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STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

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Bruce and Vickie Bush of Palmer Win 2024 Farm Family

(Palmer, AK) – Alaska’s “Farm Family of the Year” for 2024 is Bruce and Vickie Bush, who own and operate Bushes Bunches farm and produce stand in Palmer. The Bushes are being recognized on the 25th anniversary of the annual award, established in 2000 by DNR’s Division of Agriculture and the Alaska State Fair to honor an Alaska Grown farm family that best epitomizes the spirit of the industry that year, and to showcase hard-working Alaskans committed to agriculture through nominations by their peers.

Bushes Bunches is a family-owned business which began in 1956 when Bruce Bush’s father bought the farm in Alaska’s Matanuska-Susitna Valley. Bruce began farming young, participating in 4-H starting at age eight and developing new peanut potato variety “Bushes Peanut Potato,” which has since become very popular at their Alaska State Fair booth. When they were kids, Bruce’s sister Nancy started a small vegetable stand selling radishes and lettuce to earn extra money during the summer. The little wooden stand kept expanding a little every year and by the 1960s, the farm stand was rolling. In 1988, Bruce took over the farm and started a farm stand near the Parks Highway which operated every summer until 1999 when it had to be moved due to the highway being widened. In 2014, the family re-opened the Bushes Bunches Produce Stand at its current location on the Old Glenn Highway (now open year round!). They sell not only their vegetables, but they also support other farm families by offering fresh, frozen, and value-added products from other farms.

Bruce has been an active member in his community, volunteering hundreds of hours in service to Alaskan agriculture. He was a Mat-Su Borough Assembly member, served on the Board of Directors for the Palmer Soil and Water Conservation District for many years, was past President of the Mat-Su Farm Bureau, and served multiple terms on the Alaska State Fair Board of Directors. Bruce was instrumental in the creation of the Farm Family of the Year award 25 years ago. He also cast the tie-breaking vote to fund the first farmland conservation easement, Heaven’s Hayfield. Bruce has been a long-time volunteer with 4-H and Future Farmers of America, served on many agricultural advisory committees for the borough and the state, and is known as the rhubarb king of Alaska.

Vickie’s family moved to Alaska in 1956 from South Dakota where her family raised livestock. Vickie grew up in Anchorage and then moved to Palmer in 1984. She worked as a letter carrier with the U.S. Post Office in Palmer for 25 years. In 2005, Bruce and Vickie married. Vickie fell in love not only with Bruce but also farming in Alaska, making her a third-generation farmer in her

family. Vickie is instrumental in design and daily operations of the farm stand and the Alaska State Fair booth, including the bookkeeping and marketing.

Vickie shared what she likes most about farming: “The challenge. The science. Providing a healthy, healing product for others to enjoy and reap the benefits. Our goal is to help feed the masses with a terrific product. You need to be stubborn, tenacious, and passionate about your work as a farmer.”

“Bruce and Vickie being recognized this year as a second-generation Alaskan farm family is impressive when you consider that Bruce continued the family farm business and grew it for the past 36 years, with a year-round farm stand, iconic sales booth at the State Fair, and as creator of the Bushes Peanut Potato,” **said Bryan Scoresby, Director of the Division of Agriculture.** “I’m personally inspired by Bruce and Vickie’s many contributions to Alaskan agriculture in Southcentral Alaska.”

“Committed Alaskans like Bruce and Vickie are helping to lead the way towards food security in our state as they put nutritious food on Alaskans’ plates, support other local farms, and inspire our next generation of farmers,” **said Governor Mike Dunleavy.** “For 25 years the State’s Division of Agriculture and the Alaska State Fair have recognized outstanding farm families, and it’s incredibly appropriate that Bushes Bunches has won the silver anniversary award for their decades of dedication to agriculture in Alaska.”

The Alaska Farm Family of the Year for 2023 was Marja Smets and Bo Varsano, who own and operate Farragut Farm located near Petersburg. For a complete list of previous winners over the past 24 years visit: https://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag_FFY.htm.

The Department of Natural Resources' mission is to develop, conserve, and maximize the use of Alaska's natural resources consistent with the public interest.

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