



“To provide education and leadership in the conservation and sustainable use of soil- and water-related resources through cooperative programs that protect, restore and improve our environment.”

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Board of Supervisors

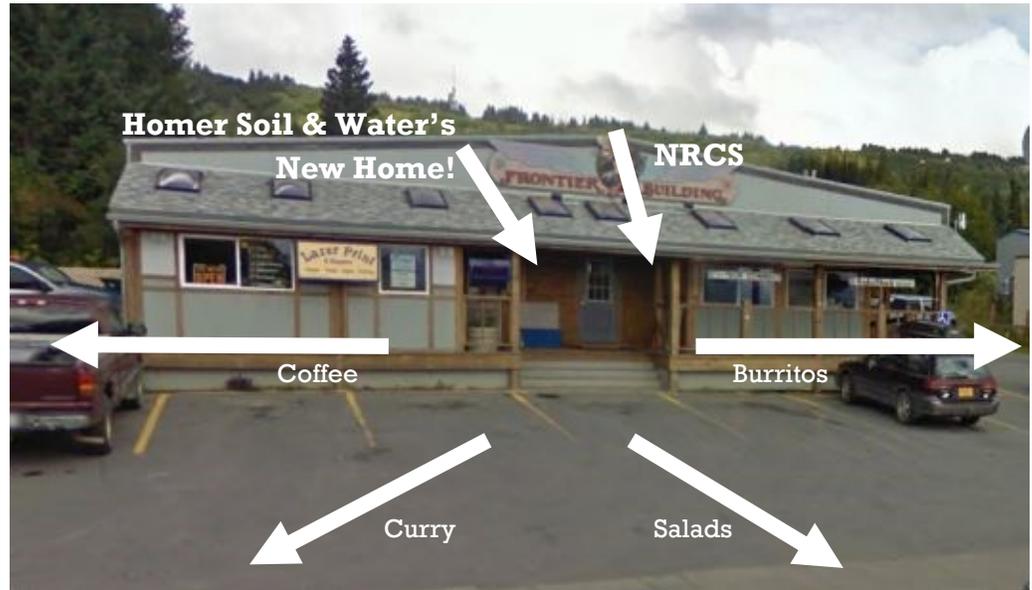
- Chris Rainwater, Chair
- Otto Kilcher, Vice Chair
- Genarita Groberek, Treasurer
- Tim Alzheimer, Secretary
- Jim Engebretsen (*new!*)

District Staff

- Kyra Wagner, District Manager
- Devony Lehner Natural Resource Specialist
- Brad Casar, Natural Resource Technician
- Charlotte Crowder, Biological Technician
- Nicole Arevalo (*new!*)

Natural Currents

The BIG News



We Moved!

It is somewhat sad to say that Homer Soil and Water has left its home of over 30 years--the blue tile building on the corner of Pioneer and Lake. We're now down Pioneer, still co-located with NRCS, in the Frontier Building (the former location for Tech Connect) at 432 E. Pioneer. Our space is nice and cozy and ready for visitors. Feel free to stop by the office and say hello; we've got some great Alaska Grown stickers and pins waiting for you and your family.

COME IN AND SAY HELLO TO THE NEW PLACE!

AND SAY GOODBYE TO AN OLD FRIEND WHO:

See page 3 for more clues

- ◆ Has a thing for invasive weeds
- ◆ Knows all that needs to be known about various mysterious permitting processes.
- ◆ Loves to build trails with kids, educate kids about Invasive weeds or anything else they will listen to.
- ◆ Always wears a Scottish wool hat.
- ◆ Loves to play music. And loves practical jokes.
- ◆ Will be missed....

IT'S ALL ABOUT SOIL HEALTH

Soil Health Study's Last Year

Homer Soil and Water Conservation District is nearing completion of year two of a soil health study done in cooperation with NRCS and four agricultural producers. Over the past 2 years, vegetable plots have been maintained outdoors and in high tunnels to track how cover crops, reduced tillage, nutrient management, and conservation crop rotation affect soil health.



Each producer had a different level of experience with both cover cropping and reduced tillage before the study started. Implementing these practices into each grower's operation came with different challenges and strategies to effectively use these practices in their management. Specifically, cover cropping in raised beds is not a common practice, so it has required some innovative approaches that each farmer tackled in a different way.

This summer we will conduct the final season of plot trials. A new vegetable crop will be grown in the rotation, followed by cover crops in late summer. At the end of the season the final soil tests will be performed and field notes from the previous 3 years will be summarized. We look forward to having the data analyzed to see how the trials performed and what results can be derived from the soil health study in Homer.

At the end of the growing season we will visit at least one of the soil health study farms so that participants can view test plots in all their glory. We plan to visit these sites when cover crops are in production so we can see and talk about differences we have noted over the years as a result of each treatment. We encourage folks to come out and ask questions about how they can make cover crops work in their own particular situations.

Outreach Events to Plan For



This summer, in conjunction with the NRCS soil health study and SVT Health and Wellness Clinic, multiple outreach events will take place throughout the growing season.

Outreach activities began on May 3rd with a discussion at SVT on developing healthy soils. Healthy soils produce healthy, productive crops. As farmers and gardeners, it is our goal to build deep, fertile, resilient soils to create a healthy environment for beneficial soil microbes that will support the crops we grow. At SVT, we talked about managing the biological, physical, and chemical properties of your soils so that they can be healthy and productive for years to come.

In late spring, SVT's weekly Thriving Thursday will offer a visit to Carey Restino's Homer Hilltop Farm, where we will demonstrate a variety of farm tools. These will include tools and equipment for seeding, weeding, tilling, harvesting, and processing. Participants will be available to see tools in action and get advice on what they are best suited for. Dates for this event will be publicized through SVT's Thriving Thursdays flyers, or check our website for updates.

The Alaska Food Hub: Open for Business, Online!

Online shopping is open for Homer!

Visit the Alaska Food Hub website to see what it's all about, and scroll through the lists of fresh locally grown, harvested, and produced food and crafts.

The Alaska Food Hub, previously known as the Kenai Peninsula Food Hub, is an aggregator and online marketplace of locally grown, harvested, and produced foods and crafts. The Food Hub will be functioning in a very similar manner for Homer this year, except now Homer producers are able to sell to a broader market of Seldovia, Ninilchik, and Soldotna. In addition, Anchorage is operating on the same system to create an online marketplace for Anchorage producers and customers. For the previous two years, Cook Inletkeeper has hosted a grant making the food hub operations possible during the initial trial period. 2018 is the first year of operation without the grant, and the Inlet Keeper decided to continue hosting the food hub and its operations.

This year an exemption has taken effect to allow cottage food industry items to be sold on the online marketplace. **We encourage everyone to check out the website and think about how they can contribute to this fantastic food system enrichment tool.** Ordering from the Alaska Food Hub helps to build and support our community, preserve agricultural land, lower carbon footprints by decreasing food miles, and strengthen local economies.

Happy Shopping!



A fond “Fare Thee Well” to Matt Steffy

In the spring of 2013 Matt Steffy joined the Homer Soil and Water Conservation District team as the invasive pest coordinator. Since then, he has tirelessly and enthusiastically helped the District promote awareness and control of the invasive species causing problems throughout the Cosmic Hamlet. Some of his favorite activities included regular visits to schools around Homer to educate future generations of land stewards. He loved getting the kids out in the woods and fields to identify and remove the invasive plants found around school properties.

The “Chief Amazement Officer” here at Homer Soil and Water, Matt is moving on to new challenges in Homer. Since he first arrived here, he has had his sights on the chief parks and recreation position with the City of Homer. After many great years of service, we are proud to see Matt move on to his dream job with the City.



Baby Salmon Live Here

Kachemak Heritage Land Trust's (KHLT) Baby Salmon Live Here program is an incredible outreach initiative that is good for salmon across the Peninsula. The goal of this important program is to help encourage good stewardship of important salmon habitat. This includes installing Baby Salmon Live Here signs in strategic, unsuspected places that salmon live and need to survive, increasing awareness that salmon truly surround us, sometimes even in our own back yards.

The Baby Salmon Live Here project is currently being implemented across the Peninsula by KHLT and in Anchorage/Matsu by Great Land Trust who developed the program in 2014. It is hoped that the initiative will be state wide in the not too distant future.

For more information about this amazing salmon-centric program or if you would like to get involved, please contact Denise Jantz at: denise@kachemaklandtrust.org.



Photo by KHLT: Seward resident and long-time KHLT supporter Mark Luttrell showing off a possible “Baby Salmon Live Here” sign location in downtown Seward.

Conservation Districts work as a grassroots form of local governance authorized under state law. They create bridges between individual cooperators (landowners interested in sustainable use of the natural resources they manage) and other partners, including non-governmental organizations and all levels of government. The aim is to combine and coordinate resources to achieve shared conservation goals. The District model was established in the 1930s by Congress as a way to promote coordinated conservation approaches to healing soils during the “Dust Bowl” of the 1930s.

Join us as a cooperator! It is similar to membership in your favorite group. Being a cooperator says that you support good practices on your land (like the ones demonstrated in the Soil Health Study) but it also gets you the benefits of a voice at the District level through your vote or your presence on our board.



Local Working Group Meeting

WELCOME!

to the Homer and Kenai Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Local Working Group 2018



Homer and Kenai Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) hosted a “Local Working Group” (LWG) meeting in Homer on April 6, 2018, at the Islands and Ocean Visitor Center. Over 30 individuals attended—from local farmers and ranchers to city and borough staff to state and federal land managers and regulators to environmental scientists and educators.

One reason they all showed up was to become more familiar with programs of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service—particularly the program that has brought hundreds of high tunnels—as well as other “conservation practices”—to the Kenai Peninsula. That program is the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, or EQIP, and since 2010, EQIP payments to peninsula “ag producers” have totaled about \$5 million. Districts partner with the NRCS to help educate communities about such programs and to help get “conservation on the ground.”

A key reason for NRCS and the SWCDs to organize LWG meetings is to listen to members of the community identify their resource concerns—whether they’re farmers or city planners or federal regulators or non-profits. This input helps NRCS identify resource priorities that its programs can address. In Homer, two concerns kept coming up throughout the meeting: stopping the spread of invasives—both plants and animals—and reducing negative impacts to salmon habitats. Other concerns were raised, among them the concern that we know very little about how much water is being used or redirected on the peninsula.

During the meeting, every participant was able to share his or her interests and concerns—and Homer Soil and Water documented these onscreen for everyone to track. (Contact Homer Soil and Water if you're interested in a copy

of these notes.) Concerns shared included private and public water management, resource extraction permitting, grazing land health, forest stand management, and more, but it was clear that the group was

particularly concerned about maintaining healthy salmon habitat and controlling invasives.

One concern related to salmon habitat was ensuring that ag producers and other resource users and managers understand how their actions might affect natural resources that in turn affect salmon. NRCS and district programs that help landowners understand relationships between salmon habitat quality and the resources that landowners manage—whether groundwater, peatlands, alder patches, drainage flows, high tunnels, or haylands—are unique tools for increasing this local understanding. Research organizations like ADF&G, Inletkeeper, and Kachemak Bay Research Reserve can provide useful information to peninsula NRCS field

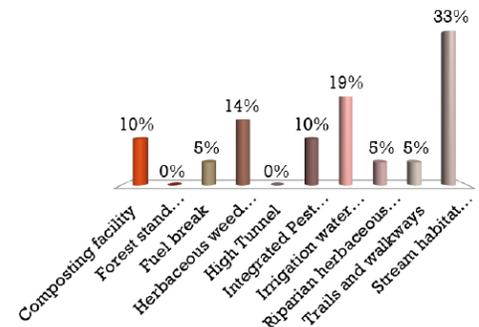
office staff and local soil and water districts so that this information can be shared with ag producers. The group promoted NRCS and district efforts to inform ag producers about salmon-enhancing conservation practices. Identifying the most effective of such practices was encouraged.

Similarly, the group recognized that controlling invasives also requires outreach to and education of landowners, as well as on-the-ground eradication efforts. Each agency and organization can play a part in helping manage and control the spread of invasives on the peninsula—whether on private farms or public road rights of way.

An enjoyable activity that closed out the meeting was using polling clickers provided by Homer Soil and Water. Questions to the group were displayed onscreen, and each participant could click on their answer, with results immediately displayed. The figures below give two examples: the top one shows which conservation practices the group ranked highest (most important) and the bottom one, ... [Continued on page 5]

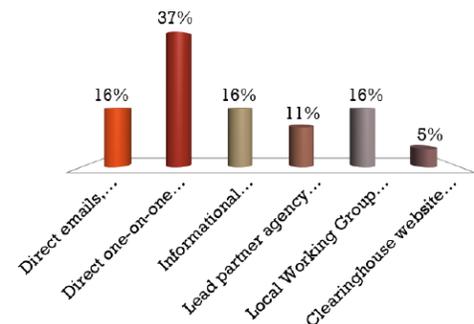
WHICH PRACTICE WOULD YOU RANK HIGHEST?

- A. Composting facility
- B. Forest stand improvement
- C. Fuel break
- D. Herbaceous weed control
- E. High Tunnel
- F. Integrated Pest Management
- G. Irrigation water management
- H. Riparian herbaceous cover
- I. Trails and walkways
- J. Stream habitat improvement and management



WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO INCREASE COMMUNICATION WITH PARTNER LAND OWNERS?

- A. Direct emails, newsletter, or listserv
- B. Direct one-on-one meetings
- C. Informational community presentations
- D. Lead partner agency who directs landowners to resources
- E. Local Working Group meetings
- F. Clearinghouse website for information and resources



[cont. from Local Working Group]
 ...which methods of contact the group thought could best increase communication with landowners.

Not surprisingly, the group ranked conservation practices that help maintain healthy salmon habitat as most important. The NRCS “Working Lands for Wildlife” program on the peninsula can complement this priority—as can specific practices funded through EQIP. Identifying these practices could be a beneficial follow up activity. The conservation practice ranked second highest was irrigation water management, reflecting the concern of many as to how climate warming and low winter snowpack might reduce groundwater recharge and therefore the amount of water available for irrigation, instream flows, and other beneficial uses. Other votes were spread among a variety of conservation practices.

Homer Soil and Water was proud to co-host this meeting with the Kenai District on behalf of the NRCS. The District-NRCS partnership is now almost 200 years old and, with the issues facing our communities, this and other partnerships are more important than ever.

KBRR.

Another group that is jumping into the Anchor River this year is the Kenai Watershed Forum. They sponsor the Stream Watch program. Stream Watch is made up of local volunteers who visit a river regularly to meet up with anglers and other stream users and give out educational information and encourage good stewardship. Stream Watch is already active on streams up the Peninsula, but this year they will get started on the Anchor River as well. Stream Watch is hiring a local coordinator and looking for local volunteers, so contact Alice at the Kenai Watershed Forum for more information.

This year king fishing is closed in the upper Inlet, so the Anchor River will likely receive an above average amount of visitors. This is a perfect time for all of us to work together and decide the best ways to keep this river healthy.

All Coming Together on the Anchor River

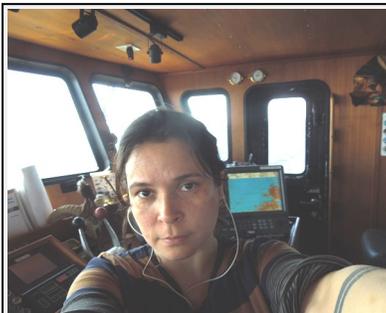


Homer Soil and Water is proud to be working with several partners to identify changes and improvements to the lower reach of the Anchor River. With funds from an ACWA grant, locations downstream from the Old Sterling Bridge needing streambank restoration will be identified and then solutions discussed. This is perfect timing because State Parks is creating a management plan for the area and our work can feed into that plan.

It also is perfect timing because Kachemak Heritage Land Trust is also

working on a project that involves gathering collaborators to share all the projects being planned and implemented on the Anchor River. Having assisted private landowners in conservation on the Anchor for nearly 20 years, KHLT is accepting donations of conservation preservation agreements and property for permanent protection. Tax incentives and grant money may be available to help protect your valuable habitat, so contact KHLT to learn more.

The Kachemak Bay Research Reserve happens to also be working a great deal on the Anchor River right now with a headwater and a groundwater mapping project. They have developed tools for landowners to use when looking at the lay of their land so they can judge what sections of land have the most/least impact on salmon habitat. Showing people what tiny little tributaries harbor salmon has been a huge eye opener of this project. Stay tuned for hikes in search of baby salmon guided by



W E L C O M E T O : NICOLE AREVALO & JIM ENGBRETSSEN!

Nicole Arevalo has lived in Homer since 2004 and is strongly attached to her freezer full of fish and moose. She spent most summers working on boats in the Aleutians or in Cook Inlet, and believes that Alaska is the best state in the USA because the wild fish, land animals and waterways are still abundant. Nicole has hired on with Homer Soil & Water to conduct interviews with producers and consumers for a Homer based food system survey.

Jim Engebretsen has been in and around Anchor Point since 1974, and had the first high tunnel contract with the NRCS’s EQIP program. A local grower of a myriad of things, his specialties include particularly tasty French fingerling potatoes and gooseberries. When he’s not farming, he’s commercial salmon fishing on a driftboat. Jim is attuned to the community, and after filling in on the board, has decided to take a seat with us. Here he is pictured with his Kenai Peninsula Fair 2014/15 first-place Zucchini Cocozelle, from Italian stock.



Public Notice: NRCS State Technical Committee Meeting Scheduled

Landowners and managers are encouraged to participate in the USDA's biannual meeting on conservation in Alaska.

PALMER, April 25, 2018 The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service State Technical Committee will meet Thursday, May 31, at the Alaska Plant Materials Center, but you can attend by

phone or join in the video conference from the NRCS office in Homer. The meeting will begin at 9 a.m. and adjourn by noon.

The NRCS State Technical Committee provides recommendations on issues related to a variety of NRCS conservation programs. Although the State Technical Committee has no implementation or enforcement authority, NRCS gives strong consideration to the Committee's recommendations. The meetings are open to public participation. Draft agenda items for the May 2018 meeting include presentations on the new USDA agreement process, Tribal Conservation Districts, and the Soil

Health Project taking place at the Plant Material Center.

To inquire about teleconference participation, please contact Dee Covalt at (907) 761-7747 or by email at phillma.covalt@ak.usda.gov.

NRCS provides products and services to enable people to be good stewards of the nation's soil, water, and related natural resources on non-federal lands. With the help of NRCS, people are better able to conserve, maintain, and improve their natural resources.



USDA NRCS is taking applications for conservation program

Conservation problems get addressed through the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service

PALMER, Mar. 29, 2018 – Do you have land with a conservation problem? The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service can help you find solutions. Alaska agricultural producers and forestry managers who want to address natural resources and increase environmental benefits are encouraged to sign up for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. The second batch of applications for EQIP will be accepted through Friday, May 11.

The EQIP program provides financial and technical assistance to help land-

owners voluntarily implement conservation practices to improve natural resources. Payment is provided for a variety of practices to address resource concerns related to water quality, grazing land health, soil erosion and quality, and wildlife habitat.

Applications for EQIP are accepted on a continuous basis, however, NRCS establishes application acceptance or submission deadline dates to evaluate and rank eligible applications. Until funds are exhausted, contracts will be awarded to producers with the highest rankings.

"NRCS in Alaska is committed to working with landowners to improve and protect lands through Farm Bill conservation programs," said Amanda Crowe, Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, "This conservation investment boosts agriculture production, improves environmental health and supports a sustainable economy in Alaska communities."

To learn about technical and financial assistance available through conservation programs, contact an NRCS Office - Fairbanks: (907) 479-3159, Kenai: (907) 283-8732, Wasilla: (907) 373-6492, Delta Junction office: (907) 859-4241, Homer: (907) 235-8177, and Juneau: (907) 586-7220 or visit www.ak.nrcs.usda.gov.

NRCS employees provide technical assistance based on both sound science and the specific needs of landowners. NRCS provides financial assistance for conservation activities to protect soil, water and related natural resources. Participation in programs is voluntary and non-regulatory.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (800) 795-3272 (voice), or (202) 720-6382 (TDD)

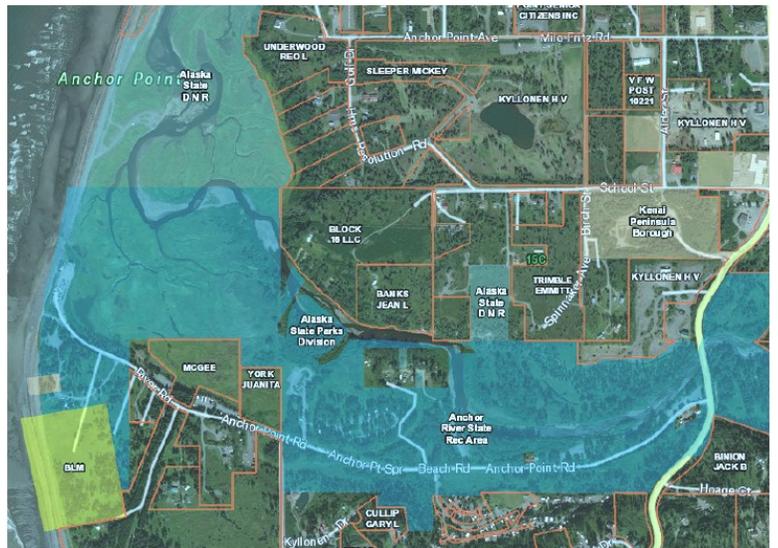
Homer Soil and Water Outreach on the Anchor River

The Anchor is one of the most popular sportfishing rivers on Alaska's road system, providing fishing for kings, silvers, Dolly Varden, and steelhead. Every summer thousands of anglers and recreationists line its banks, crowd its campgrounds, and gather on its beaches to fish, launch boats, pitch tents, picnic, get together with friends, and enjoy what the river offers.

As with many rivers, popularity brings issues —from trampled banks to safety concerns along access roads. Addressing these is complicated by the fact that the river is so dynamic. For one thing, it meanders back and forth across an active floodplain and is subject to regular, sometimes severe flooding (as in 2002). For another, winter ice can build up in the channel (see photo top right), leading to ice scour along streambanks and sometimes extensive flooding behind ice dams.



Below the Old Sterling Highway Bridge, most land bordering the river is within the Anchor River State Recreation Area managed by Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (areas colored blue in the map at right). State Parks is looking at ways to improve fish habitat and recreation in this area.



Homer Soil and Water is helping State Parks collect information—especially from landowners and from scientists who have studied the river for years. Soil and Water is also helping coordinate outreach to landowners so that those interested can know who's doing what along the river and how to contact them. As part of this effort, Homer Soil and Water hosted a community meeting on April 14 at the Anchor Point Senior Center. About a dozen locals shared their knowledge of and love for the river, helping clarify key concerns. State Parks, Fish and Game, Kachemak Heritage Land Trust, and Stream Watch also attended—making it convenient for landowners to meet key personnel and ask them questions. Homer soil and Water has set up a Facebook page: “Anchor River Updates,” where anyone can learn about or post information related to the lower Anchor River. What do you see as the best way to address trails and streambank issues? Tell us!



Left to right: Jason Okuly, Jack Blackwell, State Parks; Kyra Wagner, Homer SWCD; and Sue Mauger, Cook Inletkeeper



Jason and Kyra look upstream from Silverking Campground towards the Old Sterling Highway bridge.



Jack, Kyra, and Sue discuss streambanks where foot traffic has removed vegetation and accelerated slumping of banks.

The HSWCD Board meets on the second Wednesday of the month at 5:00 pm. We meet at the USDA Service Center, 432 East Pioneer Ave, Suite C, Homer. We welcome all visitors! Feel free to call our office to confirm the time & location. [u](#) [f](#)

GOT EMAIL?

There is so much going on in our office regarding

- Trails and Outdoor Education
- Invasive Weed Management
- Agriculture and Local Food
- &
- Habitat Conservation

that we'd like to share in our newsletters, and it would waste less and let us publish more if we email them. Then we could keep you better informed! So, if you're receiving a mailed copy or you're a newcomer...

PLEASE SEND US YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS!

Write us today at info@HomerSWCD.org, and we'll put you on our newsletter list.

In partnership with USDA-NRCS, the HSWCD is an Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer

HIGH TUNNEL PROGRAM STATS

What is this "high tunnel grant" thing? Well, it's actually an "incentive payment" rather than a grant--but either way, the USDA NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program--or EQIP--pays farmers, ranchers, and foresters to install "conservation practices" that help address environmental concerns. A high tunnel is one of those conservation practices, and it addresses the need to improve plant vigor and extend the growing season. High tunnels have been vital to the growth of ag production on the Kenai Peninsula. From 2010 to 2016, NRCS incentives helped to install 679 high tunnels in Alaska and obligated \$6.3 million in EQIP contracts.

- Kenai Peninsula has 325 of those high tunnels and \$3.2 million of the \$6.3.
- Nationwide, Kenai Peninsula borough has more high tunnels than any other county (county equivalent).
- Second to Kenai Peninsula is the Matanuska-Susitna borough (county equivalent) with 131.
- Third is an Ohio county, Cuyahoga with 65 and then,
- Back to Alaska on Kodiak Island with 62 high tunnels.

Much of this workload is carried in the Homer Field Office specifically. After the deadline for applications this fall, around 100 applications had been accepted at the Homer Field Office. The high tunnel program continues to be popular and show no signs of decline.

Alaska is listed 6 times in the top 50 counties/boroughs in America for NRCS contracts of high tunnels.

WE LOVE HIGH TUNNELS!

Phone: 907-235-8177 x 5
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