worked alone.

So how much agricultural land is there in Alaska? It depends not only on who you ask but when you asked. In the early 1980's there were a slew of agricultural reports pontificating about the "future" of agriculture in Alaska. Some claimed that there were over 4,000,000 acres of agricultural land available in Alaska, and I'm asked if there were 4,000,000 acres then "why don't we have 4,000,000 acres already in production or going up for sale now?" The short answer is that most of those reports included lands suitable for grazing everything from cattle to reindeer. There are over a million acres currently used for reindeer leases and that land will not likely ever be used for anything other than grazing reindeer so is not available to us for agricultural development short of a good lichen crop. A lot of the land they mentioned in those reports was given away to municipalities as land grants or designated by the legislature for other purposes like game refuges. Even with most of that land not available, the northern region still has tens of thousands of acres of land suitable for agricultural development and hopefully after the Tanana Basin Area Plan revision much more.

Please keep your eyes open for the public meetings concerning the Tanana Basin Area Plan revision and let your voice be heard. While the Division of Agriculture will argue our case it is ultimately the citizens that will determine what is the highest and best use for a piece of state land.

Marketing:

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For the AAIG application, go to the website above and look under "What's New".



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Marketing Services

Are you interested in learning more about hosting tours on your farm? Do you have questions about whether or not you need a permit to provide samples at the farmers market? Have you thought about starting a CSA subscription box program with your produce, but aren't sure what it takes?

Join us at the first Agriculture Direct Marketing Conference, to be held April 15th - 16th at the Depot in Palmer! See the full agenda and registration forms at our web site www.dnr.alaska.gov/ag. Register by Friday, April 10 to avoid late charges. Please note that the Palmer Cooperative Extension Service is handling registration; contact information is available on the form.

Wednesday has been dubbed "Agritourism Day" and our keynote speaker is Darren Schmall, nationally recognized and award winning speaker from The Pizza Farm in California. The Pizza Farm hosts over 25,000 students annually, providing education to all about how food is grown. Read more about Darren at www.thepizzafarm.com

Thursday is "Direct Marketing Day" and a wide variety of speakers will provide an overview of the different opportunities and challenges that arise when direct marketing your products in Alaska.

If you have questions about the conference please contact Amy Pettit at 761-3864 or Amy.Pettit@alaska.gov

Pest Detection Surveys in Alaska

In the previous issue, we discussed why we conduct pest detection surveys in Alaska, namely to help safeguard agricultural and other natural resources from pest damage and infestation and to support international agreements. In this issue, we would like to briefly introduce to you some of the actual surveys the Division of Agriculture coordinates in Alaska. Some of the surveys are conducted in response to national concern, usually to help determine the scope, range, and potential pathways or movements of a particular pest that has been detected in a particular locality of the country, or a pest that occurs in another country with which the U.S. participates in trade. Considering the efficiency of today's shipping and transportation industry, a pest has the means to overcome natural barriers of expansion (geography, climate, etc.) and introduce itself into new locations on a global scale. Other surveys are conducted to directly target state pest concerns.

In 2008, the Division, with funding from USDA-APHIS-PPQ, participated in nine pest detection surveys. Surveys were coordinated by the Division and survey participants included, but were not limited to: University of Alaska Cooperative Extension Service Integrated Pest Management Technicians, Alaska Division of Forestry, and federal agencies who offered volunteer assistance such as the U.S. Forest Service and Customs Border Protection.

2008 surveys for Lepidoptera pests of concern included the European gypsy moth, Asian gypsy moth, Rosey gypsy moth, Nun moth, Siberian Silk moth, Light Brown Apple Moth, and the European Yellow-Underwing. An exotic beetle survey for Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) was conducted as part of a national response to the current infestation and spread occurring in Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, and surrounding states. Nematode

surveys included surveys for Golden nematode, Potato Cyst nematode, and pine-shoot nematode which is potentially vectored by a native *Monochamus* beetle. An invasive weed survey was conducted for Purple Loosestrife and Illyrian Thistle. A plant pathogen survey was conducted for *Phytophthora infestans*, a biological agent that causes Potato Late Blight. And, a terrestrial mollusk survey was conducted to more extensively survey for non-native slugs and snails throughout Alaska.

We are expecting to be conducting similar surveys during summer 2009. We are currently writing work plans for 2009 surveys for which funds have been awarded. In the next issue, and just in time for the summer field season, we will begin to discuss the highlights of each particular survey.



Emerald Ash Borer (*Agrilus planipennis* Fairmaire)
Bugwood

Many exotic species are colorful and pretty, but when introduced to areas where there are no natural predators, they become a serious problem to natural resources and potentially cost local, state, and federal governments upwards of tens of millions of dollars to eradicate or control. EAB is only one example, and was probably introduced from Asia into the U.S. on solid wood packing material carried in cargo ships and airplanes originating from the species' native range.

Mt. McKinley Meat & Sausage (MMM&S)

In our last article we said that Mt McKinley Meats was the only USDA inspected Plant in South Central AK. That is not correct; we are the only USDA Inspected **slaughter** plant in South Central AK. There are many different agencies under USDA, for example: Forest Service (FS), Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) & Food Safety Inspection Services (FSIS).

FSIS is the meat plants inspection service. Until January 26, 1998 meat & poultry purchased from wholesale outlets, retail stores and slaughter houses in Alaska could be inspected by either State or Federal Inspectors, and it was their responsibility to make sure products was wholesome & not adulterated.

On January 26, 1998 HACCP started in meat plants with 500 or more employees; January 25, 1999 10 to 499 unless sales were below \$2.5 million per year; January 25, 2000 plants fewer than 10 employees or annual sales less than \$2.5 million. Up until July 1999 Mt. McKinley Meats was inspected by the State of Alaska. On that date the State of Alaska gave up its meat inspection program and turned all meat inspection in the state over to the Federal Government. Some states still have their own meat inspection programs, but in order to do so, they must meet or exceed all of the requirements of the Federal Meat Inspection Program, including HACCP.

McKinley Meat & Sausage

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After January 24, 2000, producing a wholesome non-adulterated product became the responsibility of the industry. The USDA's responsibility was to inspect the health of slaughtered animals & verify that the particular meat establishment's individual HACCP plan is in compliance with USDA requirements and that it is adhered to.

HACCP – A Brief History; “Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points”

The HACCP concept was developed in 1971, by H.E. Bauman and other scientists at the Pillsbury Co, in collaboration with the NASA. It was first applied to low-acid canned food, the HACCP concept has since been applied throughout the food industry to a large variety of products.

The HACCP system has been adopted almost world wide; it works with any type of food; and it will only expand in the future. HACCP is a logical and scientific based control method. HACCP was designed to ensure that any meat & poultry that is processed packaged and distributed for consumption is safe and hazard free. The objective of HACCP is to identify and prevent, eliminate or reduce hazards to acceptable levels.

Hazards are: 1) Biological (microorganisms), 2) Chemical (chemical compounds that can reach the food supply in different stages of growing, manufacturing, preparation, or handling of food products), 3) Physical (sticks, stones, glass, metal etc). All HACCP plans must be in writing and include information about the processes & monitoring activities used to make products

A separate HACCP plan is required for each product type:

- 1) Slaughter (beef, pork, buffalo, elk, goat, lamb, reindeer, etc.)
- 2) Raw not ground products (roasts, steaks, etc.)
- 3) Raw Ground (hamburger, pork sausage, etc.)
- 4) Thermally Processed/Commercially Sterile (canned product, etc.)
- 5) Not heat treated-Shelf Stable (fermented, low water products)
- 6) Heat Treated-Shelf Stable (salami, jerky)
- 7) Fully Cooked-Not Shelf Stable (hot dogs, fully cooked ham)
- 8) Heat Treated but Not Fully Cooked (bacon)
- 9) Product with secondary inhibitors-not shelf stable (Summer Sausage)

There are other plans for poultry and eggs.

There are seven principles of HACCP:

- 1) Hazard identification
- 2) Determination of critical control points.
- 3) Establish critical limits
- 4) Establish procedures to monitor criteria
- 5) Record keeping
- 6) Corrective action
- 7) Verification of HACCP plan

Plans must be reviewed or reissued once a year or whenever anything changes. Example: new hazards, ingredient change, new supplier, new or different equipment.

Plant Material Center - PMC

Alaska State Seed Laboratory

Did you know that the Plant Materials Center has the only official seed testing laboratory in Alaska? To become “official” the lab needs to be certified by the national seed testing organization, Association of Official Seed Analysts (AOSA). The lab has currently been certified since 1998.

AOSA is an organization of member laboratories. AOSA was formed in 1908 to develop seed laws. This was the beginning of regulated seed commerce in the United States. It establishes uniform and accurate rules to assure a high standard of quality seed testing for the United States.

There has to be an AOSA Certified Seed Analyst for any laboratory to be official. To be "certified" the individual goes through extensive training followed by a mandatory certification testing process. Kathi VanZant is the PMC's certified seed analyst. She is currently training Lyubo Mahlev to be certified.

Essential services the laboratory provides are purity and germination tests, noxious weed seed examinations, tetrazolium testing, and grain moisture testing.

Test reports are a valuable tool for end users of seed. Contaminants such as inert matter, weeds and other crop seeds are reported, as well as germination potential. Required by federal law for interstate commerce and state regulations, seed offered for sale must have current and accurate testing and labeling.

In addition, the seed lab regularly researches laboratory germination and dormancy breaking techniques of understudied native species that are being considered for crops in Alaska. The seed lab also assists other state agencies and individuals in research on various projects including seed upgrade and viability enhancement, propagation techniques, and invasive weed seed vigor.

The PMC's seed lab is open daily, Monday through Friday, from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm (but not on holidays!) To learn more about how the seed lab works and how it can help you, please stop by or call 745-8033.

Plant Material Center

http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag_pmc.htm

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Calendar Events April - It is time for the season to begin and for the events slow down. We will keep you posted on events we are aware of that are taking place.

These events are those that we are currently aware of and this list may not be all inclusive. If you would like to have an event added on next months newsletter, please contact Patricia O'Neil @ Patricia.O'Neil@alaska.gov or 907-761-3858

- April 15-16: Direct Marketing Conference, Palmer Train Depot

These are some photos that were shared with us from Samuel Wenger from Whitestone Farms. These are only a couple of the photos that were shared, but they were great to see. Please feel free to share photos that you would like us to put in our newsletter.

