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## Press Release

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### Economic development potential highlighted

Anchorage, Alaska – An Air Cargo Summit convened earlier this week highlighted an Alaska commodity that is poised to bloom in international markets – peonies.

Rita Jo Shoultz, a Homer peony grower and member of the Alaska Peony Growers Association, told attendees that peonies grown in Alaska generally bloom when there are no other peonies available to the global market. The bloom period of late June into September makes it possible to supply these highly desirable flowers to markets when there is no direct competition, providing the potential for an expanding agricultural export industry in the state.

Her presentation drew a host of follow-up questions, as well as the interest of at least two air cargo companies who see potential for peonies to fill empty space on outbound cargo flights.

“This interest in peonies is fantastic,” Shoultz said. “Right now, there are more domestic buyers than growers in Alaska can service. But regular access to international cargo flights would be a huge boon to Alaska’s peony growers.”

There are currently 50 peony farms around the state. Shoultz said Gov. Parnell’s proposed revolving loan fund legislation, which includes a microloan program, could help new growers get started and existing growers to expand their operations to meet increasing demand.

House Bill 121, introduced last session and still awaiting legislative action, includes revolving loan funds for mariculture and halibut charter operations, as well as for the microloan program. Also pending in the Legislature is action on Gov. Parnell’s proposed legislation to establish a tax credit for research and development conducted in Alaska, HB 118.

“The interest in issues raised at the summit demonstrates the importance of Governor Parnell’s legislation designed to spur economic development and create paths of

opportunity for Alaskans,” said Curtis Thayer, deputy commissioner of the Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development (DCCED).

The three-day Air Cargo Summit, hosted by the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities Aug. 29-31, brought together air carriers, freight forwarders and Alaska entrepreneurs. The third day focused on “Alaska’s Role in Developing Economic Opportunity in Partnership with Alaska’s International Airports,” a discussion facilitated by DCCED.

Other discussion during the DCCED session at the summit included possible uses of the recently shuttered Kulis Air National Guard Base, which drew a crowd of predominantly film industry enthusiasts who favor establishing a film campus at the facility. Emerging markets for seafood and mariculture were also explored, along with financing options through the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority.

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