

# Agriculture Best Route For Social Progress

By JAMES DREW

Have the development policies for agriculture that were implemented throughout the U. S. history in the lower 48 been encouraged in Alaska?

Recent surveys completed by the Soil Conservation Service indicate that Alaska has 18.5 million acres of land suitable for agricultural tillage. At the moment, however, only 17,000 acres are in production. And Alaskans continue to import over 95% of the food they consume.

According to the agricultural development policy that has been so successful in the lower 48, the farmers' supply of major resources must be enlarged and the prices of these resources must be kept low. Of course, the major resource required for farming is land. Alaska has more land than the states of California, Texas, and Montana combined. With the exception of the land holdings of the Native corporations. However, Alaska's private land holdings total an area about the size of the District of Columbia.

Moreover, present policy for state-owned land in Alaska is not to emphasize the disposal and sale of land to private individuals for farming, but instead, to conduct studies to determine the long-term impact of land disposals and sales. This policy has its origin, in part, in current land use philosophy in the lower 48.

During the past 200 years of agricultural development in the U.S., a major goal of government policy has been to transfer public land to private ownership. Now that much of the land in the lower 48 is in private ownership, a major concern is to protect the public interest in private lands.

The second factor responsible for successful agricultural development in the lower 48 involves government policies designed to keep the prices of commodities produced on the farm favorable and stable for the producer. Potential increased revenues from Alaska's nonrenewable resources provide an excellent opportunity for investment in the infrastructure of transportation, processing and marketing, including the development of export markets necessary for a modern agriculture.

The third factor responsible for successful agricultural development in the lower 48 has been government policies for the structuring of operating costs

to favor innovation. Right now, Alaska has a high protein resource for innovative use as a supplement in combination with forages and grains in livestock feed. Fish meal, a byproduct of Alaska's fishing industry, has substantial potential as a protein supplement in livestock feed for a major livestock industry in Alaska and for export.

The fourth factor responsible for successful agricultural development in the lower 48 has been government policy to encourage and support agricultural research and technology. While we continue to conduct needed research in the fields of agronomy and horticulture, funds have

not been available to initiate livestock research on the scale originally planned at the Experiment Station, funds for ongoing research programs are not sufficient, and on-site research is needed to determine the feasibility and methodology of utilizing waste heat from pump stations along the trans-Alaska pipeline for energy consumption in agriculturally oriented industries.

From our own perspective as Alaskans and as U.S. citizens, it is important that we increase food production to help meet increased world demands for food. If we do not, our food prices will continue to rise even faster than  
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# **Social Progress . . .**

in the past three years.

Agriculture is one of Alaska's best routes for long-term economic development and social progress. Without such development and social progress there can be no long term assurance of increased being. The existence of new technological, financial and organizational capabilities in Alaska offers a magnificent opportunity, although perhaps a fleeting one, to take effective action. We cannot afford to delay agricultural development in Alaska any longer.