



The Division of Agriculture Activities

June 07, 2013

Find us on the web at:
<http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag>

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To remove your name from our e-newsletter list, [click here](#).

To be added to our e-newsletter list, [click here](#).

Questions or Comments?
E-Mail or call 907-761-3864.

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Director's Note

Winter has finally released its cold grip on Alaska and summer has arrived! June is always a busy time – and this year even more so as we find ourselves trying to catch up due to springs delayed arrival. The Interior had temperatures dipping well below freezing through mid May and late May brought south central a late snowfall that brought up to six inches in certain areas. One thing is for sure – everyone in Alaska is celebrating the warmer weather and the beautiful clear days.

Just a few quick reminders – The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requires that all farms have a Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasure (SPCC) plan in place if an oil spill from your farm could reach water and you store oil in above ground quantities of more than 1320 gallons or have completely buried tanks with more than 42,000 gallons of oil. For additional information on the requirements and developing a SPCC plan visit the SPCC for Agriculture website at epa.gov/emergencies/content/spcc/spcc_ag.htm. For those of you interested in learning more about agrosecurity, Cooperative Extension is holding a workshop next week. Additional information is available at dnr.alaska.gov/ag/CALENDAR/SCAPFlyer.pdf. Don't forget to nominate a deserving family for the 2013 Farm Family of the Year award.

This month we are sad to say goodbye to Marketing Program Assistant Kristi Krueger. Kristi has been a valuable asset to our marketing team and the Division as a whole for the past two years. She was instrumental in the creation of the Restaurant Rewards program, the Kids' Farmers Market activity and many other projects. We wish Kristi the best on her next adventure.

As always, please take the time to review the calendar. If you have any comments or concerns please give me a call @ 761-3867 or send an email to Franci.Havemeister@alaska.gov.

-Franci Havemeister

*"It is neither wealth nor splendor, but tranquility and occupation which give happiness."
- Thomas Jefferson*

Agriculture Calendar

- ▶ **Mon. Jun. 10th- Tue. Jun 11th:** **Strengthening Community Agrosecurity Planning Workshop.** Fire Station 61, 101 W Swanson, Wasilla. *Details: [here](#);*
- ▶ **Mon. Jun. 10th:** **Alaska Grown Chef at the Market grant deadline.** Statewide. *Details: [here](#);*
- ▶ **Thu. Jun. 27th, 1 pm:** **Board of Agriculture & Conservation Meeting;** Palmer. *Details: [here](#); Teleconference: 800-315-6338, passcode: 122#*

If you have an event that you would like to add to the calendar, please contact [Lora Haralson](#).

Farm Family of the Year Past Recipients

2000	Huppert Family	Palmer	2007	Insanity Acres, Peterson Family	Delta Junction
2001	VanderWeele Family	Palmer	2008	Brad Lewis & Family	Palmer
2002	Havemeister Dairy	Palmer	2009	Oberg-Kenley Family	Palmer
2003	Rempel Family Farm	Palmer	2010	Pyrah's U-Pick	Palmer
2004	P & M Gardens	Eagle River	2011	Gray Owl Farm	Palmer
2005	Calypso Farm & Ecology Center	Fairbanks	2012	Diamond M Ranch	Kenai Peninsula
2006	Wrigley Family	Delta Junction	2013	?	?

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Marketing Section

Call for 2013 Farm Family of the Year Nominations

The Division of Agriculture is seeking nominations for the 2013 Farm Family of the Year (FFY). Please send your nomination to Amy Pettit by June 28, 2013. Include in your nomination information about the family addressing these four categories:

1. Production of quality, Alaska Grown products (not based on quantity);
2. Community Involvement (civic organizations, school, sports, Church);

3. Involvement in agricultural industry organizations (local, State, Federal, etc); and
4. Overall farm family image, farming history and unique or special production.

Follow Alaska Grown on Facebook at [facebook.com/dnr.alaskagrown](https://www.facebook.com/dnr.alaskagrown) for all of the latest updates.

Alaska Farm to School Program Update

Alaska Agriculture Day!

What a great week to celebrate and teach kids about agriculture in Alaska!

The Alaska Farm to School Program led activities for 8 classes adding up to 150 kids in the Fairbanks area. This year we did the Seed Potato Planting activity where kids learned about why we use Alaska Certified Seed Potatoes to plant with, what healthy potato food choices are, and how to plant

a potato. Kids all went home with a potato plant of their own.

The Seed Potato activity is available on our website at: dnr.alaska.gov/ag/FarmToSchool/Potato_Planting_Activity.pdf.



Students from Fairbanks Montesorri School learn why it is important to use Certified Seed Potatoes, how to plant potatoes, and how to make healthy potato food choices.

AK Farm to School mini-grants

We received 22 applications for this year's mini-grant announcement and were able to fund 14 of the proposals. We were happy to see representation from all regions of the state with our first application from the Northern Arctic region. Funded projects were evenly distributed between urban and rural projects.

Projects range from school gardens and farm tours to cooking with local products; we look forward to hearing more about them as they develop! We are happy to announce our 2011 and 2012 farm to school grant reports are available for everyone to learn from. All projects that have been awarded are described along with the project results. These reports are great to give

people ideas and find out how kids are getting engaged in their local food system, all over the state! To view these reports go to our site at: dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag_FTS.htm, and scroll down to reports.

For updates, news, grant opportunities, and announcements join our listserv at: list.state.ak.us/soalists/akfarmtoschool/jl.htm.

Don't forget to check us out on facebook at: [facebook.com/AlaskaFarmToSchool](https://www.facebook.com/AlaskaFarmToSchool).

For more information about the Alaska Farm-to-School program, or if you have any questions, contact Johanna Herron at Johanna.herron@alaska.gov or (907) 374-3714.



ARLF Services

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

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Pest Detection / Inspection Section

Brand and Mark program in the State of Alaska

Many people don't know there is a brand program for the State of Alaska. There are currently 146 registered brands throughout the state that include cattle, horses, elk and reindeer.

The State of Alaska Brand statutes are in Chapter 03.40 titled "Brands and Marks". Under section 03.40.010, any person owning cattle, reindeer, bison, musk ox, elk, sheep, horses and mules or asses may adopt a brand or mark. After recording the brand or mark as provided in AS.03.40.030, the person has the exclusive right to its use.

The Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources has designated the Division of Agriculture (Division) the responsibility of managing the brand program. The Division publishes a brand book every 5 years. The period covers years that end in either a 0 or 5. A copy of the brand book can be obtained by contacting the Division office in Palmer or Fairbanks.

There are several methods and reasons to apply a brand or a mark. For example, the elk and reindeer farmers may use a 'Mark'

method to identify their animal. The 'Mark' method is notching the animals ears a certain way for identification. Every notch or cut in the ear is recorded and designated for that individual, the same as an actual brand.

There are many different ways that an animal can be branded. Here is a list and brief explanation of how branding irons are prepared:

Heated - A red hot branding iron is applied to the hide of an animal.

Freeze-branding - the branding iron has been chilled using dry ice or liquid nitrogen. Rather than burning a scar into the animal the freeze-brand damages the pigment producing hair cells, causing the animal's hair to grow white.

The Division of Agriculture sends out renewal letters to registered brand owners so it is important to keep us notified of your current address. If you have a brand that you would like to register go to the Division of Agriculture Website at: dnr.alaska.gov/ag/Marketing/2010BrandApplication.pdf.



Branding has many shapes and sizes. The Division of Agriculture's Brand Book has a plethora of brands and marks to peruse through. Add your own by visiting the website and applying.

Meet Alaska Farmland Trust's New Executive Director

Greetings! As of the end of April, I have taken over management of the Alaska Farmland Trust as its new Executive Director. I have worked in agriculture in a variety of positions including as a consultant, a policy researcher, and as a worker on a variety of central Pennsylvania farms. As a native of Ohio, I have watched the farmland surrounding my family's home slowly disappear as chain restaurants and strip malls replace what was once corn and soybean fields, so I am excited to work here in Alaska to help harmonize the development of communities with existing and new agriculture. I am also very excited about developing new programs for the Alaska Farmland Trust including one that would link landowners interested in selling, leasing, or renting their farmland with individuals looking to acquire or lease agricultural land. To help me get an idea of the level of interest for such a program, I'm would appreciate it if you would visit the Alaska Farmland Trust's website, akfarmland.com/news, and take a very quick 5 question survey that will enter you to win an Alaska Grown Hoodie, courtesy of the Alaska Division of Agriculture. Thank you so much for your time and I am looking forward to working with you all to continue to grow Alaska agriculture.

Sincerely, Louisa Yanes



Plant Materials Center

<http://plants.alaska.gov/>

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Plant Materials Center

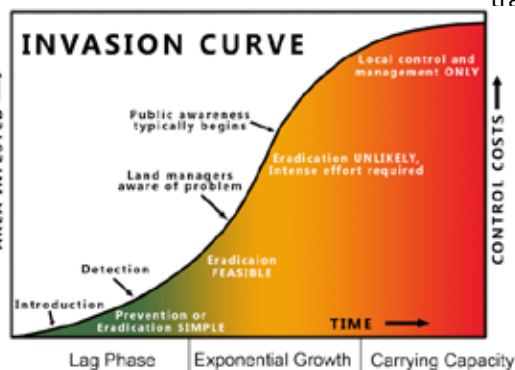
Invasive Weed Program Seasonal Staff

Canada Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*, *C.thistle*) is an aggressive, invasive plant that is a registered noxious weed in 35 states, including Alaska. *C. thistle* has a limited distribution in the southcentral region, with Anchorage being the hot spot for infestations and a potential source for adjacent un-impacted agricultural and wildlands. Control and management efforts began in 2010 by the Plant Materials Center (PMC) to control Canada Thistle in Anchorage. The Invasive Weed and Agricultural Pest Program staff, Jacki Schade and Heather Stewart, will continue the Canada Thistle Management Program for the 2013 summer season.

Staff will be coordinating with the Anchorage Cooperative Weed Management Area, the Department of Transportation, Anchorage Parks Foundation and other partners to manage infestations of Canada Thistle along State owned right-of-ways and other high priority locations. Control activities include digging up plants or clipping seed heads (this prevents *C. thistle* from going to seed and stresses the



plant by taxing the energy stored in their root system). The Division of Agriculture is also exploring options for herbicide treatment on priority infestations along transportation corridors to reduce *C. thistle* infestations.



To learn more about Canada Thistle, visit the Plant Materials Center's website, at plants.alaska.gov/invasives/index.htm. If you have questions, contact the Invasive Species coordinator at 907-745-8785, or email Brianne.blackburn@alaska.gov. You can also report suspected infestations by calling 1-877-INVASIV (1-877-468-2748).

New Plant Materials Staff - Publication Specialist

Kim Allen is from Winterhaven, Florida and currently resides in Palmer, Alaska. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Ohio Dominican University in Visual Communications and a Master's degree in Environment and Natural Resources, Soil and Water Conservation/Restoration, from The Ohio State University. She has over ten years of experience as a graphic artist and has experience in environmental field work. She is an avid outdoors enthusiast and enjoys kayaking, rafting, fishing, camping, 4 wheeling, snowmachining, snowboarding, snowshoeing, ice fishing, xc skiing, gardening etc. She is very excited to join the team as Publications Specialist at the Plant Materials Center.





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Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation: Division of Environmental Health

Health Considerations of Fresh Produce Raw is Not Without Risk

Article contributed by Patryce D. McKinney

Over the last couple of years there have been many headlines exposing deadly pathogen risks related to fresh produce: 'E. coli with Oregon Strawberries,' 'Salmonella with Mexican Cucumbers,' 'Listeria with Colorado Cantaloupes.'

Many large retailers across the nation have voluntarily implemented or increased surveillance testing of supplier produce shipments. Some require passing tests prior to delivery at the retailer. Others allow for the produce to be distributed to the store but held in store pending results before stocking shelves for consumer purchase. These self-imposed vendor requirements help protect the retailer by reducing risk of a foodborne outbreak associated with their establishment and can increase consumer confidence with retailers who implement surveillance testing requirements.

Examples of tests that can be run are Total Viable Count (heterotrophic bacteria), *E. coli*, and *Salmonella*. Total Viable Count is an indicator of product lifespan; results above the limit may result in early or increased spoilage losses either in store or at home. *E. coli* is a harmful pathogen that in some forms (serotypes), such as O157:H7, produces a toxin that can cause serious disease like kidney failure or death. The 2011 European outbreak from German sprout is a deadly and tragic example of an *E. coli* outbreak resulting in 852 with kidney failure and 32 deaths across the globe (CDC, July 8, 2011). *Salmonella* causes gastrointestinal distress and the infection can spread through the blood stream to other parts of the body. CDC reports that children are the most likely

to get salmonellosis and the elderly and immunocompromised are most prone to severe infections.

Produce testing poses many challenges. The variety of items is one of the toughest: it takes a lot more lettuce to make a 100 gram sample than it does tomatoes, and the pH between broccoli florets and cut pineapple varies drastically. Also, in a commercial world, the commodity of time is extremely valuable with such perishable products. There is a narrow window of time to test produce while it moves from farmer harvest to wholesale distributor and supplier to retailer while ensuring there is enough 'life' left in the produce to be available for sale to the consumer. Some tests take at least 48 hours to get preliminary results.

In addition to testing of the produce itself, swab samples can be taken at various points around processing facilities to check for *Listeria*. *Listeria* can be transferred to product during food preparation and storage. Listeriosis also affects children, elderly, and those with weakened immune system. Pregnant women are also highly susceptible.

In response to recent outbreaks and the increased monitoring, the Environmental Health Laboratory has in-state capacity and capability to perform all of the testing services described above at our Anchorage facility. For additional questions or information regarding our ability to test produce, please call our main number at 907-375-8200.



Photo: healthworldnet.com



Photo: isocertificationtraining.blogspot.com

E. coli (left) and testing in a laboratory for *Salmonella* (right).



UNIVERSITY OF
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School of Natural Resources & Agricultural Sciences

Peonies: A Growing Success

Article contributed by Nancy Tarnai

A little over a decade ago you'd have been hard pressed to find peonies growing in Alaska, except for the occasional decorative backyard bush. Today, there are 25 farms that belong to the [Alaska Peony Growers Association](#).

At the group's winter meeting in Fairbanks, 150 people gathered to learn about peony growing techniques and share their stories of pluck and perseverance.

"It's been incredible," said Franci Havemeister, director of the Alaska Division of Agriculture. "I was at their first meeting five years ago and the growth is amazing." Peony sales present an economic potential for Alaska, she said. "We can meet the demand no one else is able to meet. It's a wide open market."

Apparently, eager growers concur. According to [Pat Holloway](#), a horticulture professor at the University of Alaska Fairbanks School of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences, commercial production began in 2004 with small test plots in Fairbanks, Kenai and Homer. By 2012, more than 100,000 roots had been planted by 38 growers. The projected statewide harvest by 2015 is over 1 million peony stems.

Holloway, who got the ball rolling on peony trials at the [Georgeson Botanical Garden](#), tracks growth and development of the new industry. "Growers, industry support groups, legislative leaders, educational and research organizations need to know basic statistics on crop production, markets and growth in order to support and fund activities that promote this industry," Holloway said. "Hard numbers also provide a great wow factor. To say an industry is thriving is quite superficial unless it can be backed up with solid numbers and trends."

By surveying 38 growers, Holloway determined sales of fresh cut peony stems doubled from 2011 to 2012. Sales to other states dominated the markets and a small quantity was shipped to Canada and Taiwan. More than 25,000 stems were sold in 2012, at a price of \$2 to \$10 per stem, depending on the buyer.

What possesses people to suddenly turn their land into peony farms?

For Kim and John Herning it was John's retirement as an airline pilot that did the trick. The couple was looking for something that would provide retirement income and become something to hand down to their children and grandchildren. "We're ready to plant 2,000 roots this spring," Kim said. They are converting a former

hay farm off of Chena Hot Springs Road into a peony patch.

"We hope it's successful and can make money," Kim said. "Maybe one of our children will want to take it on."

Marilyn Berglin said it merely took the delightful smell of peonies at the Georgeson Botanical Garden to convince her to grow the flowers. "I was charmed by their beauty," she said.

Last summer, Berglin planted 130 roots and will be putting in 2,000 at her farm in Fox this year. "It's something I'm going to really like," she said. "I hope to expand."

Michael Williams' story takes an interesting turn in that his land in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley is off the road system. The Eagle Song Family Peony Farm came about after the family lodge lost its fishing rights after regulations changed.

When Williams discovered reports about the success of Alaska peony growers, he decided this was an entirely doable project. "We did the logistics and the business plan and now we've got 10,000 roots in the ground."



After 17 years of doing business with flight services, Williams will now pay them to transport peonies instead of tourists. "I can have flowers to Anchorage in 25 minutes," he said.

Three of his four children are interested in the new venture, which seals the deal for Williams. "I hope to provide a living and create something to pass on," he said.

He also hopes to come up with a blueprint for other operations and inspire rural entrepreneurs and farmers to follow suit. "It's definitely hard work," he said.

Once planted, the roots take several years to produce a product that can be sold. And there are serious considerations about soil quality and fertilizers.

UAF SNRAS Associate Professor [Mingchu Zhang](#) studies the soil quality for optimum peony growth. He said, "We have a long way to go but the research will be able to tell a lot."

Peonies require 16 essential nutrients. "Each one is irreplaceable," he said. "If one is missing the plant won't perform."

He is looking at 31 soil samples in 17 locations. Once completed, the results will be published.

Ron Illingworth, outgoing president of the peony association, said, "We are starting to see what research is doing for us."