ALASKA LOCAL FOOD PROJECT

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Design and Implementation

Household Food Survey
This survey was designed to help us answer the question of how residents of the Anchorage area engage in the local food system and why.

In designing the survey we:
• Identified key information we wanted
• Revised several drafts using a collaborative editing process
• Organized a raffle with prizes from local businesses to be used as an incentive
• Did a classroom test run of survey to get feedback
• Finalized survey the end of Fall 2010

Survey distribution began in the Spring of 2011, targeting:
• Local organizations
• Highly attended events
• Community council meetings
• Classrooms
• Networking through personal contacts
• Other places large numbers of people gather

After various setbacks we came to the conclusion that targeting “captive audiences” was the most efficient method and narrowed our focus to this.

Food Basket Survey
With the food basket survey our goal was to collect price and display information on a variety of foods sold in grocery stores that can also be produced in Alaska. From this we will assess availability, marketing and relative prices of local compared to imported goods.

We targeted mostly large and medium grocery stores as well as a few smaller, specialty shops. Recording:
• Average price for each product
• Whether there was an Alaskan grown version
• How Alaskan products were displayed to customers
- A label on the container
- A small or large sign put up by the grocer
- In an Alaska grown section with other products

Ethical Review
In Dr. Anthony’s Environmental Ethics course, ENVI 303, we have learned about various moral theories and how they can be applied to issues such as climate change, obligations to future generations and consumers’ duty. This project has provided the opportunity to apply such theories to food production.

Aspects of this project which lend themselves to moral scrutiny:
• Local and state government responsibilities to provide access to food for their residents during times of crisis
• Environmental factors involved in food transportation and production methods
• The impact of food production systems on human welfare
• The duty of shoppers in choosing food

By understanding people’s engagement and interest in the local food system, this project will ideally facilitate bringing consumer’s economic and practical reasons for choosing food closer to ethical reasons for doing so.

Reflection

The survey capture, food price and display collection are still in progress. The results will be published in May on the Alaska Food Policy Council’s website at alaskafoodpolicy.blogspot.com.

Focus of Inquiry

The state of Alaska depends heavily upon food shipped or flown up from the continental United States. In case of a catastrophic event food distribution would be disrupted. The project aims to uncover how prepared the state and the citizens are in sustaining themselves in the case of a crisis. This local food project focuses on where Anchorage and Eagle River citizens purchase their food, and how much is locally produced. Local food includes food that can be grown within the state or which can be hunted or gathered. The information is being collected is through a survey capture.

The second half of the project focuses on food distributors and grocers. Teams of students plan to assess the availability of foods that can be grown within the state, how they are presented to customers and affordability. Price comparisons with imported foods and display designs will be contrasted and published in the near future.

Context of Inquiry

UAA students under the direction of Professor Mark Carper have been conducting a local food research project that studies the availability of locally grown foods in the Anchorage and Eagle River areas. This research group was formed through the Geography and Environmental Studies department and the project was made possible by funding from the Center for Community Engagement and Learning.

Findings

From this project we both benefited personally and contributed to our community by:
• Getting hands on experience with research methodology
• Learning how to be adaptable and flexible with changes in project design
• Exercising application of ethics to the issues of food production and food security
• Engaging in work that directly involves and will affect the entire community
• Learning about our community’s needs, strengths and the challenges we face