Food Security and Local Food Production in Alaska: Status, Challenges, and Opportunities

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Purpose: To better understand the current state of food production in Alaska and to identify options that may stimulate the expansion of local food production and promote overall food security within our State.

Methods:
The project utilized components of a Community Food Assessment (CFA).
- Literature review
- 46 key informant interviews
- Interactive food security workshop
  - 62 participants
  - Guest speakers
  - Group work to conduct SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunities, and threats) analyses of food security and components
- Workshops to identify specific, potentially fundable projects to improve food security in the state
- Group feedback session

Findings:
It is clear that neither enthusiasm, expertise, nor ingenuity are limiting factors to improving local food production and overall food security in the State of Alaska. Rather, what are needed are additional supports (i.e. monetary, educational, and structural) to promote continued development, diversification, and sustainability of our food system, as well as efficient and coordinated mechanisms to provide that support.

Figure 2 categorizes the study findings across four themes, identifies supporting activities, and links to associated AFPC goals. Specific needs commonly identified during the interviews and workshop include:

- Increased fresh food production and processing in Alaska.
- Additional skilled and incentivized farmers overseeing both large and small, traditional and non-traditional operations.
- Growth in the skilled workforce in the fishing and seafood industries.
- Regular information exchange at a variety of levels and on a range of topics. The combination of a maintained clearinghouse of information, a regular Alaska food systems meeting/conference, and/or public events (e.g. a food festival to promote public understanding of local product value) could be helpful in meeting information needs.
- Better connections between farmers/fishers and retailers and consumers.
- Increased agricultural and nutritional literacy in our youth to promote a continuous demand for fresh, healthy, and local foods.
- Activities at the food availability, access, and utilization levels paired with supportive policy.
- Additional research to address specific needs and gaps in the local food system; inform development of innovative solutions and interventions; characterize food inequities; and fully and sustainably capitalize on the unique food-related opportunities in the state.
- A resource that integrates research findings and key food systems indicators for mapping food trends in Alaska, and effectively responding to those trends in a timely manner.

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