



MEMORANDUM
Department of Natural Resources

STATE OF ALASKA
Division of Agriculture

TO: Board of Agriculture
& Conservation

DATE: March 27, 2014

FROM: Franci Havemeister
Director

SUBJECT: Director's Report
March 2014

Agricultural Revolving Loan Fund (ARLF):

- Loan officer has received and processed two loan applications, an extension request, and a collateral release request.
- Loan officer has been in close contact with a realtor on the sale of the Kenai property, which is an ARLF asset. An offer to purchase has been accepted and is in the stages of closing.
- Loan officer has updated the asset report.
- Loan officer has processed loan payoffs, associated Deeds of Reconveyance, and UCC filing updates, as well as other duties associated with ARLF management.
- Loan officer has had conversations over the phone with several potential new borrowers and forwarded them application information.
- Loan officer has had conversations over the phone with current borrowers requesting potential loan modifications and assumptions.
- Loan officer has been in contact with delinquent borrowers. Default borrower contact list has been updated.
- Loan officer has been in process of managing loan insurance requirements and other ARLF loan requirements.
- Loan officer has updated the interest rate comparison for review.

Marketing & Development:

- Thirteen businesses were added to the Alaska Grown certification program in January and February.
- Staff continues to make daily posts on the Alaska Grown and Alaska Farm to School Facebook pages. The Alaska Grown page has over 16,000 likes with the Farm to School page surpassing 2000 likes in February.
- Staff ran a special promotion via Facebook and the www.eatlocalalaskagrown.org website in February. The "28 Days of Potatoes" campaign featured a different recipe each day that highlighted Alaska Grown potatoes. The Facebook promotion resulted in 688 new page likes and over 70,000 individuals 'engaged' with the page during the 28 days.
- Marketing staff attended the Western United States Agricultural Trade Association (WUSATA) winter meeting, learning about opportunities, trends and new developments in international export of agriculture products.
- The Alaska Farm to School Listserv currently reaches 452 subscribers each week with updates.
- Staff participated in a panel discussion about the Nutritional Alaskan Foods in Schools (NAFS) grant at the Alaska School Nutrition Association (AKSNA) annual meeting.

- Staff continues to participate with the Alaska Food Policy Council, serving on the Governing Board, as a liaison to the Locally Grown workgroup and on the School Programs workgroup.
- Marketing staff conducted a survey to find out what farmers and ranchers in the Kenai Peninsula and outlier locations would like to see from the Division of Agriculture. This survey is the same as the previous survey for farmers and ranchers in the MatSu/Anchorage area. The results of these surveys will be compared. Survey end date was scheduled for February 28th, but was extended into March.
- Staff received an award at the Alaska Public Health Summit for the efforts of the Farm to School and Alaska Grown programs.
- Staff met with Ken Meter to discuss Alaska agriculture; Ken is a renowned food systems analyst who has been hired by the Alaska Food Policy Council to research barriers and opportunities in the Alaska agriculture industry.
- Staff gave a presentation to a classroom of 15 students in Palmer on the Farm to School Program, local foods, and food security.
- Staff participated in an Alaska Grown potato wedge taste-test in the Mat Su School District as part of a Specialty Crop Competitive Grant with the Alaska Chip Company.
- The marketing team began collecting data for the 2014-2015 Source Book in February; we have a goal of gathering data from 270 farms this year, a 20% increase over the 2012/13 book. Staff will collect data through 4/15/14.
- Marketing staff attended a meeting between farms and restaurants in Talkeetna in January. Information about Alaska Grown and the Restaurant Rewards program was relayed to the farms and restaurants. There are currently 24 restaurants participating in the Restaurant Rewards Program.
- Staff conducted interviews of applicants for the Farmers Market Quest/EBT VISTA position that Kyla vacated at the end of January. It is anticipated that the new VISTA will start in April.
- Marketing staff attended the 2014 North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Association Convention in Kansas City, Missouri. The conference included a number of workshops and farm tours related to Agritourism.
- Marketing staff managed registration of and attended the Alaska Peony Growers Association (APGA) 2014 Annual Winter meeting.

Central Office Inspection:

- Staff completed 3 FV 300 with 3 lots inspected.
- Staff conducted 12 retail surveillance visits to monitor grade and condition of produce.
- Staff worked with timber exporters to review requirements, expectations and shipping plans for 2014.
- Staff developed Exterior Quarantine related to aquatic weeds.
- Staff answered legislative questions regarding Alaska's livestock brand registration program.
- Staff participated with USDA and other Western states in table top exercises regarding dealing with plant health emergency plans.
- Staff conducted farm visits to check quality of potatoes.
- Staff conducted seed potato storage inspections in Delta, Nenana, Fairbanks and Trapper Creek. The seed potato storage inspections are a requirement for producers participating in the Alaska Certified Potato Seed Program.
- Staff issued 6 phytosanitary certificates.
- Staff reviewed and released three USDA permit applications for interstate movement of plant pests and soil.

- Staff participated and trained with the Montana Seed Certification inspectors during their winter seed potato postharvest grow outs in Oahu Hawaii. The grow outs involved evaluating the health status from all of the certified seed lots produced in the state (10,000 acres of over 60 potato varieties represented in a 16 acre plot). As part of the seed potato certification, the results of the grow outs would determine whether the seed potato grower would be within disease, virus, injury, etc. tolerance to sell their lots for seed, tablestock or not recertified. Other states that participated in these grow outs were MT, ID, WI, MN, MI, Colorado and Canada. In addition to this, we participated in the virus and herbicide trial plots planted by the USDA. We observed different strains of viruses that were inoculated on different potato varieties as well as we observed how different herbicides and application rates affected the potatoes growth and characteristics associated with these applications.
- Staff attended and gave presentations at the Alaska Peony Growers Winter Conference. Staff discussed the Pest Survey work that is being conducted on Peony Farms in Alaska. The presentation included descriptions of the 3 surveys being conducted; Thrips associated with Peony in Alaska, Nematode Surveys, preliminary results and proposed projects for next year; Enhance Specialty Crop Producers Understanding of and Response to Pest Threats, Nematode Vectors of Tobacco Rattle Virus TRV and to continue the Thrips associated with Peony in Alaska.
- Staff attended and participated in the annual Alaska Seed Growers Inc. (ASGI) meeting. Staff discussed the certification tag printing equipment supplies and new changes to the seed tag requests. Staff also briefly discussed some changes to be expected with the application, i.e., documentation needed for seed purchased as well as an update on the regulations.
- Staff participated in a meeting with Alaska Division of Forestry (DOF), Forest Health Program Coordinator and continues to draft up the deliverables for the Forest Health Protection Grant, "Improved training and partnering for the coordinated early detection of invasives by individuals in Alaska". Staff is working under a Reimbursable Services Agreement (RSA) with the (DOF) on this Project thru December 2014.
- Staff participated in the quarterly Alaska Pest Risk Committee (AKPRAC) Meeting, where topics of interest included a discussion on planning an interagency cooperative nursery survey project with the USDA. This project would complement the current Cooperative Agriculture Pest Survey (CAPS) Nursery Survey work that is being conducted.
- Staff participated in the Producer Conference in Palmer. Topics of discussion were a Potato Update; the current changes and transitions with the Alaska Seed Potato Program as well as National Potato Council and Potato Association of America Updates. Staff completed the needed CEUs for Pesticide Certification recertification.
- Staff continues to work with the Potato Disease Specialist with the transition into managing the Alaska Certified Seed Potato Program.
- Staff has successfully set up the software and tagging machine for the Alaska Certified Seed Potato Program. Staff drafted up a letter to the certified potato seed growers that addressed the new protocols for requesting their certification tags. Staff has responded to multiple requests and has issued tags for 2014.
- Staff drafted and completed the 2014 Seed Potato Certification Handbook.

- Staff continues to provide input to the Alaska Weed and Pest Coordinator on the Draft State Plant Health Regulations.
- Staff responded to media inquiries on the Late Blight Letter Press Release. The Late Blight Letter is an annual reminder on the current Quarantine and discusses restrictions on importing tomato plants and seed potatoes and a list the Seed Potato Growers that were certified in 2013 and the 2013 certified varieties.
- Staff completed and submitted to the USDA the Thrips associated with Peony semiannual report. This is the second year for this project where the goal is to identify insects, focusing on Thrips on Peony Farms in Alaska.
- Staff met with Northern Region Inspection Staff/ State Survey Coordinator (SSC) to discuss creating a template to be used for all projects that would be easily imported into the USDA databases for the CAPS and Farm bill project work.
- Staff has responded to multiple inquiries regarding requirements for the importation of nursery stock into Alaska as well inquires on export of plants from Alaska.
- Staff conducted farm visits and store inspections to check quality of potatoes.
- Staff compiled article regarding On Farm Food Safety Workshops and put article in division newsletter.
- Staff participated in DEC Farmers Market Training.
- Staff completed regional shell egg surveillance inspections.
- Staff is working with APHIS and Division Staff on preparations and planning for 2014 pest detection activities.

Plant Materials Center:

Invasive Weeds and Agricultural Pest Program

- Staff is coordinating with Department of Transportation (DOT) regional and statewide leads to implement a DOT Integrated Vegetation Management Plan that facilitates the treatment of invasive plants in DOT maintained rights-of-way. On March 5, 2014 DOT hosted a roundtable discussion that included topics such as contracting, herbicide selection, and outreach to agency staff and the public.
- On March 6, 2015, the Division of Agriculture established quarantine at the boundaries of Alaska to prevent the entry and spread of five specific aquatic invasive plants. This action aims at preventing further introductions for high risk species. See <http://plants.alaska.gov/invasives/aquatics.html> for more information.
- Staff is continuing to participate in efforts with the Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Weed Management Area to develop an Integrated Pest Management Plan for the aquatic invasive weed Elodea. This effort includes assisting in the permitting processes with Department of Economic & Environment Conservation (DEC), Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G), and Department of Natural Resources (DNR).
- Collaborating with ADF&G, staff will be conducting field staff trainings on aquatic invasive species and will include information on field identification, sampling, and best management practices for the field. These trainings will be available for other state, private and federal agencies to participate via web course.

- Staff will be making statewide Elodea distribution data publicly available mid-March for download through the Division of Mining, Land and Water navigable water dataset.
- Staff have produced a Request for Proposals to create and distribute statewide a radio PSA targeting Alaska gardeners for providing information on invasive species in the state. The PSA will provide direct contact information for reporting invasive species and resources for more educational materials.
- The Anchorage Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA) and staff have updated the invasive species ranking and management priority list specific to ornamental and garden species the Anchorage area. This list along with other invasive species information relevant to the green industry will be distributed throughout the municipality nursery and greenhouses for public awareness.

Pathology

- Presented work on Tobacco rattle virus (TRV) infection of peonies at Alaska Peony Growers Association on January 31, 2014.
- Met with Alaska Pioneer Fruit Growers for the apple hardy rootstock trials.
- Set up a Real-Time PCR machine for bacterial ring rot (*Clavibacter michiganensis* subsp. *sepedonicus*) testing in potato.
- Met with a Trapper Creek grower who expressed interest in diversifying their crops and possible field trial.

Publications

- Staff is continuing to update webpages for all PMC programs and preparing for launch of new pages.
- Staff continues to prepare monthly newsletters, support other staff with computer related duties, BAC reports, and general web maintenance duties.
- Staff continuing to build printed and online 2014/2015 Alaska Grown Sourcebook.
- Staff preparing audio/visual technology for upcoming Potato Symposium Conference.
- Staff beginning brochure to reflect PMC services.

Horticulture

- Staff is writing reports from the data collected from the 2013 growing season.
- Staff planning and preparation of the 2014 field season will continue over the coming months.
- Variety trial plans and maps are being designed for the upcoming growing season.
- Outreach is being conducted to growers and producers throughout the state.
- Plant material has been ordered for the upcoming growing season.
- Hard good materials have been ordered and have arrived for the season.
- Integrated Test Management (IPM) plan updates are being made for the 2014 season.
- Seeds are started for the 2014 variety trials.
- Finish seeding for the 2014 season.
- Staff attended the Sustainable Agriculture (SARE) conference in Fairbanks.
- Staff attended the Peony Growers Conference in Anchorage and the Produce Growers Conference in Palmer.

Seed Cleaning

- Staff continued seed cleaning and conditioning in both the large and small seed house.
- Only three commercial producer seeds lots left for cleaning this season.
- Seven PMC foundation seed lots left for cleaning this season.

- Staff is continuing construction in the large seed house to get two additional seed cleaning machines operational.
- Staff are preparing and planning for 2014 PMC foundation seed field plantings and renovations.
- Staff completed pre-plant cleaning recommendations for commercial growers cleaning their own seed lots.
- Reviewing pesticides for use in foundation seed fields for 2014.
- Staff is working toward registration of new pesticides for use in Foundation seed fields.
- Staff is making updates to PMC IPM plan for additional pesticides to be used in the 2014 season.

Revegetation

- Staff is reviewing Reclamation Plan for Donlin Gold in cooperation with SRK consulting.
- Staff are assisting the public with revegetation questions in regards to project implementation and choosing seed mixtures
- Staff is working with the DOT design engineers to assist with their seeding and erosion control specifications for projects around the state.
- The Pipeline Coordinators Office has received the final Trans Alaska Pipeline Report and is distributing the report to interested state and federal agencies.

Ethnobotany and Education

- Staff provided information on many topics to callers and e-mails. Some topics include landscape needs, revegetation suggestions, pesticide training, where to find seed, how to plant beach wildrye by sprigs, suggestions on finding information for the Winter Conservation Series, how to add value to native plant harvests for sale, identification of landowners' trees, etc.
- Staff provided training on the uses of cottonwood and spruce. Research, handouts, and a salve were produced for the monthly "Walking the Red R.O.A.D." Plant Project.
- Staff attends every Monday Farmer's Indoor Market at the Palmer Depot, assisting the five vendors selling products made from locally harvested wild native plants, plus answering general agriculture questions.

Foundation Seed

- Staff is measuring amounts of seed, reviewing purity and germination records, inputting inventory data in preparation for seed sale starting April 14, 2014.
- Staff reviewed 26 Plant Materials Center's foundation seed prices and procedures to evaluate the pricing formula Alaska PMC uses for viability for our agriculture industry.
- Staff spoke with several long-time seed producers about seed needs and pricing procedures.
- Staff is following the costs of cereal grains and shipping in the lower 48 to appropriately price grains from the PMC.
- Staff met to evaluate pricing formulas and is reviewing PMC's and AK Seed Grower's Inc.'s past decisions on foundations seed distribution and pricing.
- Staff is reviewing varieties to continue to produce as needed for the industry.