



## Board of Supervisors

**Chair** – Kerry Nelson  
**Vice Chair** – Steve Albers  
**Secretary** – Bill Johnson  
**Treasurer** – Bonnie Miller  
**Member** – Janice Chumley (to 6/2015)  
 Louise Heite (from 6/2015)

## Staff

**District Manager** – Heidi Chay  
**Schoolyard Habitat Coordinator/**  
**Market Manager** – Dan Funk

## Partner Organizations

Alaska DNR and Div. of Agriculture  
 Alaska Community Foundation  
 Central Peninsula Garden Club  
 Cities of Kenai and Soldotna  
 Fireweed Fiber Guild  
 Kenai Chamber of Commerce  
 Kenai Feed  
 Kenai Local Food Connection  
 Kenai Peninsula 4-H  
 Kenai Peninsula Borough & Schools  
 Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Weed  
 Management Area  
 Kenai Peninsula Farm Bureau  
 Kenai Peninsula Fish Habitat Partnership  
 Kenai Peninsula Food Bank  
 Kenai Peninsula Foundation  
 Kenai Peninsula State Fair  
 Kenai Peninsula RC & D  
 Kenai Watershed Forum  
 Homer Soil & Water Conservation District  
 Soldotna Chamber of Commerce  
 People Promoting Wellness through  
 Community Action  
 UAF-Cooperative Extension Service  
 USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service  
 USDA Agricultural Marketing Service  
 US Fish & Wildlife Service

## Contact Us

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 Kenai, AK 99611  
 (907) 283-8732 x 5  
 Email: [kenaiswcd@gmail.com](mailto:kenaiswcd@gmail.com)  
 Website: [www.kenaisoilandwater.org](http://www.kenaisoilandwater.org)

## Rental Equipment

Mobile kitchen  
 Meri Crusher, for soil preparation  
 Truax No-Till Drill, for re-seeding  
 John Deere 660 Roto Tiller  
 McHale Square Bale Wrapper  
 John Deere 45-gal. Tow-behind Sprayer  
 Solo Backpack Sprayers (2)  
 Buckeye Vegetable & Flower  
 Planting Tools:

- Chisel plow
- Spring tooth harrow
- Disc pre-bedder/potato hiller
- Raised bed shaper
- Plastic mulch/drip tape layer
- 2-row vegetable & flower planter
- Mulch row remover

Broadcast Spreader (hand-cranked)  
 Earthway Precision Seeder  
 Thomas Hart Broadfork

For more information, visit the Equipment  
 Rental page at [www.kenaisoilandwater.org](http://www.kenaisoilandwater.org).



## FY 2015 Annual Report



**September, 2015**

110 Trading Bay, Suite 160  
 Kenai, Alaska 99611  
 (907) 283-8732 x5  
[www.kenaisoilandwater.org](http://www.kenaisoilandwater.org)

***Please join us!*** By becoming a cooperator of the Kenai Soil & Water Conservation District, you join a community of local landowners who have pledged to follow a conservation ethic when developing natural resources on their land. For information on membership, visit our website.



# GROWING FARMERS

*Partnering to promote sustainable agriculture and successful farms*

**Offering Learning Opportunities**  
to farmers is a District priority. In the past year, we offered farm business workshops on risk management, record-keeping for taxes, budgeting and estate planning. We organized a full day of training for current and prospective farmers market vendors featuring Arthur Keyes of Glacier Valley Farm and Amy Pettit of the Alaska Division of Agriculture. We also co-sponsored the fifth annual Kenai Peninsula Ag Forum, which featured sessions on building healthy soils, farm diversification, customer service and marketing, among other topics. Our lending library has resources on soil health, cover crops, composting, crop rotation and other sustainable agriculture practices.



An apple tasting in one of the brand new high tunnels at O'Brien Garden & Trees in Nikiski. Michelle (O'Brien) LaVigue feeds apples into a hand-cranked cider press. Next season, this tunnel will be full of young trees. September, 2015.



Steve Albers of Dandelion Acres in Kenai makes use of floating row covers to extend the season in one of his new high tunnels. September, 2015.

## Survey of High Tunnel Growers

In fall of 2014, the District surveyed 28 growers to find out how the first wave of high tunnels funded by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) between 2010-2012 is being used in our community. We found that all structures but one were planted in 2014. On average, respondents said that vegetables occupy 84% of high tunnel space, with the remaining space devoted to fruit, herbs and work areas. When asked about the future, one-third of respondents said they would likely add fruit trees and berries, while two-thirds said they were interested to add more high tunnels. On average, respondents reported selling 42% of their produce, giving away 30% and keeping roughly 50% for personal use. This survey was made possible by a grant from USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

## High Tunnel Boom Continues

Experienced high tunnel growers are expanding farming operations thanks to new NRCS rules that allow the agency to cost-share numerous high tunnels at one site. The District cooperators shown on this page are two examples.

Kenai Soil and Water Conservation District

## FY15 Financial Summary

July 1, 2014 - June 30, 2015

### REVENUES

Unrestricted Revenues:	
Services	\$2,710
Rentals	\$2,645
Sales	\$549
Donations and Gifts	\$3,493
Other	<u>\$1,097</u>
<b>Total Unrestricted Revenues</b>	<b>\$10,494</b>

Restricted Revenues:	
State Grants	\$20,273
FY14 Carryover, State	\$13,801
Federal Grants	\$111,873
FY14 Carryover, Federal	\$28,774
Local Government	\$0
Foundation/Private	<u>\$250</u>
<b>Total Restricted Revenues</b>	<b>\$174,971</b>

<b>Total FY15 Revenues</b>	<b>\$185,465</b>
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### EXPENDITURES

Personnel	\$65,030
Training and Travel	\$2,281
Facility	\$0
Supplies	\$5,571
Equipment	\$2,035
Other	<u>\$6,376</u>

<b>Total FY15 Expenditures</b>	<b>\$81,293</b>
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FY14 Year-End Cash Balance	\$58,368
Less FY14 Temporarily Restricted Funds	-\$47,136
Total FY15 Revenues	<u>\$185,465</u>
Total Available Funds in FY15	\$196,697

Total FY15 Expenditures	<u>\$81,293</u>
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FY15 Ending Cash Balance	\$115,404
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# ORGANIZATIONAL UPDATE



**What we care about:** The District's core purpose is nurturing sustainable agriculture on the Kenai Peninsula. We are moving steadily in the direction of increasing the number of viable farm businesses and building a fully-integrated local food system on the Kenai Peninsula with natural resource conservation at the core. Seventeen new member-cooperators have joined the District since FY13. If you also share this vision, please join us!

**5-Year Goal:** By 2018, the number of viable farm businesses has doubled over 2012.

**10-Year Goal:** By 2023, a fully-integrated local food system is in place on the Kenai Peninsula.

## Meeting the Fiscal Challenge

In the last three years, state funding for Soil & Water Conservation Districts fell from \$60,000 per District to \$9,200 in FY16. Due to continuing budget stress, we expect \$0 in state funds for FY17. In the meanwhile, we have been working hard to diversify our sources of funding. From FY13 to FY15, our earned income grew from \$160 to \$5,895 and direct public support increased from \$200 to \$3,493. Dozens of community members and organizations signed on to support the District's application for funding to develop and promote Kenai Peninsula market farmers, and USDA awarded us an \$88,000 grant for work that will continue through October, 2016.

## Building Community Awareness

Community awareness of the District continues to grow through projects involving broad-based partnerships such as Schoolyard Habitats and Harvest Moon Local Food Festival. This year the District launched its own Facebook page, and traffic at our website increased 70% over FY14, for a total of 3424 unique visitors. The following articles in local newspapers highlighted District projects and goals:

*Food group thinks local*, Peninsula Clarion, 11/3/2014

*High tunnel program proven on Peninsula*, Peninsula Clarion, 10/27/2014

*Trusty Tasty trails: Volunteer effort expands learning beyond classroom walls*, Redoubt Reporter 12/17/2014

*Farmers market roundtable provides networking and education*, Peninsula Clarion, 2/11/2015

*Peninsula growers find opportunity with Rhodiola*, Peninsula Clarion, 4/20/2015

*Farm to fiber: Natural fiber industry grows*, Peninsula Clarion, 4/29/2015

*Ag Day Letter to the Editor: Little bit goes long way in supporting agriculture*, Redoubt Reporter, 5/6/2015

*Ag Day photo feature*, Peninsula Clarion, 5/6/2015

*Cuts impact local ag support effort*, Peninsula Clarion, 6/2/2015

*Keeping it fresh: Farmer's markets boost farms, economies*, Peninsula Clarion, 8/24/2015

*Noted agrarian to give talk in Kenai*, Peninsula Clarion, 9/18/2015



**Photo Credits** Thanks to Susan Nabholz, Joseph Robertia and Heidi Chay  
**Cover Photo** by Claire Johnson

## Building Local Capacity

In partnership with Kenai Feed & Supply, the District offers an equipment rental service that is well-utilized by dozens of peony, hay, fruit and vegetable growers. This year, the District expanded equipment training opportunities to include workshops on the no-till seed drill and Meri Crusher.

## Demonstration High Tunnel Upgrade

The District partnered with NRCS and Kenai Peninsula Food Bank to build the Demonstration High Tunnel in 2011. The ongoing goals of the project are to raise community awareness of season extension techniques, provide learning opportunities for community members and to grow food for the Food Bank. In 2015, the District purchased materials and helped install a new irrigation system.



## Weed-Free Forage and Gravel

The aim of our Certified Weed Free Forage and Gravel programs is to prevent the spread of invasive plants. Demand continues to increase for weed-free hay, a value-added product available at participating farms. In 2015, five trained volunteers inspected 108 acres of hay. In 2014, the District became the first in the state to offer weed-free gravel certification. Fees-for-service help pay for this voluntary program, which allows local businesses to compete for bids that require weed-free gravel, such as construction projects within the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge or other environmentally sensitive areas.



No-Till Drill Workshop and service project at Soldotna Rodeo Grounds, May 5, 2015.

## Experiments with Fish Waste

Along with large salmon harvests on the Kenai Peninsula and in Cook Inlet come abundant quantities of fish waste. The District supports experimentation with raw and composted forms of fish waste by providing test plots and farmer feedback. We hope to promote increased utilization of this valuable natural resource as an element of sustainable agriculture.

## Protecting Ag Land

960 acres of private land in the Central Peninsula carry permanent state agricultural covenants. The District's designation of Soils of Local Importance (officially approved by NRCS in 2014) enables interested landowners to protect valuable agricultural lands through NRCS conservation easements.



Weed-Free Forage inspectors Janice Chumley, Steve Albers, Larry and Carol Marsh.



# GROWING A LOCAL FOOD SYSTEM

*Expanding local markets to increase food security*



Plentiful produce and customers at Farmers Fresh Market.

**Local Food Festival** Over 600 people took part in the third annual Harvest Moon Local Food Festival (August, 2015) put on by the District in partnership with Kenai Local Food Connection. This year's festival featured nationally-known fermentation expert Sandor Katz, hands-on workshops on fermenting locally-grown foods, a family farm tour, cooking demonstrations, restaurant specials and more. The Kenai Local Food Connection's mission is "supporting local food by fostering healthy eating."

**Crunching the Numbers** For the second year in a row, we surveyed customers at two local farmers markets to gather valuable information on customer demographics, preferences and spending habits. This work was aided by a \$500 grant from Kenai Peninsula Foundation.

**Farmers Fresh Market** A collaborative effort of Kenai Peninsula Food Bank, the District and local farmers, Farmers Fresh Market has completed its third successful year. 2015 developments included improved signage, nine returning and seven new vendors, and occasional musicians.

**Who Says You Can't Farm in Alaska?** The District continues to raise awareness of Kenai Peninsula farmers and their products via literature, public presentations, displays at farmers markets and community events, paid and earned advertising, and social media. This year, we joined with six Kenai Peninsula organizations to launch the \$5/Week Alaska Grown Challenge. With help from the Kenai Local Food Connection, we also updated and distributed the fifth annual Local Food Directory. A major two-year grant from the USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program supports these and other District activities.

**Cultivating Customers** In 2015, the District organized seven Chef at the Market events at two local farmers markets. New this year: recipe cards for every event. These free cooking demonstrations featuring professional and amateur chefs bring additional customers to the markets and promote healthy eating using locally-grown fresh produce. This project was funded by a \$1500 grant from the Alaska Division of Agriculture.



Susan Nabholz of Sterling prepares to make "Fantastic Veggie Fritters" at a Chef at the Market demonstration July, 2015.

# GROWING YOUNG STEWARDS

*Good stewardship of natural resources starts with inspiring young people*

**Connecting kids with nature** lays the foundation for long-term soil and water stewardship. In the third year of the District's Schoolyard Habitat program, our Schoolyard Habitats Coordinator, Dan Funk, helped mobilize school and community resources to plant 200 native willows at Tustumena Elementary's new native plant nursery, expand the outdoor classroom area at Sterling Elementary, and upgrade more than 7000 feet of trails at both schools as well as at Kaleidoscope School of Arts and Sciences in Kenai. Initial planning is underway for a Schoolyard Habitat project on the school grounds shared by Soldotna Elementary and Soldotna Montessori. To date, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has awarded the District a total of \$75,000 to support this program through the end of 2016.



Tustumena Elementary students preparing ground for planting May, 2015.



Schoolyard Habitat Coordinator Dan Funk with willow "sticks" ready to plant at Tustumena's native plant nursery May, 2015.

## ***What is "Schoolyard Habitat"?***

Schoolyard Habitat is a nationwide program developed and funded by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service that involves students and community at every phase of envisioning, designing, constructing, using and maintaining projects on school grounds that create habitat for birds, fish and native plants, and that get kids learning outdoors.

## ***"Mysteries in the Soil" Poster Contest***

The theme of our annual conservation poster contest – "Dig Deeper: Mysteries in the Soil" – challenged students to learn about and convey through artwork the complex living world beneath our feet. Poster contest partners include Central Peninsula Garden Club (prizes), Kenai Watershed Forum, UAF-Cooperative Extension and NRCS.

First place poster, Grades 4-6, by Maria Shaginoff, age 12.

