



Can a Ready Veteran Workforce Assure Food Security?

Description

To Dream the Impossible Dream...

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Veteran Advocate **Dixie Banner** has a burning desire to help veterans—and to give back.

Let's imagine our elected *State of Alaska* officials—who like to blow smoke about *Alaska Food Security*—suddenly made land available for Commercial Agriculture...

IMAGINE 10,000-acre parcels dedicated to serious farming endeavors instead of current 460-acre parcels where farmers do each other's laundry. Such fantasy SOA Ag offerings would require successful bidders to prove up on the land as homesteaders used to do; dollar-for-dollar match in infrastructure at a value established and agreed to by both parties, **dedicated to agriculture endeavors only**. **IMAGINE** thousands of acres of alfalfa—a variety of which the ***Alaska Division of Agriculture*** has already developed for Alaska's climate—turned into hay. **IMAGINE** silos filled with Alaskan-grown grain. **IMAGINE** cattle ranging on fenced Ag land as they do in Northern Canada—to feed that country. It's a fantasy, I know, but we can only **IMAGINE** it now that the legislature has finished its work over two sessions in Juneau with one laughable bill: HB 298, to form an ***Alaska Food Strategy Task Force*** to STUDY the problem. ***Sponsor Statement HB 298*** [1]

Expect Gov. **Mike Dunleavy**'s immediate signature on a bill to study something.

But, in this fantasy where MIGHT we get the workforce to make Alaska Food Security happen?

Alaska Veteran Advocate, **Dixie Banner** has been investigating this question and has some insights to address the perceived barrier.



US Department of Agriculture employment opportunities for transitioning service members includes matching skills, qualifications, and ambitions toward careers, explained Banner. Professionals review resumes and provide feedback, explain the federal hiring process for USDA Jobs, and translate military experience directly to jobs. This can include everything from criminal justice to conservation technician, contracting, procurement, information technology, food inspection, public health, smoke jumping, finance and economics. This full range of USDA jobs are readily available to veterans through the preference that they're given because of military service.

EMPLOYMENT

On-the-Job Training:

Paid Apprenticeships

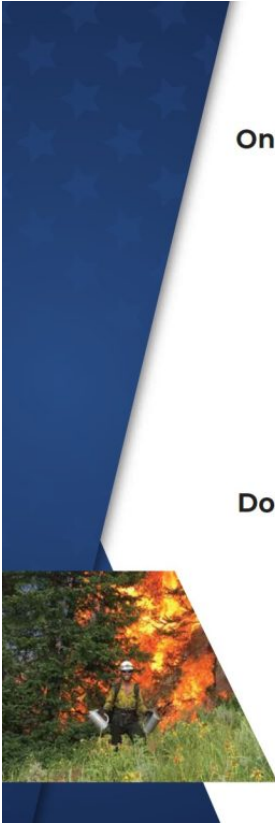
- Agricultural Commodity Graders – 12-month training program through USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, starting at GS-5/7
- Wildland Firefighters – 3,000 hour on-the-job learning program through USDA's Forest Service, available positions include GS-3, 4/5, and 5
- Food Inspector and Consumer Safety Inspector
- Dairy Graziers* - Includes full-time employment, training and mentorship over a period of two years

DoD SkillBridge / Career Skills Program:

Eligible service members can participate in industry training instead of performing military duties during the closing months of their career

*Dairy Grazing Apprenticeship is an independent non-profit organization with a National Apprenticeship under the U.S. Department of Labor-Employment and Training Administration

Austin Looney uses drip torches to conduct backburns



Those kinds of Ag jobs are rare in Alaska now. **USDA has the footprint of a chicken**, while the *Alaska Division of Agriculture* hands out federal mini-grants and slaps real farmers on the back. ***Alaska has Food Security Options.***[2]

Banner is a disabled vet. During some health issues and down time—when she couldn't find gainful employment in Alaska—she transitioned and rebranded herself beginning with five contacts on LinkedIn.com. She now has over 2,500 contacts and is a volunteer for Vets2Industry.org and a Veteran Employment Coach. Her goals are to 1) bring resources from the Lower 48 to help Alaska vets, 2) Encourage Remote Opportunities using technology, and 3) Act as a conduit with the **USDA** so Alaskan Veterans can interface and learn what the USDA has to offer. Banner says involvement by veterans can provide employment conducive to our Alaskan lifestyle while promoting food sustainability.

Dixie Banner
Talent Acquisition-Recruiting | Project & Business Management |
USN Veteran//Veteran Advocate | Active Clearance
Talks about #v2i, #hiring, #veterans, #networking, and #opportunities
Wasilla, Alaska, United States · [Contact info](#)
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<https://www.linkedin.com/in/dixiebannelaska/>

*Another goal is to create a veteran workforce; a clearing house, explained Banner. For example, I may have somebody that can do welding, electronics, IT, CT, whatever. My vision is to be able to call up somebody and say: "Hey, I need you." Perhaps there is a need for five laborers, and a truck and operator. I want to create a clearing house for that. Additionally, we may have other large projects requiring a ready workforce such as the next **Oil and Gas pipelines**. In the military we are taught the 5Ps; Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance.*

It's hard to find good help. She might be onto something.



WHY VETERANS?

There are approximately 18.2 million Veterans in the U.S.

- 19 percent of the military come from rural America
- 233,000 Vets (1.2 percent) reported being in an agriculture related occupation, industry, or field
- Approximately 5 million live in rural America
- Veterans want meaningful work and quality of life that can be achieved through farming, ranching, community leadership or owning a small business

USDA Needs Veterans so that, together, we can:

Preserve and strengthen rural communities
Restore and conserve the environment

Veterans have characteristics needed in agriculture, agribusiness and in rural business: Dependability; Integrity; Decision making; Leadership; Adaptability; Tenacity; Attention to detail; Discipline; Teamwork

Doesn't the SOA do that at *Department of Labor Job Centers* around the state?

No, she responded. Half the time I go into the job service up here in the valley and I educate THEM about veteran opportunities. This must change. Alaska can no longer operate in a closed environment—we must be integrated and included in the Lower 48's work force. The Covid Pandemic demonstrated our workforce can operate virtually anywhere in the world. And, we are generally more productive with a work/life balance.

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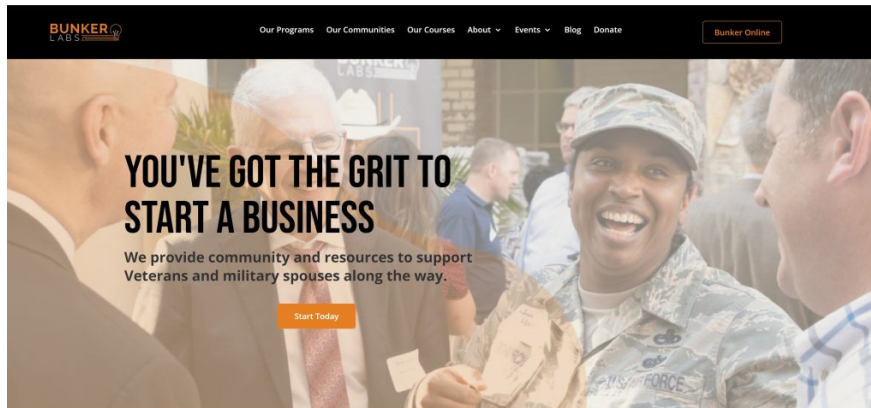
Steps to Food Security for Alaska.[3]

Alaska has a strong veteran community. We have the highest Vet-per-non-Vet ratio in the country. When Vets stay in Alaska it is because they seek Independence, not social welfare. We

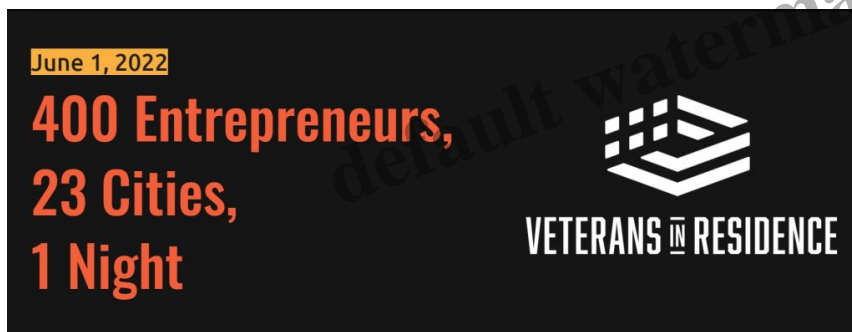
want and demand a vision vs excuses and governmental interference.

As a matter of fact, Alaska once had 5,000-6,000 head of cattle providing support for military needs in Kodiak during WWII. You can read what I wrote about it after interviewing the current farmer on one of those underutilized leased parcels. ***The Sorry State of Alaska Agriculture.***[4]

Another important veteran empowerment program is **Bunker Labs**.



<https://bunkerlabs.org/>



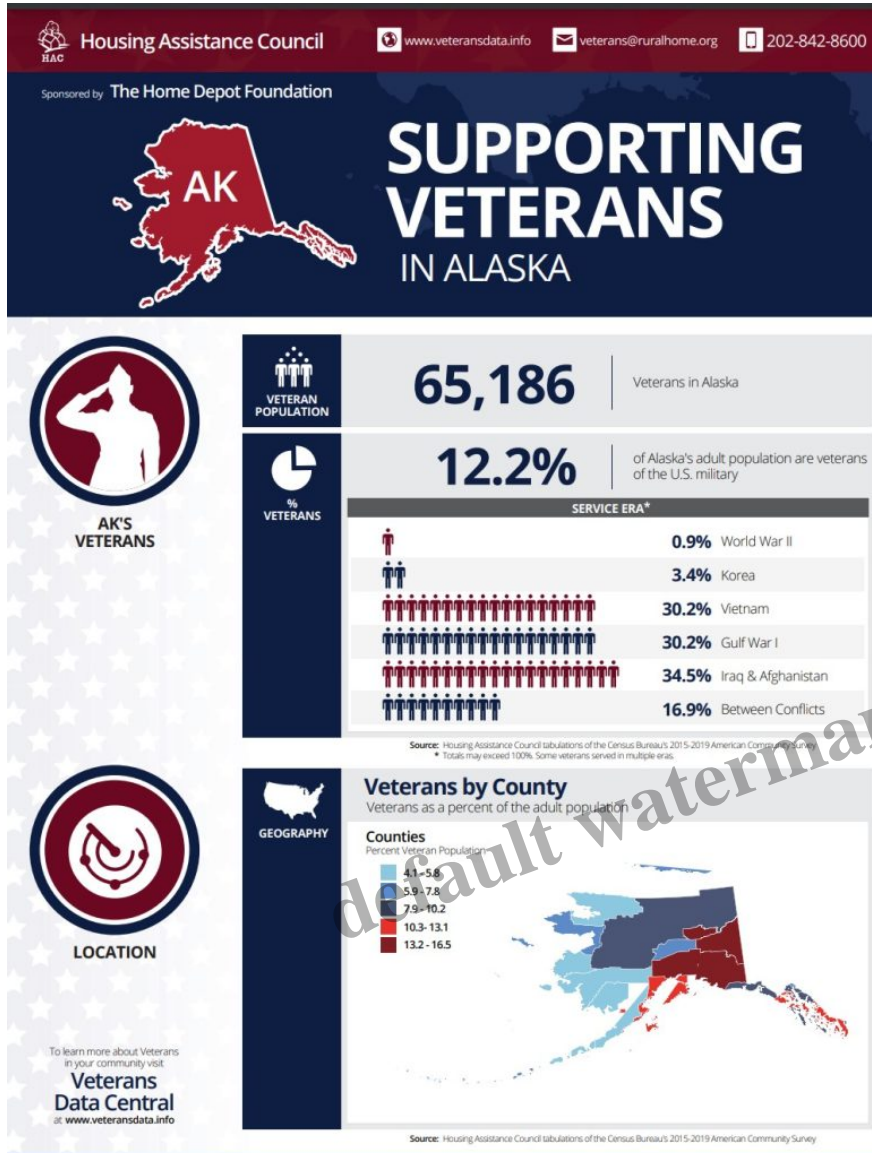
Igniting America's economy through Veterans & military spouse entrepreneurs & small business owners

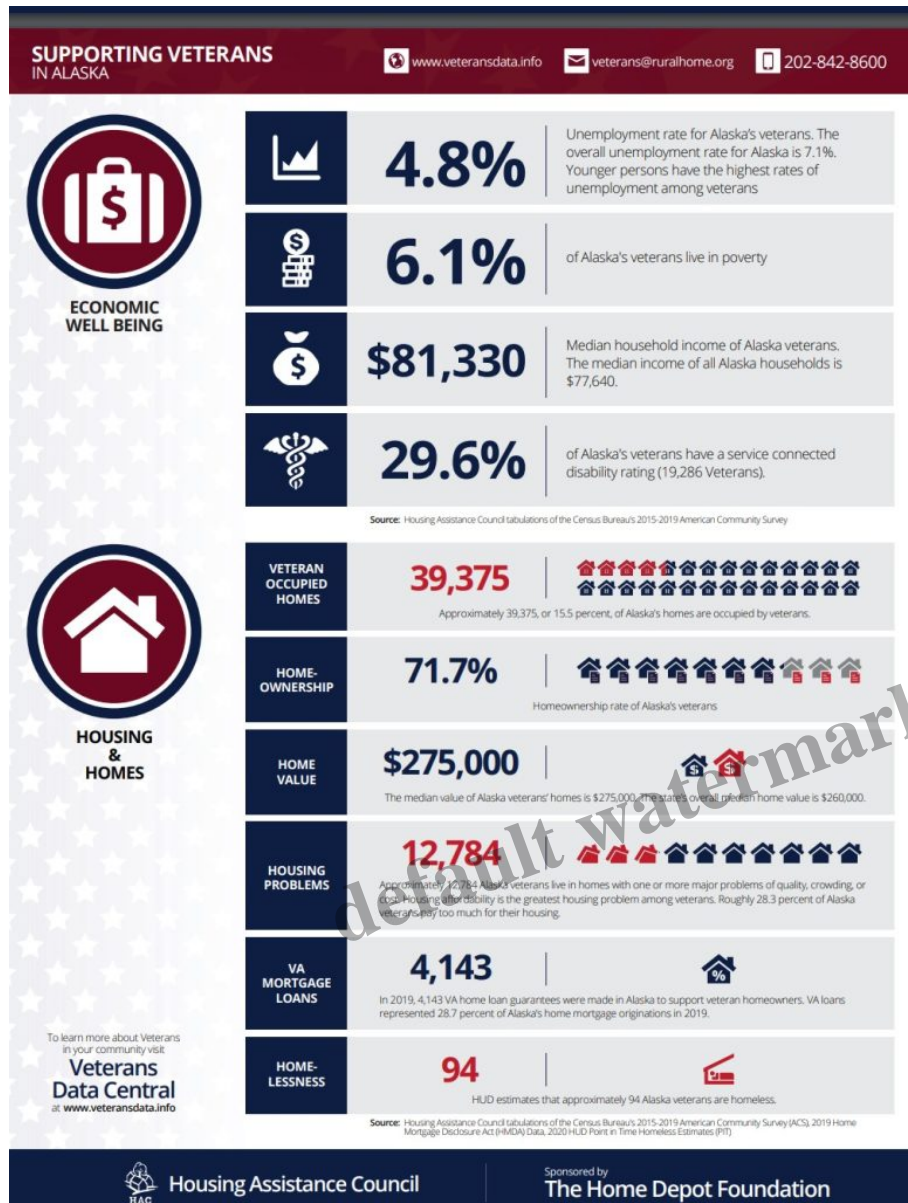
Don't miss this opportunity to network & connect



RSVP FOR A CITY NEAR YOU

Plenty of Alaskan veterans qualify for assistance but may not know it.





[5]

As an independent advocate for veterans, Banner has seen how USDA jobs can support families. She has visited other states and wondered why we cannot have a robust USDA veteran agriculture workforce here. She's been encouraged by top administrators of USDA/veteran employment efforts in Washington, DC who have told her they are ready to work with any Alaska agricultural or small business interests seeking veterans for their workforce.



Bill ASHTON
U.S. Navy Retired

Monshi RAMDASS
U.S. Army Retired

USDA supports America's heroes and provides opportunities and resources to Veterans in the areas of the 3Es: Employment, Education, and Entrepreneurship.

Banner says she is trying to foster communication between Alaskans and this agency office for **Alaska Food Security**.

I spent four years in the Navy and four years in the National Guard, continued Banner. I have two sons—one a four-year Navy corpsman married to another veteran. My other son has a 20-year contract until 2032 and is also married to a Navy Veteran. My dad and brother also served—Navy is a family tradition.

Banner continued: *I have a degree in agriculture, and fortunate that my husband and I have a small business. The many veterans who return to Alaska or remain here after they transition out of active service are experienced and knowledge people who could help build a meaningful agriculture infrastructure for this state.*



Seamen E-3 **Dixie Banner** continues to serve her country today as an advocate for veterans.

Those Alaskans who have served don't know what veterans don't know. The oath of an enlisted officer has no expiration, continued Banner. We want to continue to serve our communities after active service . This is a way that veterans who need education, training, employment opportunities or loans for business, can succeed. It's straight out of Washington, DC, directed to Alaskans. They know the demographics of veterans and their needs. The veteran unemployment is very high here. And so, when they talk about why veterans are an important asset, they consider the facts regarding this state's high proportion of veterans.

And, those veterans could contribute to Alaska Food Security!



UN-imaginative Alaska Lawmakers: What is your next excuse for hanging onto land that could be put into production to serve Alaskans and contribute to food security currently controlled by Seattle? In the **References** section of this story I provide links to three of many stories I have written studying the problem of **Alaska Food Security**. I don't mean to be glib, but plenty of Alaskans were expecting something tangible AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS LEGISLATIVE SESSION. **February 2021 Copy of Letters sent to all legislators and Gov. Dunleavy**.^[6]

Lawmaker's solution to perhaps the most threatening challenge facing Alaskans today is a committee to **STUDY** the problem?



Resources:

[1]HB 289 “An Act establishing forgivable loan programs for farm development and improvement and for certain meat processing facilities; relating to a program of state inspection for certain meat processing facilities; establishing the Alaska Food Strategy Task Force; and providing for an effective date.”

Session:
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801
(907) 465-3438

Alaska House of Representatives
Representative Liz Snyder



Interim:
1500 W. Benson Blvd.
Juneau, Alaska 99801
(907) 269-0100

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HB 298: Alaska Food Strategy Task Force

Sponsor Statement

HB 298 establishes the Alaska Food Strategy Task Force, a multidisciplinary task force on Alaska's food systems and sovereignty with the goal of improving food security for the long-term benefit of Alaska's communities, economy, and environment. Sitting members will come from various communities and interests and be representative of Alaska's diverse population.

Alaska faces both significant challenges and opportunities with respect to food systems and food security. We are a geographically remote state with expansive borders but have millions of acres of arable land. We rely heavily on food imports, but also have thriving traditions of hunting, fishing, and gathering and a robust seafood industry. We are increasingly susceptible to shifts in hydrological regimes and forest fires but are also home to an abundance of fresh water and have a future of extended growing seasons.

The Alaska Food Strategy Task Force seeks to take advantage of our strengths and provide sound, data-driven policy recommendations to grow our food system. It will do this by providing policy, legislation, and implementation strategy recommendations for strengthening Alaska's food systems in six integrated focus areas:

- 1) sustainably growing the agriculture industry;
- 2) sustainably growing markets for locally grown, locally harvested, and locally processed foods;
- 3) enhancing the climate for food and beverage businesses;
- 4) minimizing food waste and diverting it from the waste stream;
- 5) improving connectivity, efficiencies, and outcomes in state-run programs affecting food availability and access; and
- 6) ensuring food security in rural and urban communities.

HB 298 was created in collaboration with stakeholders such as the Alaska Food Policy Council, the Alaska Farm Bureau, and the Food Bank of Alaska, who want to grow Alaska's food system and economy. It looks to find long-term solutions and untapped economic potential for our state. I hope you can join me in supporting this bill and urge you to reach out to my office with any questions or concerns.

[2]Alaska Has Food Security Options

[Alaska has Food Security Options](#)

[3]Steps to Food Security for Alaska

[Steps to Food Security for Alaska: Are Alaska Agriculture Efforts Working?](#)

[4]The Sorry State of Alaska Agriculture

[The Sorry State of Alaska Agriculture: Kodiak Island Area Beef Production](#)

[5]Alaska Veterans Information: <https://veteransdata.info/states/2020000/ALASKA.pdf>

[6]February, 2021, copy of letters sent to all Alaska Legislators and Gov. Dunleavy.



MIKE'S QUALITY MEATS

12110 Business Blvd
Eagle River, AK 99577



February 5, 2021

Welcome Senator Tom Begich to the 32nd Alaska Legislature.

You face many challenges as you consider the future of Alaska during this legislative session. As a 40 years business owner in Eagle River, serving Alaskans all over the state, I know the concerns you must have after seeing our grocery shelves emptied precipitously by the November 2019 earthquake, and again by the Coronavirus Pandemic beginning in March of 2020. I watched what happened in amazement, myself.

You can make Alaska food security possible in the future by actions you take this legislative session.

Enclosed is my company brochure for products we produce in Alaska. While many businesses, dependent upon Outside sources for beef and pork, put rations on amounts Alaskans could purchase during these calamities, **Mike's Quality Meats** had plenty of meat available.

By responsible pro-active public policy to assure agriculture land for commercial production, Alaska Lawmakers this session can bring food security to our isolated state. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this critical need with you. Food security is the most important issue facing Alaskans at this time!

Thank you for your interest in this matter.

Sincerely,

Greg Giannulis, Owner
Mike's Meats, Rocket Ranch, Mt McKinley Meats & Sausage
907-696-1888

encl

Mike's Quality Meats

USDA Beef, Pork, Specialty Meats Processed in ALASKA!



MIKE'S QUALITY MEATS

12110 Business Blvd
Eagle River, AK 99577



February 5, 2021

Dear Governor Dunleavy,

Your State of the State speech on January 28 was the first time such an important address was made virtually to the people of Alaska. In it you called for "self-reliance...maximizing every opportunity, and potential to be sovereign within the United States." As a 40 years business owner in Eagle River, serving Alaskans all over the state, I applaud your message because I know the concerns you must have felt upon seeing our grocery shelves emptied precipitously by the November 2019 earthquake, and again by the Coronavirus Pandemic beginning in March of 2020. I watched what happened in amazement, myself.

Your administration can make Alaska food security possible in the future by actions you and the Legislature take this legislative session.

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Thank you for bringing this matter to the attention of Alaskans.

Sincerely,

Greg Giannulis, Owner
Mike's Meats, Rocket Ranch, Mt McKinley Meats & Sausage
907-696-1888

encl

cc: Commissioners of Natural Resources, Labor and Revenue.

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