



ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
REPRESENTATIVE JOHN HARRIS  
STATE CAPITOL 513, JUNEAU, ALASKA 99801-1182 (907) 465-4859

## Sponsor Statement

### HB 82

#### Right-to-Farm Bill

The State of Alaska has invested millions of dollars in the development of its natural resources, both renewable and nonrenewable. Fishing, timber and agriculture are our basic renewable resources, and the Legislature has endeavored to enhance these for future generations. The Right-to-Farm bill seeks to protect and enhance Alaska's agricultural sector.

With the export of potatoes and carrots from Alaska, and the increasing local demand for fresh vegetables, hay, barley, milk, pork and beef, we can see agriculture "taking root and growing" in many diverse locations across the state. Yet, as the state's population grows and urban areas expand, we see a corresponding need to protect our interest in agriculture.

Many farmers have already had some experience with an encroachment on their right to farm. As urbanization swallows up farming areas, oftentimes the newcomers don't like the smells of agriculture – or the chemicals – or the sounds – or the animals.

The Right-to-Farm bill would add some protection to existing agriculture operations and put new property buyers on notice if the property they are acquiring is within one mile of a farm or agricultural operation. This also protects the new property owners through full disclosure that should keep them from getting into a situation that will become unpleasant to them later on.

People who move to the country need to know what they are getting into. And it appears that other areas of the nation – where urban sprawl is creating a bigger problem than we have experienced yet in Alaska – are taking action to protect existing agricultural operations and avoid unnecessary lawsuits.

The "Code of the West" is a small pamphlet adopted by many counties around the Western U.S. and distributed to prospective property buyers. It basically says that if you want to move to the peaceful countryside, you must be willing to accept that cow poop, hay balers that make noise late into the night,

farmers that use chemicals, tractors that drive slower than you do, and so forth. And most importantly that these activities were going on before you moved there, and will continue to go on after you arrive.

The Right-to-Farm bill takes the innovative approach of coupling a farmer's grand-fathered right to continue his agricultural activities to the filing and maintaining of a farm conservation plan with the U.S.D.A. Soil and Water Conservation Service. Expansion of operations or other changes to the conservation plan would not necessarily be grand-fathered in regard to existing rights of surrounding property owners.

Alaska has the opportunity to place protections in statute now – both for the farmers and the new property buyers – so that future agricultural operations will be able to supply the foodstuffs Alaskans will need.