

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH AGRICULTURE ADVISORY BOARD

| | | | |
|---|-------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| Chairman – LaMarr Anderson (01) | Tony West (03) | Dylan Blankenship (06) | Kenneth Hoffman (10) |
| Vice Chair – Misty O'Connor (09) | Alexandria Hoffman (04) | Adam Jenski (07) | Thomas Bergey (11) |
| Melissa Lytwyn (02) | Jozef Slowik (05) | Craig Hanson (08) | Abby Raisanen(12) |

AGENDA

REGULAR MEETING
DSJ Building / Lower-Level Conference Room

July 16, 2025
4:30 P.M.

Call In #: 1-907-290-7880
Participant Code: 625 235 317#

- I. CALL TO ORDER; ROLL CALL
- II. APPROVAL OF AGENDA; PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE
- III. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION (Limit 3 minutes)
- IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: May 21, 2025 Meeting
- V. ITEMS OF BUSINESS
 - A. Assembly Request for Resolution of Approval on Waterbody Setback (OR 25-126/IM 25-73) – Alex Strawn, Planning Department Director
 - B. Staff Report – Suzanne Reilly
 1. SB179 – Application to Borough Ag Program Parcels
 2. MSB Ag Program Survey
 - C. Work Session – Develop Draft Legislation
Investigate the feasibility of smaller parcels and more subdivisions and develop a recommendation to the Assembly while ensuring de minimis loss of agricultural land.
- VI. MEMBER COMMENTS (Limit to 3 minutes)
- VII. NEXT MEETING: August 20, 2025
- VIII. ADJOURNMENT

1 **MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH**
2 **AGRICULTURE ADVISORY BOARD**
3

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| 4 Chairman – LaMarr Anderson (01) | Tony West (03) | Dylan Blankenship (06) | Kenneth Hoffman (10) |
| Vice Chair – Misty O’Connor (09) | Alexandria Hoffman (04) | Adam Jenski (07) | Thomas Bergey (11) |
| VACANT (02) | Jozef Slowik (05) | Craig Hanson (08) | Abby Raisanen(12) |

5
6 **MINUTES ** DRAFT ****
7

8 **REGULAR MEETING**
9 **DSJ BUILDING**
10 **LOWER LEVEL CONFERENCE ROOM**
11
12

May 21, 2025
4:30 P.M.

13 I. **CALL TO ORDER; ROLL CALL**

14 Mr. Anderson called the meeting to order at 4:32 p.m.
15 Members present and establishing a quorum were: LaMarr Anderson, Tony West,
16 Alexandria Hoffman, Jozef Slowik, Craig Hanson, Kenneth Hoffman, Thomas Bergey
17 (by phone, left @ 5:45 p.m.), and Abby Raisanen
18 Members absent: Misty O’Connor, Dylan Blankenship, and Adam Jenski
19 Staff present: Suzanne Reilly, Asset Manager
20 Margie Cobb, Department Administrative Specialist
21

22 II. **APPROVAL OF AGENDA; PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

23 The following changes were made to the Agenda:
24 - Add and Item B: Issue re Term Limits referred by the Assembly to this Board
25 - Items B & C on Agenda changed to Items C & D.
26 Mr. Hoffman motioned to approve the Agenda s amended; Mr. Slowik seconded.
27 Agenda approved as amended.
28

29 III. **AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION (Limit 3 minutes)**

30 No audience participation.
31

32 IV. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

33 The April 16, 2025 Minutes were amended, removing a statement by Assessments staff;
34 Ms. Reilly will follow up with Assessments staff to confirm what was said. Mr. Slowik
35 moved to approve the minutes as amended; Mr. Hanson seconded. Minutes approved as
36 amended.
37

38 V. **ITEMS OF BUSINESS**
39

40 A. **Staff Report –**
41 Ms. Reilly passed around the updated Mat-Su Farms list. Discussion on how
42 research for this list is being achieve; the purpose of the list is informational only.
43
44
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- 47
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52 B. Request from Assembly for input on Ag Board Term Limits –
53 Resolution 25-03 was drafted to respond to this request from the Assembly. Motion
54 was made by Ms. Hoffman to approve the Resolution; Mr. Hanson seconded.
55 Motion passed unanimously. A copy is attached.
56
57 C. Survey Questions –
58 Ms. Reilly shared the purpose for the survey. The Board reviewed the questions
59 and proposed changes. Mr. Hanson moved to approve Survey with changes made;
60 Mr. Slowik seconded. Motion passed unanimously.
61
62 D. Work Session – Develop Draft Legislation
63 Due to other meeting, there was no Work Session at this meeting.
64

65 VI. MEMBER COMMENTS

66
67 Mr. Anderson stressed how vital consistency with attendance at these Board meetings are
68 at this time, and grateful the Board agreed to meet over the summer.
69

70 Many members expressed that tonight’s meeting had good discussion.
71

72 VII. NEXT MEETING: June 18, 2025
73

74 VIII. ADJOURNMENT

75 Mr. Anderson adjourned the meeting at 5:55 p.m.
76
77
78
79

80 _____
LaMarr Anderson, Chairman DATE

81
82 ATTEST:

83
84
85 _____
86 Margie Cobb
87 Department Administrative Specialist

By: Alex Strawn
Action:

**MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH
AGRICULTURE ADVISORY BOARD
RESOLUTION NO. 25-04**

A RESOLUTION OF THE MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH AGRICULTURE ADVISORY BOARD RECOMMENDING APPROVAL OF AN ORDINANCE AMENDING MSB 17.02 - MANDATORY LAND USE PERMITS, MSB 17.55 - SETBACK AND SCREENING EASEMENTS, MSB 17.65 - VARIANCES, AND MSB 17.125 - DEFINITIONS.

WHEREAS, the 75-foot waterbody setback was originally established in 1973 by assembly ordinance; and

WHEREAS, the setback was temporarily reduced to 45 feet in 1986 but reinstated to 75 feet by voter initiative in 1987; and

WHEREAS, over time, enforcement of the 75-foot setback has been limited, resulting in widespread noncompliance, environmental impacts, and real estate complications; and

WHEREAS, between 1987 and present, over 700 shoreline structures have been built in violation of the 75-foot setback ordinance, many of which went undetected due to limited permitting requirements and enforcement options; and

WHEREAS, Ordinance 25-073 offers a pragmatic solution by allowing structures to be built within 75 feet of a waterbody, provided they are designed and built in accordance with plans developed by a qualified professional that ensure water quality is protected; and

WHEREAS, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB) continues to experience sustained residential, commercial, and recreational development near its lakes, rivers, and wetlands, increasing the need for clear land use regulations to manage growth while protecting environmental resources; and

WHEREAS, waterbodies in the MSB provide significant public benefits, including clean drinking water, fisheries, recreation, scenic values, and ecological services that can be negatively impacted by unmanaged development, impervious surfaces along waterbodies, and pollutant discharges; and

WHEREAS, Ordinance 25-073 requires land use review and permitting procedures for mechanized development within 75 feet of a waterbody, providing the MSB the opportunity to evaluate drainage and infiltration in order to protect water quality; and

WHEREAS, the ordinance develops several new general standards for development within 75-feet of a waterbody to ensure pollution is minimized.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Agriculture Advisory Board hereby recommends Assembly adoption of Ordinance 25-073.

ADOPTED by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Agriculture Advisory Board this 18 day of June, 2025.

LaMarr Anderson, Chairman

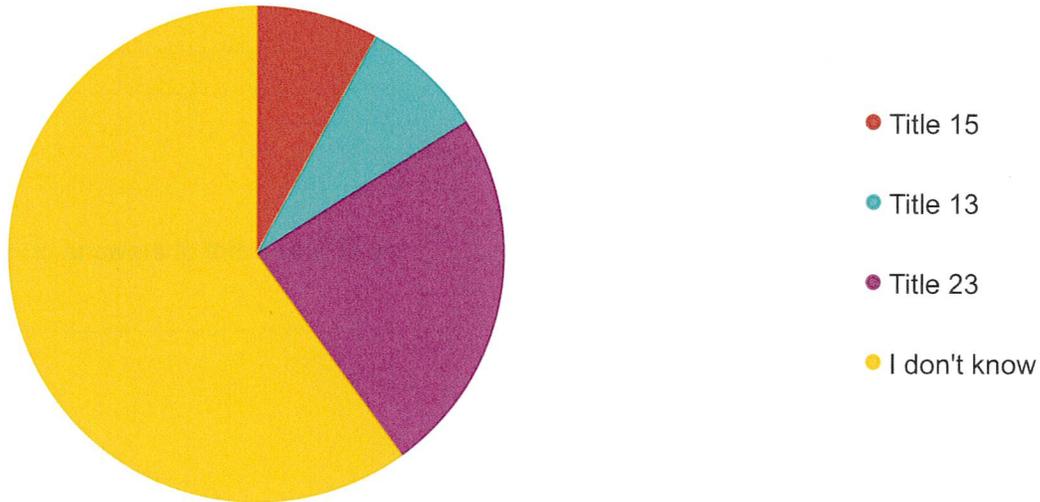
ATTEST:

Margie Cobb
Dept Administrative Specialist

DRAFT

Mat-Su Borough Agricultural Programs Survey

What Borough agricultural program applies to your property? *



Answers

Count

Percentage

Title 15

2

8%

Title 13

2

8%

Title 23

6

24%

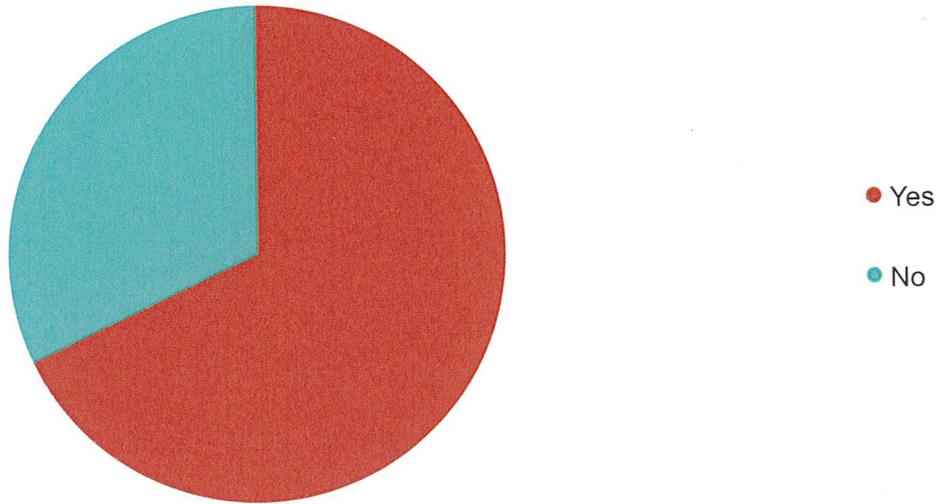
I don't know

15

60%

Answered: 25 Skipped: 0

Is your property, including land leased to others, currently used for any kin... *



Answers

Count

Percentage

Yes

17

68%

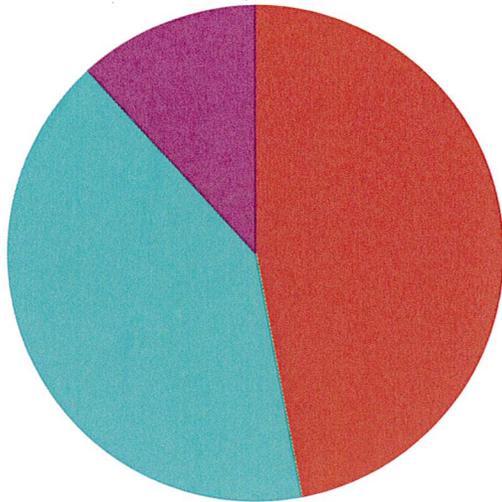
No

8

32%

Answered: 25 Skipped: 0

Are the agricultural activities for personal or commercial use? *

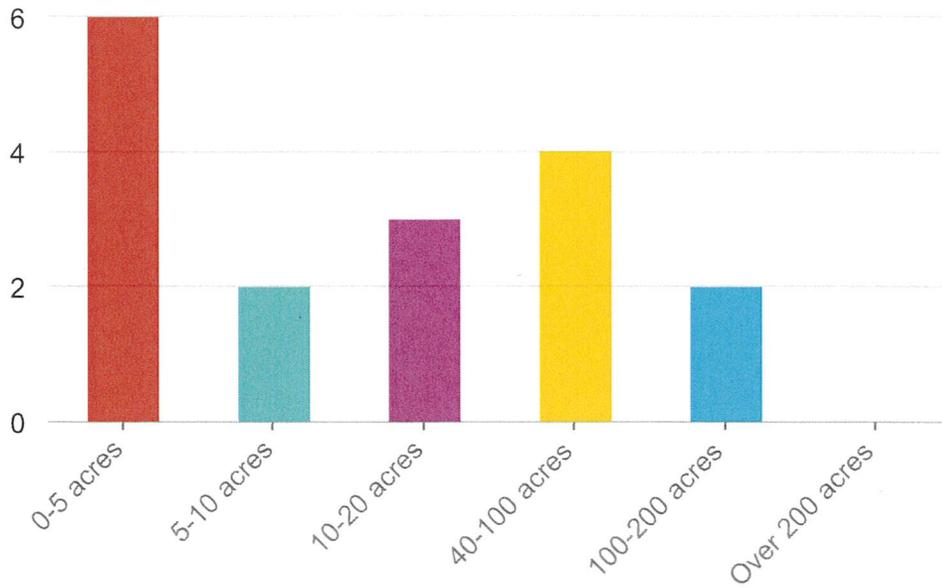


- Both (personal and commercial)
- Personal (products are used by family)
- Commercial (I sell what I produce)

| Answers | Count | Percentage |
|--|-------|------------|
| Both (personal and commercial) | 8 | 32% |
| Personal (products are used by family) | 7 | 28% |
| Commercial (I sell what I produce) | 2 | 8% |

Answered: 17 Skipped: 8

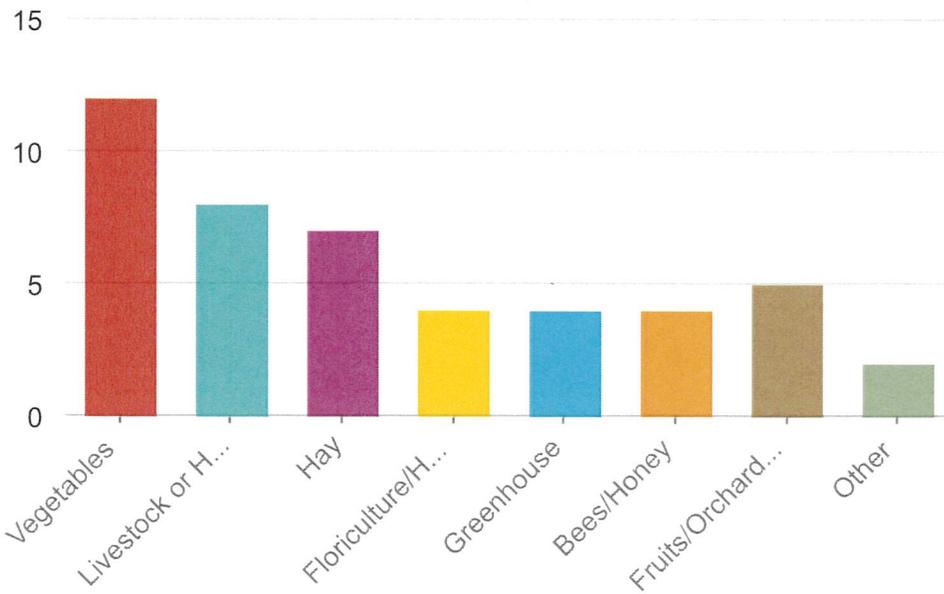
Approximately how many acres are used for agricultural activities (producti... *



| Answers | Count | Percentage |
|----------------|-------|------------|
| 0-5 acres | 6 | 24% |
| 5-10 acres | 2 | 8% |
| 10-20 acres | 3 | 12% |
| 40-100 acres | 4 | 16% |
| 100-200 acres | 2 | 8% |
| Over 200 acres | 0 | 0% |

Answered: 17 Skipped: 8

What products do you grow, raise, or produce? *



| Answers | Count | Percentage |
|---------------------------|-------|------------|
| Vegetables | 12 | 48% |
| Livestock or Horses | 8 | 32% |
| Hay | 7 | 28% |
| Floriculture/Horticulture | 4 | 16% |
| Greenhouse | 4 | 16% |
| Bees/Honey | 4 | 16% |
| Fruits/Orchards | 5 | 20% |
| Other | 2 | 8% |

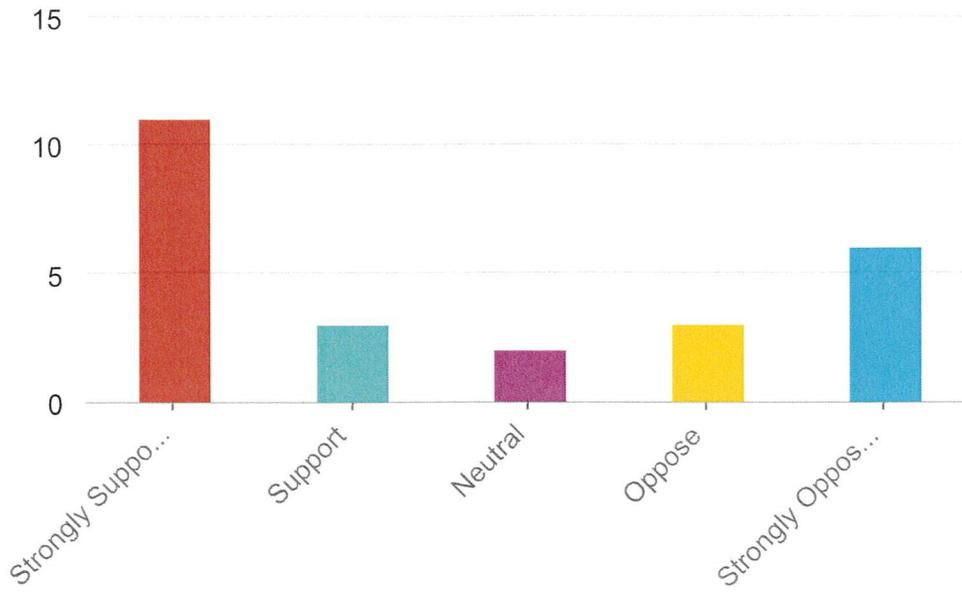
Answered: 17 Skipped: 8

Other products:

| | |
|---|---|
| Seed potatoes | 1 |
| Potatoes. Seed potatoes and table potatoes. | 1 |

Answered: 2 Skipped: 23

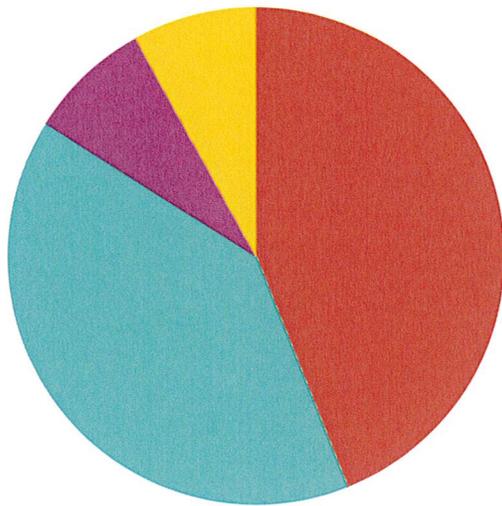
Would you support a proposal to allow agricultural parcels an opportunity t... *



| Answers | Count | Percentage |
|------------------|-------|------------|
| Strongly Support | 11 | 44% |
| Support | 3 | 12% |
| Neutral | 2 | 8% |
| Oppose | 3 | 12% |
| Strongly Oppose | 6 | 24% |

Answered: 25 Skipped: 0

What do you think should be the minimum size for agricultural land parcels? *



- 10 acres
- 40 acres
- (current minimum size)
- 20 acres
- Other

| Answers | Count | Percentage |
|---------------------------------|-------|------------|
| 10 acres | 11 | 44% |
| 40 acres (current minimum size) | 10 | 40% |
| 20 acres | 2 | 8% |
| Other | 2 | 8% |

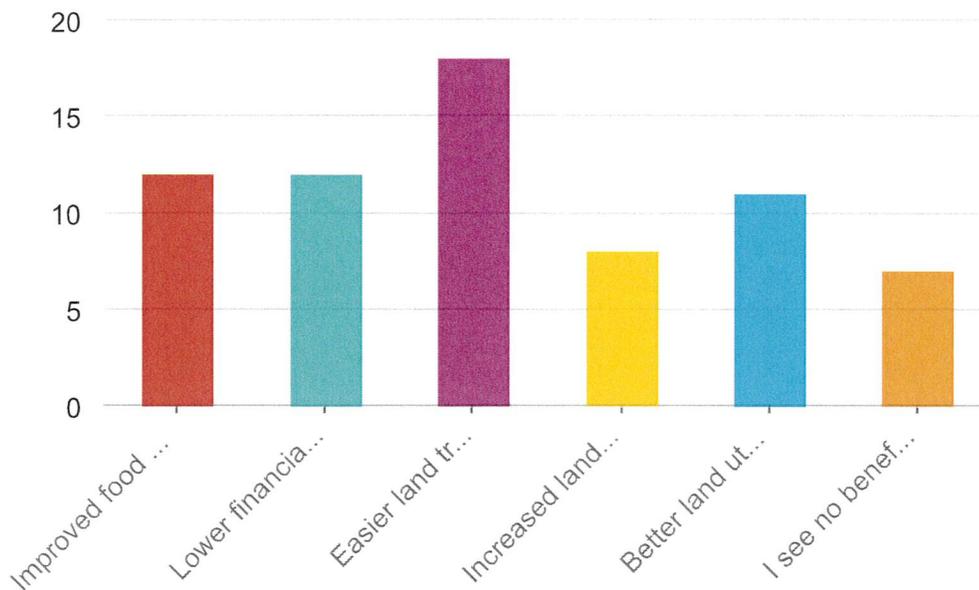
Answered: 25 Skipped: 0

Other, Please Specify

| | |
|--|---|
| 5 acres this would allow for small home plus personal farm | 1 |
| 5 acres | 1 |

Answered: 2 Skipped: 23

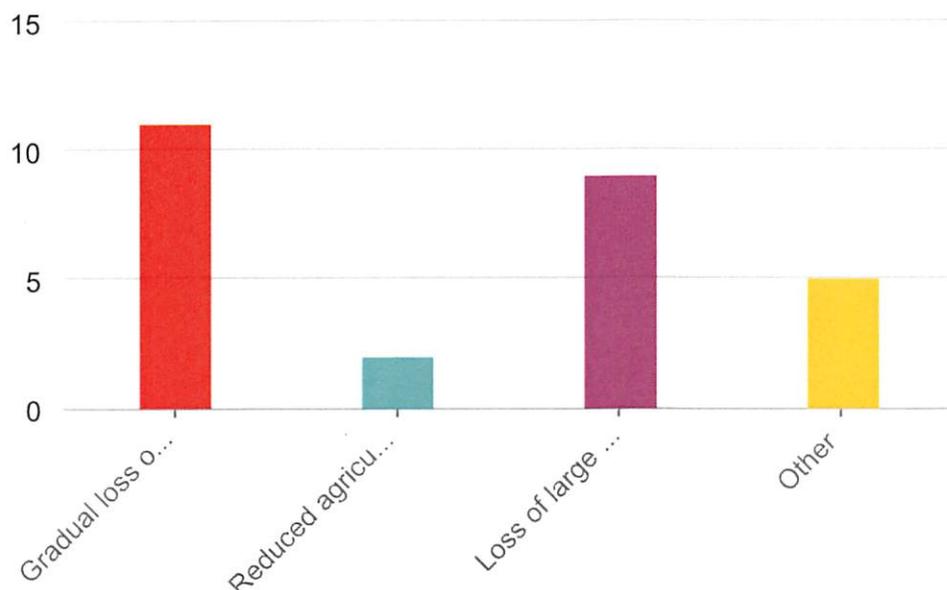
What benefits do you see in allowing smaller agricultural land parcels? (Select all that...)



| Answers | Count | Percentage |
|---|-------|------------|
| Improved food security | 12 | 48% |
| Lower financial burden for new farmers | 12 | 48% |
| Easier land transfer to the next generation | 18 | 72% |
| Increased land lease opportunities | 8 | 32% |
| Better land utilization | 11 | 44% |
| I see no benefit to allowing parcels less than 40 acres | 7 | 28% |

Answered: 25 Skipped: 0

What concerns do you have about allowing smaller agricultural land parcels? (Select all...



| Answers | Count | Percentage |
|--|-------|------------|
| Gradual loss of agricultural land | 11 | 44% |
| Reduced agricultural productivity | 2 | 8% |
| Loss of large contiguous farming areas | 9 | 36% |
| Other | 5 | 20% |

Answered: 17 Skipped: 8

Other concerns:

- This initiative will continue to erode the rural lifestyle of the Valley. The Mat-Su Borough lacks the oversight and enforcement capabilities needed to prevent Ag parcels smaller than 40 acres from being further divided by divorce settlements, estate liquidation, etc. If unchecked, all of the remaining large parcels will be permanently transformed into high-density subdivisions in the next decade, negatively impacting the quality of life for those living nearby who appreciate the freedom and unrestricted agricultural potential afforded by protecting the larger acreages for future generations of resident farmers.

1
- Not concerned, the land is marginal at best as ag land.

1
- None

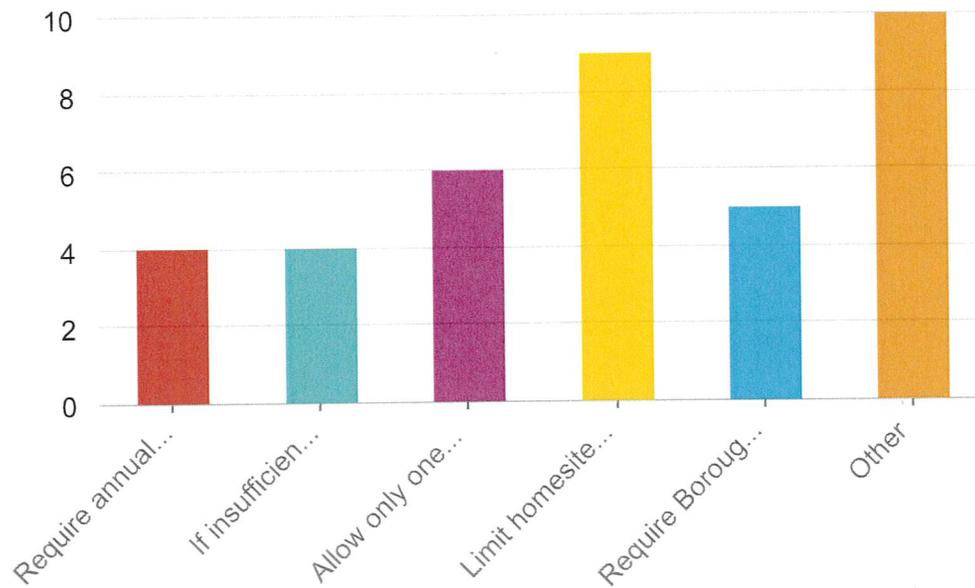
1
- New neighbors

1
- I don't have concerns.. I believe it will increase agricultural interest.. providing a more secure local source for farm products.

1

Answered: 5 Skipped: 20

When approved by the Assembly, owners of a Borough Agriculture parcel could... *



| Answers | Count | Percentage |
|--|-------|------------|
| Require annually, a copy of the federal Schedule F or C (which require minimum revenues of \$2,500). | 4 | 16% |
| If insufficient documentation is filed for a given year, raise assessed land value to market value (ie: disallow farming discount on land) | 4 | 16% |
| Allow only one subdivision under this provision | 6 | 24% |
| Limit homesite acreage | 9 | 36% |
| Require Borough-approved farm plan | 5 | 20% |
| Other | 10 | 40% |

Answered: 25 Skipped: 0

Other suggestions:

None. Government should not be allowed to dictate how an individual uses their farm. If the boroughs 1
desire is to promote farming in Alaska, there should be an assistance program to cover upfront costs
and continued operations. Tax should continue to be at an ag land rate, whether it is productive or not.
This will allow individuals who want to farm, benefit without having to turn a profit. People dream
about having farms and a white picket fence, but if there are restrictions on what is allowed and not
allowed this discourages people to use the land how it was intended and that was to farm and sustain
a way of life. Smaller than 40 acre parcels will only create hobby farms as people will continue to work
a day job to pay for this way of life. Some people may find a niche market that allows use of smaller
acres, but that is far and few between. Not everyone wants to grow micro-greens in a conex. People
want fields and space.

None 1

Limit number of homesites as well as acreage. (Probably limit to 1.) Require soil conservation 1
practices. In other words, owner of each ag parcel, whether or not the rest of the acreage besides the
homesite is used for farming or not, to be under requirement to do nothing to spoil the soil on the
unused portions, so the unused portion will remain farmable if some future owner wants to use the soil
underneath for farming. Not fair to require a schedule F. Many "home farmers" will not be doing any
commercial business but only personal farming, which is indeed important to food security.

If the point is to promote more farming, reducing acreage size of lots does nothing toward that goal. 1
Most people who are looking for large lots these days, are people who missed the opportunity before
land in the core Mat-Su was subdivided beyond belief. Requiring people to be a "productive farm" to
benefit from agriculture tax benefits creates more government oversight and frustrations to individuals
that want to own large land plots for their own personal use/farming. Legislature will push out future
farmers due to the high cost of entry and maintenance in the state. There is a reason so little farm
land is actually farmed...everyone knows it's hard and rarely profitable. Unless there will be grants
and federal money toward everyone on agriculture parcels, people will continue to work their day job
just to pay for their hobby farms. Hobby farms are not money making ventures and are personal use.
Which is the majority of owners with ag land. Continues below..

I would not support additional requirements on landowners of fee simple land. Our land is bought and paid for. Our property is completely wooded with the exception of the house lot area that we cleared. I am a disabled vet and do not have the means to be "farming" several parcels. My interest, if I even have an interest in subdividing would be to distribute the property to our 4 children. Our property is more of a protected green belt than a farm. The borough has allowed subdivisions against our South and West property lines and do not enforce development processes. The contractors have no regard for these ag properties. WM construction mulched 1.5 acres of our property during development of Wolfe Ridge Subdivision rather than harvesting to wood as required by the Borough. I understand the section line was part of my property and the road was necessary, but I do not support more rules/restrictions for ag owners when developers are running rogue and the borough does not enforce processes.

1

I don't think the Mat-Su Borough has the manpower or the will to ensure the land will be used for agricultural purposes or preserved so that future generations may have the opportunity to do so.

1

Drop the ag requirement and allow owners the option to pay the borough to rezone the property

1

Don't subdivide less than 40

1

Don't approve dividing into smaller parcels

1

Allow land power to determine how to best use thier labd

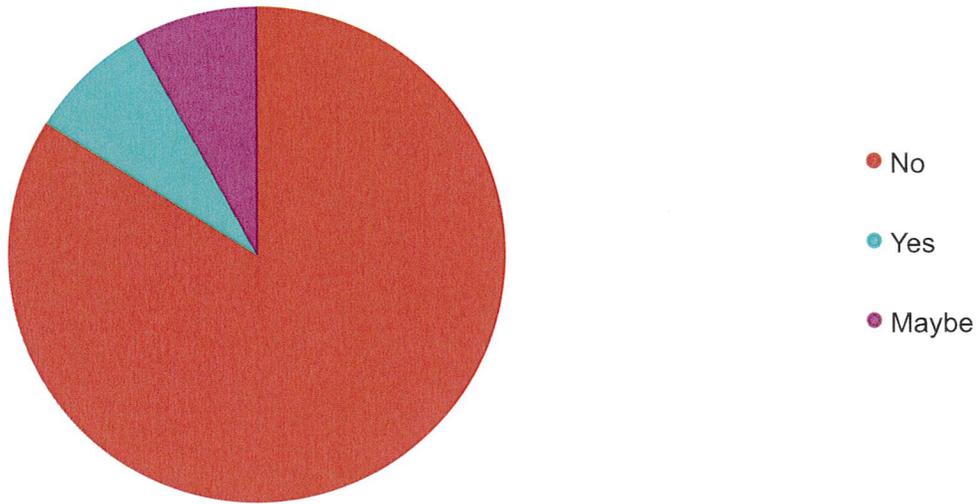
1

Answered: 10 Skipped: 15

Mat-Su Borough Code 23.05.150 states, "Agriculture" means the production and harvest or care of...

There are no answers to this question yet.

If smaller parcels are allowed, do you think any of the above should be... *



Answers

Count

Percentage

No

21

84%

Yes

2

8%

Maybe

2

8%

Answered: 25 Skipped: 0

If you answered "Yes" or "Maybe" to the previous question, please elaborate.

There are some types of animal cultivation such as swine that could produce a large amount of runoff waste or roosters that are very noisy that could impact the quality of life enjoyed by their neighbors. 1

This becomes more of a risk if Ag lots are divided up smaller than 40 acres. Widespread spraying of weedkillers or other insecticides to optimize potato production (for example) could also become more problematic for those living nearby. Any legislation that allows for smaller Ag parcels needs to address these concerns and others that may arise from the unintended consequences of adjacent agricultural activities.

Not really feeling that is a question for me to answer since I do not want to allow subdivision under 40 1

If they buy ag land they need to use it. Not buy it cheap then subdivide. 1

If lots are closer together thought should be given to groundwater contamination, etc. 1

Answered: 4 Skipped: 21

Please share any additional comments or concerns you have regarding the proposal to...

We do not enough affordable and decent land opportunities. Plus the world has changed as to what "agriculture" is, and how it can be carried out. (Think successful greenhouse operations for salad greens or floraculture with growth in pots, not the actually ground.) Look at Alaska's agriculture history which shows that almost none of the large farming operations in Alaska since statehood have ever been financially successful, and even then only with lots of government handouts or investment. Let the people of Alaska and the valley have the opportunity to purchase and live on small parcels of quiet rural land doing as well as they can to grow something for themselves and often for others. Let people live and enjoy the earth, and have a small stake in their world! Growing and producing things is good for soul and body, whether a full time job or supplementing a day job. 1

The effort the borough is making to provide more opportunities for individuals to contribute to our self reliance as a community is appreciated. 1

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposal. I strongly support the idea of allowing smaller farm parcels as well as removing the four parcel limit. Allowing smaller parcels would create a more diverse agricultural community by encouraging the production of more niche products which are much more appropriate for Alaska's climate and terrain. This would also lower the cost of entry into the farming industry, encourage stronger farm supply and support sectors, create more of a sense of community between farming neighbors due to close proximity. If someone wants to grow product on a large scale or commodity basis they could always buy or lease multiple parcels. A potential benefit to the borough would be higher property tax revenues due to more homesites. Continue disallowing dog kennels and catteries. 1

Small organic farms on 20 acres or less is a fast growing trend in framing. We should support these farms and farmers and one way to do that is to provide more parcels by reducing the minimum size and thereby increasing the net number of farms. 1

My primary concerns are the high cost/barrier to entry for the younger generation and passing the farm on to our kids. In the current situation/ economy its difficult to find a solution that works for the family 1

My primary concern is making it easy for my children to inherit the land and divide it equally between them 1

My guess is that you will achieve higher taxation and lower conservative if you subdivide ag parcels more.....as government will!! 1

Land settlement and population growth needs more economic parcels for younger families to flourish. 1

It seems that this subdividing of larger parcels is a way for people with larger farms to gain profit from subdividing over farming the land they have. The Borough seems like they would support this because of the increased tax from increase in parcels. This does not benefit the person who wants to have land and to farm in any way. The borough policy would restrict people even more if the parcels were smaller so how does that "promote" large farming? Some of the proposed actions levy having to make so much money, having to have a farm plan, what if these plans don't come through? People have jobs and careers to pay for this way of life, yet are being penalized for not being able to turn a profit..seems a little backwards in the whole intent. This will prevent people from wanting to buy ag land and find parcels without restrictions which does the complete opposite of this proposal. Create more grants and incentives to help without having to submit to a restrictive program. 1

If the state/borough wants to create career farmers, there should be money allotted to allow people to fill-time farm. Food security for the state is not the responsibility of people wanting to have their own farms. A good example of failed farming is the Midwest and the amount of farmland being sold off due to no profit. The big farms in Alaska now are lacking in profit and they are being backed by state programs already. Is this to split parcels to get more tax money for the borough? Or is the actual intent to promote people to be involved with agriculture. Are the big farms unable to sell so they want to be able to parcel off pieces to sell easier? Seems like there is a backdoor agenda that is not to promote farming. It shouldn't matter whether someone uses their land for profit or not, if it is a hobby farm that is using full use of the land. Whether keeping bees or growing carrots. Who says that doesn't meet the requirements or intent of the ag land. 1

I'm concerned that farm land will gradually disappear, being replaced by subdivisions. 1

I think smaller parcels could be useful for enabling people to homestead and farm on smaller parcels with a better price entry point. Protections should be in place to ensure that large lot subdivisions don't take over the land. 1

For heavily wooded ag parcels, I would like to see a discussion on forest management. I have a young man who has been working on our property for the last couple of years. He is taking out the beetle kill spruce and selling it for firewood. I am not making a \$2500 profit that would qualify for the "proof of agriculture " question above. This is not a monetary transaction agreement. He gets the wood/profit and we get a cleaner forest that promotes new growth and creates habitat for moose, etc. He is reducing wild fire fuel to help preserve this land. There has also been a complete cabin built from beetle kill spruce trees harvested this year. Does that count as "fiber?" Overall, I support smaller parcels, but I do not support more rules/restrictions/taxes. 1

Dividing ag parcels will only create more ag land that people are buying for the low tax rate with no intention of actually farming. The land is already affordable enough to buy a larger parcel. Ask any Midwest farmer and they will tell you what a deal our ag land is. If a potential buyer can't afford it, then they are likely not in a position to invest in the equipment needed for success in the farming industry. Buyers want a cheap piece of land to break up and resale for profit. Or maybe they think if they have a small piece of land, it will be easier. Farming isn't easy... There are many other ways that our government can help out the farmer. This isn't one of them. Let's address the REAL issue here. Alaskans who claim to want to farm, need to be held accountable for actually farming the land in which they are paying very little in taxes. Protect our farm land. We need every bit of that precious life giving soil we can get to nourish our food and in turn our fellow Alaskans.

1

As described above, my main concern with allowing larger Ag parcels to be subdivided into lots smaller than 40 acres is the negative impacts this will have on adjacent neighbors and how this might limit the overall agricultural potential of this land in the future. Certain uses would need to be legislatively curtailed to prevent potential problems with the waste, chemicals, and noise generated by some agricultural activities.

1

Agricultural land, with its current restrictions, makes lending institutions hesitant to finance homes on the property. However, living on the land simplifies and makes agricultural production more cost-effective, especially during the startup phase. This should be considered when rewriting code. Additionally, a tax reduction should have a baseline but also a sliding scale that applies to the entire property, including all buildings. The more revenue generated from federal taxes, the lower the tax burden becomes. This shouldn't only apply to land and agriculturally supporting structures. The state and MSB urgently need increased agricultural participation, and tax incentives are the easiest way for the MSB to encourage this increase. Furthermore, prior approval from the MSB should allow other businesses to be formed on agricultural land. Agriculture is a challenging profession, seasonal and opportunities to earn additional income on-site would be beneficial.

1

Ag parcels are for ag. Not for people to purchase for a lower cost then subdivide and make a lot of money for themselves and add more people to our small community.

1

Ag land will be used for housing rather than Ag

1

Answered: 18 Skipped: 7