

## Alaska Farmers Markets Association

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To Whom It May Concern:

The Alaska Farmers Market Association (AFMA) is a statewide organization made up of over 30 farmers' markets from across Alaska. We are a dedicated group of agriculture industry members who are directly connected to farmers markets as vendors, market managers, non-profit support groups, and consumers. We are writing this letter in response to the proposed cuts to the Division of Agriculture budget as outlined in the Governor's budget, released 2/13/19.

Agriculture is one of the only renewable resources in the State and our industry is growing! In fact, Alaska is one of the only states in the nation whose number of farmers is growing. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agriculture Census data in 2012 showed the largest percentage of growth in direct to consumer (farmers market!) sales per capita in the Nation was right here in Alaska! USDA Ag Census data for 2017 will be released in the next month and we anticipate more positive growth.

Programs slated for reduction or elimination from the State Division of Agriculture include: the Alaska Grown program, the Agriculture Revolving Loan Fund, the Farm to Institution program, and nearly all of the services of the Plant Materials Center. In addition to providing marketing and promotion, access to lending, development of new markets, and research on varieties and diseases, these programs also bring in **millions** of dollars in Federal funds. Without the Division team to provide support, these dollars will be turned away and growers will not have access to essential programs.

Services provided by the Alaska Division of Agriculture should be considered "core" services. Not only are the dedicated staff incredibly knowledgeable about Alaska agriculture issues, they are highly efficient, budget conscious and committed to supporting the industry as a whole. Alaskans have benefited from a Department or Division of Agriculture since Territorial Days; farmers, ranchers and other industry members are dependent on the knowledge, expertise and unbiased support that Division staff provide.

Alaskans import 95% of the food they purchase, but have demonstrated their support of Alaska Grown products through their commitment to shopping at Farmers Markets, participating in the \$5 a week Alaska Grown Challenge at retail grocery stores, and encouraging growers of all products to increase production. To cut off the valuable services provided by the Division of Agriculture now, during this time of incredible momentum, would be devastating to our immature but thriving industry.

As members of the Alaska Farmers Market Association, we urge you to support full funding for the Division of Agriculture. *Everybody eats* and therefore we are all "involved" in Agriculture. Support the industry that can both help strengthen our food security and grow our economy.

Sincerely,

Brad St. Pierre      Robbi Mixon  
AFMA Vice President      AFMA President

\*\*\*On March 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, we met in Homer, Alaska for our annual meeting. Attached is a list of meeting attendees who have added their signatures to indicate their support of this letter.