April 9, 2019

Governor Mike Dunleavy
PO Box 110001
Juneau, AK 99811

Dear Governor Dunleavy:

The Alaska Food Policy Council, established in 2011, is an all-volunteer group of Alaskans who believe food security is key to a healthy, self-reliant and prosperous Alaskan future. Having a strong food system in place, from production to access, will have a significantly positive impact on our economy and the health of Alaskans.

As the state continues to face fiscal challenges, we encourage you to consider the long-term positive effects of a strong food system. Supporting state programs that foster growth in Alaska agriculture and programs that promote access to healthy foods can help diversify Alaska’s economy, stimulate job growth, and improve the health of all Alaskans.

Alaska imports roughly 95% of our food, sending nearly $2 billion out of state each year - roughly equal to our current state budget deficit. We are experiencing great growth in agriculture; Alaska is actually one of the only states seeing an increase in the number of farmers. Successful farmers will increase Alaska’s share of that $2 billion, and increase access to local, fresh and healthy foods. We urge you not to put the brakes on this momentum and to continue to support what has proven to be a wise investment in Alaska’s economy.

The proposed $1.2 million cut to the Division of Agriculture would end the farm loan program and the Alaska Grown program -- both of which have proven their worth and are critical to the survival of local food production in Alaska. Significant cuts to the Department of Environmental Conservation will further limit their ability to enforce food safety regulations, putting Alaskans’ health at risk.

Food is expensive in Alaska and low-income families sometimes have to choose less healthy foods to feed themselves and their kids, compromising their health. Medical costs for diabetes in Alaska are at $570 million per year. Improving access to healthy foods, especially for our youth, can help decrease a lifetime of medical costs associated with improper diets. One way to address this is by ensuring that low-income Alaskans have access to critical nutrition programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, also known as food stamps). Cuts to SNAP, whether through the elimination of the Permanent Fund Dividend Hold Harmless...
Fund or through cuts to the Division of Public Assistance field services, will decrease both food security and the health and wellbeing of our communities.

In addition to programs and services being cut, residents in many communities around the state will be faced with further financial impacts from repealing programs like the fisheries business tax allocation and revenue sharing for the fishery resource landing tax. These repeals will rob fishing communities of $28 million traditionally used for municipal services and operations, resulting in the need to increase taxes on the locals in these communities.

The Alaska Food Policy Council urges you to support reinstating funding for programs that promote a strong food system in Alaska.

Sincerely,

Rachael Miller  
Co-chair

Ryan Wiswesser  
Co-chair

CC: Alaska State Legislators
   Tuckerman Babcock, Chief of Staff

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