

Gravel's TT Report

By Mike Gravel
U.S. Senator, Alaska

The Kenai Native Association, Inc., has been engaged in a fascinating and valuable experiment. How to grow high-nutrition food — indoors, at a fast rate, and on a year-round basis.

But if their work is to be continued, there must be new funds for Fiscal Year 1975, which begins July 1, 1974. That's when the original funds from the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity run out.

NATIVE AND FEDERAL BACKING

I've visited the project, located on the old Wildwood Air Force Base, and I've talked with Alex Shadura and other Native Association leaders who are involved in the experiment.

Just last week, we had a meeting here in Washington with Alex, administrators of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Research Service, and Senator Herman Talmadge (D-Georgia) the chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee. Other meetings are scheduled with Senator Gale McGee (D-Wyoming), chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture.

Both Senator Talmadge and Senator McGee will have a crucial say in whether the Kenai project is funded.

Without exception, all those at the meeting agreed that the project has real potential.

'CONTROLLED ENVIRONMENT AGRICULTURE'

Using special lights, the workers at Wildwood — most of whom are Kenai-area residents — are sowing seeds that should produce a good harvest in just a few weeks.

The high intensity lighting system replaces the sunlight that normally is required for growing. In addition, constant temperature and humidity levels can be maintained inside the building.

This "controlled environment agriculture" experiment is getting technical help from both the General Electric Company and the University of Alaska.

FOOD FOR ALASKA — AND MORE!

Just think of what this could mean: A virtual revolution in food production methods. Villages in the bush could get fresh vegetables and fruits on a year-round basis. Once expanded, the soil project will mean a lot more jobs, too. And it could relieve a worldwide food shortage.

CLAIMS ACT

The Wildwood Base was turned over to the Native Association under provisions of the Native Claims Settlement Act, following a series of meetings among Kenai residents, the Interior Department, the Pentagon, and myself.

We persuaded the military to keep up the Base for the Natives until the final transfer could take place, after the Native roll had been completed.

We also persuaded the Air Force to leave their electric generators at the base as a donation to the experiment and the Kenai Natives.

Finally, last March, the Base, along with the badly-needed generators, was turned over to the association.

MILLIONS NEEDED

Now that the Base is in Native hands, the experiment is going ahead as planned. If successful, Alaska for the first time will be able to feed herself, free of the dependence on the lower 48 farms and the high cost of transportation, canning, etc.

But all that takes money.

So what I'm pushing for is a federal appropriation of just under \$2 million to make sure the experiments can continue. After all, the success of this project could have importance in the lower 48 too. It could even contribute to the reduction of nutritional deficiencies and lack of food supplies that has been plaguing the lesser-developed nations for thousands of years.

The Kenai Native Association deserves congratulations for its efforts and leadership, and for its willingness to break new ground in an area of work with which most members had little or no familiarity. They've worked hard for the benefit of their people.

And those who struggled so hard and for so long for passage of the Claims Act should take pride in this one example of what it all has meant.