



# Division of Agriculture Activities

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

## Note from the Director

Director of Agriculture -  
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### In This Issue

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- Exciting News on the Ag Revolving-Loan Fund!
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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)*

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

### ARLF Land Asset Management Staff

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Spring is always a welcome site in Alaska! The days are finally getting longer and our thoughts move toward outdoor activities – whether it be spring calving, starting up the greenhouse, or repairing the equipment for the upcoming season – Alaskan Agriculture begins to come alive this time of year!

As everyone knows, March also includes Alaska's Legislative Session. I spent the latter part of last week, in Juneau, discussing funding issues and answering questions regarding all things agriculture. We are fortunate to have a Governor who supports the industry, and reflects it in her budget. As well as some Legislators, Senators and Aides who understand and defend its worth.

While in Juneau I had the opportunity to attend a presentation by Bryce Wrigley, Alaska's Farm Bureau President. He had a powerful presentation for the Natural Resource Committee showcasing barley production in Delta and the use of barley stoves. It was interesting and drew many questions from the committee.

As pictures paint a thousand words – I would like to talk less and show more. Next year's presentation will include a PowerPoint presentation representing the different sectors of the industry. It is important to show that agriculture is a viable industry in our state. We have all seen and heard about the failures of the past, but it is time to move forward and share the success stories of today. If you have footage or pictures you would like to share please let me know.

Thank you for your commitment to the Alaska Agriculture Industry!

Franci

## ARLF Land & Asset Manager

Hello again from the Asset Management corner of the Division of Agriculture.

I had the opportunity to visit the Alaska Farmers Coop Feed Store in Delta during January of this year. As usual, Norma and other staff were quite helpful in providing me information about the operation. The store was currently experiencing the winter lull in business; however they expected that fertilizer sales would start increasing soon. I was impressed with their supplemental heating system currently in use, which utilizes barley to produce the heat necessary to keep the building warm. Staff explained that it was costing about \$10 a day to heat the entire store.

That's all for now..... *Ray Nix*

## ARLF - Loan Officer Corner

### Agricultural Revolving Loan Fund

The objective of the ARLF is to promote the development of agriculture as an industry throughout the State by means of moderate interest rate loans.

#### ARLF Loan Office

Candy Easley

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We have great news regarding the Agricultural Revolving Loan Fund interest rates! The Board of Agriculture and Conservation discussed the ARLF interest rates at their regularly scheduled meeting on February 26, 2009.

Effective February 26, 2009 the Board of Agriculture and Conservation (BAC) approved lowering the Agricultural Revolving Loan Fund (ARLF) loan interest rates from 5% loan interest rate that has been in effect since January 16, 2003.

Short Term Operating Loan/Maximum 1 Year - 3%

Chattel Loan/Maximum 7 Years - 4%

Land Clearing Loan/Maximum 20 Years - 4.50%

Farm Development & Irrigation & Product Processing Loans/Maximum 30 Years - 4.50%

- **FARM DEVELOPMENT** – loans to purchase real property and construct non-residential improvements for agricultural purposes.
- **CHATTEL** – loans to purchase equipment or livestock.
- **SHORT TERM** – loans to finance annual operating expenses such as seed, feed, fertilizer, harvesting or planting activities.
- **IRRIGATION** – loans to purchase and install irrigation systems.
- **PRODUCT PROCESSING** – loans to build and equip facilities to process Alaska agricultural products.
- **CLEARING** – loans to provide for land clearing.

Loan Type	Maximum Loan	Maximum Term
Farm Development	\$1,000,000	30 years
Chattel	\$1,000,000	7 years
Short Term	\$ 200,000	1 year
Irrigation	\$1,000,000	30 years
Product Processing	\$ 250,000	30 years
Clearing	\$ 250,000	20 years

For more information on applying for loans, please contact Candy Easley at 761-3869 or by email: [candy.easley@alaska.gov](mailto:candy.easley@alaska.gov)

## Land Sales & Grazing Lease Staff

[http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag\\_sales.htm](http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag_sales.htm)

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## Land Sales and Grazing Leases

I have been asked to help update the Susitna Area Plan, specifically I have been asked to identify the areas that should be classified as Agriculture. How the heck do you do that? Well you start with the old plan, identify the areas that remain in State ownership and the lands that have been purchased by the public. Quite a bit has moved into the hands of individuals looking to fulfill their dreams of land ownership and pursuit of a rural lifestyle. For example the Bartlett Hills area south of Talkeetna had about 8,000 acres classified in the 1982 Susitna Area Plan and only 300 acres still remain in State ownership.

Next I look at soil data, the NRCS has a great web site for doing this:

<http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/>

I recommend anyone buying land from the State, Borough, or a private owner use the Web Soil Survey to get more information about the land they are buying. I look at the Non irrigated Capability Class when determining agricultural suitability. The WSS also compiles soil information not related to agriculture. For example the reports on Building Site Development and Sanitary Facilities have information for anyone thinking of building a house or septic system

The NRCS has identified soils of local importance for the Mat-Su and Yetna areas. These are soils that have limitations but with special conservation practices will be suitable for some field crops. These are also the soils that grow the best trees for forestry, browse for moose, and provide dry stable trails for recreational users, all important considerations for the Area Plan.

Next I look at the historical land use. It makes sense to cluster farms together because of shared infrastructure, similar climate, and a sense of community. All are important to the success of agriculture in Alaska.

Lastly I look to the future, where will the next generation of Alaskans want agricultural development? The Moose Creek area south of the Petersville Road looks promising. The Deshka Flats area west of the Big-Su and east of the Yetna river has good agricultural potential but a plan to address the needed access and other infrastructure has not been developed.

I will be presenting my recommendations at Upper-Su and Wasilla, Soil and Water Conservation District meetings. There will also be an opportunity for the public to comment at a scoping meeting in late April. You can call me directly with questions or comments at 761-3863.

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## Inspection Section

### Russet Spotting in Lettuce

Russet Spotting is one of the more common condition defects found in romaine, iceberg, and leaf variety lettuces. The small, rusty-brown spots that occur on the ribs and leaves after harvest are mostly a cosmetic concern, but they can also make the lettuce unmarketable. In addition, the affected tissues can become infected by secondary organisms, resulting in decay.

Russet spotting may be more severe on overly-mature lettuce, or on lettuce that is produced in hot, dry climates. It can be caused by variations in storage temperature or by exposure to ethylene gas. Lettuce is extremely sensitive to damage from ethylene. Besides causing russet spotting, ethylene also stimulates damage to cell membranes and cell walls.

## Inspection Staff

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

Have you heard about the new publication "Alaska Farm & Ranch News?" The first publication recently came out. You can subscribe by emailing: [editor@alaskafarmandranchnews.com](mailto:editor@alaskafarmandranchnews.com)

The subscription is \$18/year.

When lettuce is cut, shredded, or damaged, ethylene production rates increase, resulting in increased russet spotting and accelerated tissue breakdown.

Ethylene is a natural ripening hormone given off by many fresh fruits, including pears, bananas, apples, and tomatoes. If lettuce is shipped or stored with these fruits, russet spotting can result. Ethylene gas can also be emitted by gasoline engines or propane-powered forklifts in warehouses. Ethylene gas stimulates the production of phenolic compounds in lettuce, which cause brown pigments to form in the leaves. This is why Romaine lettuce, which has a higher concentration of phenolic compounds than iceberg lettuce, often discolors more rapidly when cut or broken.

#### Optimum storage conditions for most lettuce varieties:

Temperatures of <2°C and relative humidity of at least 95% are required to optimize the postharvest life of lettuce. Proper ventilation, or alternatively, a low oxygen atmosphere environment (1% to 8%) is very effective in controlling russet spotting. With proper storage, lettuce can have a shelf-life of approximately 3 to 4 weeks.

Contact us for USDA Tolerances for grade defects for various varieties of lettuce.

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## Marketing Services

### **Alaska Agriculture Innovation Grant (AAIG)**

*This grant is intended for specialty crop producers to adopt and develop methods and systems for season extension and increased crop productivity.*

- Grants will range from \$500—\$5000
- Applies to fruits, vegetables, and nursery crops
- *Funds cannot pay for labor and shipping costs*
- The grant can fund up to 50% of your purchase
- Dollar-for-dollar match of every state dollar expended
- A public presentation of your project and information must be given to other producers

This grant is now open to receive applications. The application deadline is April 3, 2009.

You can find the application, sample application and budget sheet online at: <http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/>.

### **Red Meat Livestock Conference**

The Division is hosting the Red Meat Livestock Conference in cooperation with the Palmer and Kodiak Soil and Water Conservation Districts. The conference is on March 25 & 26, 2009 at the Palmer Train Depot.

Two dynamic guest speakers will be participating in our conference. Joel Huesby and Keith Swanson are owners and operators of Thundering Hooves in Walla Walla, WA. They operate an organic farm where all their livestock is grass-fed. They own and operate a mobile abattoir (slaughter-house) that has a USDA inspector on-board. They work together with other like-minded producers, and process other livestock in their mobile abattoir. They market their meat online, through buying clubs, at the Thundering Hooves Meat Shop, and to restaurants. They have extensive experience and knowledge in raising, processing and marketing livestock, which they will be sharing with us.

Additionally, Bob and Nathan Mudd will be sharing about their trip to the



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Fancy Food Show in San Francisco. We have three producers participating in a discussion panel on diversified livestock, the State Veterinarian's office will be sharing about marketing non-amenable species and what is possible in Alaska, and a local chef will be discussing local meat demand with our local restaurants.

We are excited about this conference. It will focus on all aspects of livestock, from production to marketing. This conference will benefit all producers within the state of Alaska, and we hope to see you there!

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## Pest Detection Surveys in Alaska

In this issue, we would like to begin highlighting some of the pest detection surveys we do in Alaska. As you may already know, pest detection survey work coordinated by the Alaska Division of Agriculture is part of a cooperative agreement with other agencies and is known as the Cooperative Agricultural Pest Survey, or CAPS. The what, how, and who of CAPS in Alaska was discussed in last month's newsletter. In this issue, we would like to briefly discuss why we conduct CAPS surveys for pests in Alaska.

One very important aspect of pest detection is to fulfill Early Detection, Rapid Response (EDRR) objectives. On the surface, this sounds fairly straight forward, but becomes quite challenging when trying to communicate efforts across multiple agencies, as well as to the public, who may not even be aware of ongoing efforts. Outreach and interagency communication are extremely important. Surveying for pests is obviously one tool in the box to detecting pests early, but why survey for pests at all, especially if the pests you are surveying for are ones not known to be established in Alaska?



Each year, dog mushers from Yukon Territory come to Alaska for either the start or finish of the Yukon Quest dog race. They often pull a trailer and purchase barley straw in the Delta area to take back to Yukon Territory for dog bedding. To get the straw across the border, they need a phytosanitary certificate certifying

that the straw is from an area free of Cereal Leaf Beetles. The Division of Agriculture used to issue certificates stating "Cereal Leaf Beetles have never been reported in Alaska." About four years ago, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) came back with the question, "Have you ever looked for them in Alaska?" Thus, we conducted an official survey of grain fields in Alaska to show that Cereal Leaf Beetles are not here.

Most of the surveys that we conduct are for serious pests that we assume are not here, and we hope that we don't find them. However, we need this negative information to facilitate international trade in plant materials. And, if we should find a serious pest in one of our surveys, this early detection would improve our chances of eradicating it before it became established.

Photo: Cereal Leaf Beetle (*Oulema melanopus* (Linnaeus)), H. Arentsen, Bugwood.

## McKinley Meat & Sausage

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## Plant Material Center

[http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag\\_pmc.htm](http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag_pmc.htm)

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## Mt. McKinley Meat & Sausage (MMM&S)

Mt. McKinley Meat & Sausage Company plays a very important part in our Alaska agricultural industry. We support privately owned businesses through buying directly from them. We also refer customers that we slaughter animals under USDA inspection to other local businesses for further processing.

We process all 4-H livestock and provide a certified scale for animal weigh in. We process their animals, and then distribute donated animals to charities! We also cut and wrap orders for 4-H buyers.

We offer the only USDA inspection facility in the south-central area of Alaska. When USDA puts out new testing, they work out the bugs at our plant before implementing it in other privately owned plants. We provide much education for those involved in the industry. Quite often we are the first place called, when an individual is seeking processing information. We take pride in the service we can provide to our industry.

We work with the Department of Corrections and state Institutions. Our labor force is prison inmates, where they receive real-life experience and training. Recently we received a rewarding call from a past inmate who worked for us. He called to tell us about his success and thank us for our efforts. He let us know that if it was not for his experience at the Meat Plant, he would not be where he is today, as a successful business man with a tax return gross of \$2 million! This type of training is invaluable to many of the inmates we work with.

We appreciate your support. Please contact us with any questions you may have regarding the livestock industry, and we will be there to help you out. If you have animals that need to be slaughtered under USDA inspection, please contact us for further information.

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## Plant Material Center - PMC

The Division of Agriculture, Plant Materials Center (PMC) is beginning work on a strategic plan for invasive weeds and agricultural pest management, and is hosting a public meeting March 26<sup>th</sup> from 9am to 5pm at the PMC. The document will include sections that cover prevention, early detection and rapid response, coordination, control and management, regulation and policy, research, inventory and monitoring, and education. Those who attend the meeting will have the opportunity to discuss topics and goals to address in the strategic plan. Written comments will be accepted throughout the process.

Strategic plans are an important tool for invasive weeds and agricultural pest management. Invasive organisms do not understand the concept of property boundaries and political jurisdictions. Because they are able to spread across multiple land ownership and land management authorities, there is a considerable need to coordinate all affected agencies and partners. Strategic plans help to do that by including input from affected partners, and stakeholders. In this way management can move forward in a cohesive and effective fashion, while addressing the priority needs and concerns of stakeholders.

Anyone that is a farmer, land manager, horticulturalist, user of renewable resources or concerned citizen with an interest in invasive weeds and agricultural pest management should be involved

in this strategic planning process. The meeting on March 26<sup>th</sup> 9am to 5pm at the PMC is the first opportunity. If attending the meeting is not an option, Gino Graziano can provide background information, and receive comments. For more information on this strategic plan or to provide comments please contact Gino Graziano at: [Gino.Graziano@Alaska.gov](mailto:Gino.Graziano@Alaska.gov) 907-745-8127.

If you would like to participate in developing a certification program for "Invasive Weed Cooperators" and run a nursery, greenhouse, or landscaping business, please go to the Plant Materials Center's website to take a survey: [http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag\\_pmc.htm](http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag_pmc.htm).



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## Calendar Events March - April

- 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](mailto:Patricia.O'Neil@alaska.gov) or 907-761-3858

- March 17-19: Sustainable Agriculture Research & Education (SARE) Meeting: Fairbanks Princess Lodge
- March 25-26: Red Meat Livestock Conference; Palmer Train Depot
- March 27-28: Alaska Association of Conservation Districts Conference: Anchorage
- April 15-16: Direct Marketing Conference, Palmer T