AK Agriculture Insider

March, 2017

Get Growing

What you can start doing now to prepare for a successful growing season.

Trash to Treasure

Compost is the "cool" thing right now! Get an update on our student outreach and the Farm to School Program.

From the Director

The latest on the Agriculture industry in Alaska from Division Director Arthur Keyes.

Certified Seed

Are you in need of Alaska Certified Seed Potatoes for this coming Spring? Checkout the list of certified growers.

Freshly Planted

The Division of Agriculture has some new staff. Learn how they will help enhance Alaska's Agriculture industry.

Recipe of the Month

Use Alaska Grown potatoes to make a mouthwatering Shepherd's Pie. We'll show you how!

Spring Cleaning

It's been a record season for seed cleaning at the Plant Materials Center.

Specialty Crop Grants

The Division is accepting applications for Specialty Crop block grants.

Alaska Division of Agriculture 1800 Glenn Hwy, Suite 12, Palmer, Alaska 99645 907-745-7200

From the Director

Hello,
We are thrilled to bring our monthly newsletter back and communicate with our subscribers on a regular basis. We are just months away from growing season and we hope everyone is getting prepared!

Our Plant Materials Center (PMC) has had a record winter season for seed cleaning; a great indication that the agriculture industry is growing in Alaska. If you haven't heard of the PMC and all of the important programs they run, I encourage you to check out their website at http://www.plants.alaska.gov/
The PMC is a great information resource for growers, producers and residents of our state.

The division is moving forward with the sale of Mt. McKinley Meat and Sausage and we anticipate the sale to be completed by June. All of the current services including slaughtering, meat processing and wrapping will continue to be provided through the transition. We will keep you updated on the progress of the sale.

I just celebrated my one-year anniversary serving as the Director for the division and it has been a wonderful experience getting to work with producers, businesses and organizations around the state. I believe as an industry we are heading in the right direction and based on consumer trends, Alaskans will continue to demand and expect that their food, consumables and goods are coming from the place they call home. We will continue to find ways and create programs that support agricultural growth and impact. As a division, our big vision is for producers to be able to sustain themselves working solely in agriculture and that agriculture will be relevant to every Alaskan.
I want to thank those who have already put in a lot of time, hard work and dedication into making our vision a reality. Your participation is paramount to the industry's success.

I look forward to keeping you updated on all of the big and exciting things happening with agriculture in our state. I want to wish you a well start to Spring!

Until next time,
Arthur Keyes - Director of Agriculture

Freshly Planted

There are some new faces at the Division of Agriculture. We are excited to have them join our team and help us enhance the industry.

Please welcome Jaman Hitchcock, who will serve as the Program Coordinator for the Alaska Produce Safety Program under the Food Safety Modernization Act. Jaman recently moved to Alaska from Carthage, Missouri. As a young child, his grandfather and parents owned a dairy farm. Jaman has grown up around and worked with farmers for most of his life. Most recently Jaman worked as the manager of the Food Safety and Sanitation Department at Schreiber Foods Inc. Jaman looks forward to working with many of our producers around the state and developing a great Produce Safety Program for Alaska.

Our new Publications Specialist, Jennifer Castro, is a lifelong Alaskan and communications professional. She has worked in local news, advertising and most recently served as the Communications Director for the Anchorage Police Department. She specializes in brand development, marketing and public outreach. She looks forward to enhancing awareness of agriculture throughout the state and promoting Alaska Grown.

David Robinson is our new Americorps VISTA. For the next year he will be coordinating the Farm to Summer Meal Site program which provides grants and support to schools and daycare centers for garden initiatives and procurement of local food. David joins us from Virginia and recently graduated with a B.S. in Culinary Nutrition.

Spring Cleaning

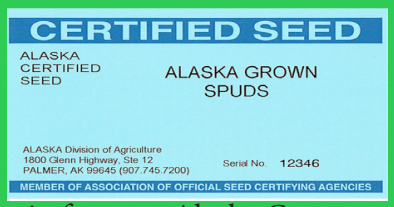
The Plant Materials Center (PMC) has been especially busy over the past few months with a record number of seed to clean and sort. More than 177,000 pounds of seed have been brought to the PMC since October of 2016.

"While this has kept us very busy, it's also an exciting indication that agriculture is growing in Alaska," said PMC Manager Rob Carter.

The record number of seed have included everything from barley to grass and even fireweed. Meanwhile, the PMC is also working on propagation of this year's generation zero seed potato production. The PMC maintains over 230 varieties of potatoes, possibly the largest assortment in the nation. We'll have more information on this in next month's newsletter!

Certified Seed

Are you a nursery, greenhouse, or garden center in need of Alaska Certified Seed Potatoes for this coming Spring? The 2017 Certified Seed Potato Grower and Variety Lists are now online. Over 70 varieties are available! Please contact an Alaska Certified Seed potato grower and get your order in for your Alaska Grown spuds! *Click here* for more information.



Specialty Crop Grant

The Division of Agriculture is accepting applications for Specialty Crop block grant funding. The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service distributes block grant funds annually, which are administered by State divisions of agriculture to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops.

For more information and to get the application, *click here*. Letters of intent are due by March 31, 2017.

Get Growing

It's a little too early to begin most of your starter seeds but there are several things you can start doing now to prepare for a successful growing season.

1. Acquire Supplemental Lighting
Even though we are getting more daylight in Alaska it is still not enough right now for most of our seeds. We recommend that you add supplemental lighting into your indoor growing space until you are ready to transplant your seeds outside.

2. Order your Seeds
Make sure you get your seed orders in soon so you will have them in time for our growing season. If you plan on planting vegetables make sure you order enough seeds for fast-growing produce such as lettuce and spinach which can usually be planted multiple times during the summer.

3. Create a Planting Timeline
Depending on what you are growing, some seeds and varieties grow faster than others - in some cases by months apart. Sort your starter seeds by their germination and maturity dates. Ones that take longer (70+ days) you'll want to start in April.

4. Design and Plan Your Seed Starting Space
We suggest putting any of your seed starters near a south facing window so they can get as much natural daylight as possible. Determine what you are going to initially plant your seeds in. You can use anything from an egg carton to a yogurt cup to an actual seed starting kit which are available at your local gardening stores.

What Plants grow well in Alaska?
Leafy greens, spinach, kale, carrots and broccoli do very well in most regions of our state. Corn, peppers and tomatoes grow well in a greenhouse environment. If you have any questions regarding variety information or general production practices, please reach out to your local extension service or the PMC at 907-745-4469.

Trash to Treasure

Alaska Farm to School Update
Reducing Food Waste One Tray at a Time

Food loss and waste in the United States accounts for approximately 31 percent—or 133 billion pounds—of the overall food supply available to retailers and consumers. Furthermore, experts have projected that reducing food losses by just 15 percent would provide enough food for more than 25 million Americans every year, helping to sharply reduce incidences of food insecurity for millions of people.

Alaska's schools are working to reduce food waste by implementing ideas from the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement. Some schools are sorting and donating organic wastes to livestock farmers, while others are turning their "trash into treasure" through composting.

Here are a couple of early composting success stories from our local schools:

- In late January, Jodie Anderson, Alaska Farm to School Coordinator, met with the Anchorage School District's (ASD) Student Nutrition Department Executive Director about demonstration projects around their Central Kitchen facility. They are currently working on reducing their food waste through composting projects they started last summer. Jodie will revisit the facility this spring to help develop their compost into active, working piles.

- In February Jodie visited Sterling Elementary School on the Kenai Peninsula to introduce students and staff to the concepts of composting their food waste. During the engagement, Jodie talked about what composting is, why it's important, and how turning their "trash into treasure" can help fuel other food growth.

It was exciting to see that many students at Sterling are already separating their organic wastes at the end of lunch. Way to go, Eagles!

In the photo below, Jodie was getting some brave students to smell finished compost made from fish. These brave students all survived!

Recipe of the Month

Shepherd's Pie
(adapted from www.allrecipes.com)

Ingredients List

- *4 large Alaska Grown potatoes, peeled and cubed*
- *1 tablespoon butter*
- *1 tablespoon finely chopped onion*
- *1/4 cup shredded Cheddar cheese*
- *Salt and pepper to taste*
- *5 Alaska Grown carrots, chopped*
- *1 tablespoon vegetable oil*
- *1 onion, chopped*
- *1 pound lean ground beef*
- *2 tablespoons all-purpose flour*
- *1 tablespoon ketchup*
- *3/4 cup beef broth*
- *1/4 cup shredded Cheddar cheese*

Recipe of the Month

Instructions

1.Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add potatoes and cook until tender but still firm, about 15 minutes. Drain and mash. Mix in butter, finely chopped onion and 1/4 cup shredded cheese. Season with salt and pepper to taste; set aside.

2.Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add carrots and cook until tender but still firm, about 15 minutes. Drain, mash and set aside. Preheat oven to 375 degrees F (190 degrees C).

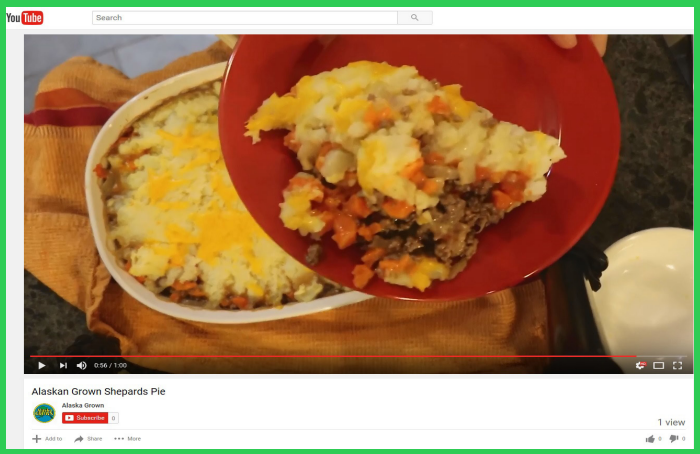
3.Heat oil in a large frying pan. Add onion and cook until clear. Add ground beef and cook until well browned. Pour off excess fat, then stir in flour and cook 1 minute. Add ketchup and beef broth. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer for 5 minutes.

4. Spread the ground beef in an even layer on the bottom of a 2 quart casserole dish. Next, spread a layer of mashed carrots. Top with the mashed potato mixture and sprinkle with remaining shredded cheese.

5.Bake in the preheated oven for 20 minutes, or until golden brown.

Making Shepherd's Pie in Action

Check out our Alaska Grown 'Tasty' Video



Upcoming Events

MARCH 2nd-6th - Annual Alaska Farmers Market Conference in Homer, Alaska

MARCH 7th - Free Agriculture Workshop in Kodiak at the Public Library from 5:00 - 7:00 p.m.

MARCH 8TH - Conference Call for Alaska Grown Specialty Crop Block Grant, 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. Click here for more information.

MARCH 19TH - National Poultry Day
Don't be too chicken to gobble up some Alaska Grown Poultry!

MARCH 31st - Specialty Crop Grant Letters of Intent Due

Have an event you want us to share? Email the info to: jennifer.castro@alaska.gov

Celebrate

March is National Nutrition Month!

Make sure you share the nutritional benefits of Alaska Grown products on your social media.

#BeSocial with us