

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Alaska's Farmers Markets are Growing**

*Alaska Local Food Program awarded part of \$13.4 Million Dollar USDA Grants*

Homer, AK - The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has awarded \$13.4 Million this year to 52 recipients across the country including \$403,000 to Alaska's Cook Inletkeeper, a community-based non-profit organization and major recipient of USDA's 2017 Farmer's Market Outreach Program (FMPP).

"It's an amazing step forward for local food programs in Alaska," said Robbi Mixon, Local Foods Director at Cook Inletkeeper and Director of the Homer Farmers Market. "These new funds will be focused on market and producer sustainability, helping markets throughout the state assist participating producers, as well as the markets' outreach to consumers".

The project will recreate the Alaska Farmers Market Association, a statewide collaboration, with a targeting pilot effort across the Kenai Peninsula, will identify farmers' market producer needs and provide specific trainings and support for those networks. The Association will also provide funding for market manager and farmer trainings, annual statewide conferences, and shared marketing, while collecting baseline data on a number of market metrics.

"Increasing food security and reducing food miles are vitally important to the sustained well-being of our communities around the state," she explained. Mixon also manages the Kenai Peninsula & Anchorage Food Hub, a program of Cook Inletkeeper that provides an online market for 100% local foods and crafts. "95% of Alaska's food is currently imported. Purchasing local food supports farms, increases our region's food security, protects the environment, creates jobs and boosts the local economy. "

Since its creation in 2002, FMPP funding has assisted local producers to grow their businesses by helping them connect directly with the shoppers at farmers markets, roadside stands and through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs. During that time, the number of farmers markets in America has more than doubled from 3,137 to over 8,684 today. FMPP grantees report an average 27% increase in vendor sales since receiving their grant, and 94% report an increase in first time market customers.

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