

Steller Botanical Health

as a small farmer and producer in rural southeast Alaska I find the current cottage food requirements very limiting to rural producers. Direct sales limits my market to a very, very small pool of people that is very stifling. I understand the need for safety regulations AND believe that with simple creativity (such as requiring product lot tracking or customer sales tracking) rural producers could be contributing much more to Alaska's food security. An emphasis on bioregional/statewide sales would be helpful for selling products within the state yet keeping a cap on overall sales distribution. The current regulations of direct sales do not seem equitable to those outside Alaska's large urban centers without access to large market venues for direct sales. It would be great if DEC could consider a more bioregional approach allowing for more interchange between small rural communities and local producers. As the regulations currently stand I find that cottage foods are not a sensible part of my growing business, instead they are the most inefficient part of my business and what I am considering giving up. Since my local direct market sales are so small i can only sell so much of any given product that I make so end up making far too many variations of products and this requires too much time and inputs for the end profit margin. I have talked to DEC and considered upgrading to a commercial kitchen...I have been told that I am quite close to meeting the requirements yet as a small rural producer the final investments to make final changes are too much of a hurdle for me to make that final leap. If there were a way that regulators could feel comfortable allowing rural producers to cooperate together or with other bioregional vendors to market products that I believe would help rural producers around the entire state.