

# Agricultural Experimental Stations play Research Role today

By RYNNIEVA WESCOTT

The first agricultural station in Alaska was established in 1898 in Sitka.

Further development of experimental stations included Kodiak, from 1898-1925; Kenai, from 1899-1908; Rampart, from 1900-1925; Copper Center, from 1903-1908; Fairbanks, from 1906 through the present; Matanuska, from 1915 through the present; and Palmer, from 1949 through the present. The experimental station at Sitka was closed down in 1932.

Through the establishment of Agricultural Experiment Stations, the government was trying to prove that a farm economy could be established for the population and industry already here as well as to prove agriculture to be profitable.

Research data compiled by soil analysis and crop experimentation in 1897 and 1898 served as evidence of the possible agricultural production that could encompass an estimated 40 million acres.

Government officials became disenchanted in Alaska's agricultural development, however, when the experiment stations did not provide the anticipated settlements development results.

The experiment stations sold agricultural products as supplement means of support for their program.

Between 1903 and 1928, sales receipts from agricultural products sold by the experiment stations totalled \$53,848.88 for an average supplement yearly income of \$2,071.11. The lowest annual sales income was \$102.75 in 1903 and the highest yearly sales during the 26 year period was in 1907 with \$4,847.13

total income.

From 1932 to 1946 sales from products totalled \$192,697.31 for an average annual supplement income of \$12,846.49. The lowest annual product income during that period came in 1932 with sales totalling \$1,167.70. In 1943, sales totalled \$28,254.54 for a record high.

Growing numbers of complaints from farmers angered by the competition from the stations and expanded private production led to a discontinuance of sales by the experimental stations.

The role that experiment stations play in Alaskan agriculture today is that of research. AES serves as an instrument to find new and better agricultural practices both culturally and economically.

Plant breeding, variety selection tests, fertilizer application tests, soil heating experiments, and crop yield comparisons continue to on-going research activities. Animal husbandry research has expanded from the traditional animal nutrient and breeding studies to include studies of the utilization of bottom fish and crab meal as supplements to livestock diets and significant progress has been made in determining the cause of several diseases incurred by Alaskan livestock.

In recent years, research in waste heat utilization, revegetation, and agribusiness economics have become new priorities in the Station's work program. Also, several members of the professional staff of AES have been studying bush agriculture, its potential and possible provisions by which agriculture in remote areas of Alaska can be developed.



**TRADITIONAL LEADER OF ATHABASCANS** — Both the Tanana Chiefs Conference regional non-profit corporation and Doyon, Limited recognize Andrew Isaac of Dot Lake as the Traditional Chief of the Athabascan Indians of Interior Alaska. Staff Photo.