

Alaska Division of Agriculture necessary

Posted: Monday, June 15, 2015 12:04 am

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Letter to the editor

June 11, 2015

To the editor: It is with great disappointment and concern I learn that the participants of the budget conference have deemed the Division of Agriculture “unnecessary.” With a conference titled “Building a Sustainable Future,” agriculture should be of high importance. Alaska imports more than 95 percent of its food. For being such an independent state, we are dependent on reliable shipping, good weather and the rest of the country to feed ourselves. With the issues affecting agriculture in the Lower 48, we need to be thinking more local. We’ve all heard about the serious drought California is experiencing, many other states are dealing with water rights issues and millions of laying hens have been killed by avian flu. All of these have an effect on the agriculture industry in the Lower 48, which affects the food supply shipped to Alaska. Having a strong agriculture industry is necessary to building a sustainable future for Alaskans. Having the programs and services provided by the Division of Agriculture is necessary to continue to expand this growing industry.

The Division of Agriculture already operates on a small budget to provide necessary services that not only assist local farmers to expand, but also ensure the health of products in Alaska and allow for exportation. It provides the phytosanitary certification for timber and peonies to be exported worldwide. It maintains clean seed potato to keep risk of disease minimal. It registers honey bees to be able to react quickly if there are any reports of foulbrood or other outbreaks.

Some might say other states have a large agriculture industry and it’s so small in Alaska. But other states place a much higher importance on their agriculture industry. Perhaps the two go hand in hand. To build a sustainable future for Alaska, agriculture needs to be deemed incredibly “necessary.”