

# ALASKA FOOD POLICY COUNCIL

## Community Kitchen Table Discussions

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Alaska Humanities Forum - Leadership Anchorage 20

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## **Project Overview:**

The Alaska Food Policy Council (AFPC) collaborates on mutually beneficial solutions to food-systems problems. AFPC's intent is to provide recommendations and information regarding comprehensive policies that improve Alaska's food with the goal of creating a healthier, more secure, and more self-reliant Alaska by improving our food system.

Through Leadership Anchorage 20 (LA20) the project goals were to:

- 1) Host 3 "Kitchen Table-Talks"
- 2) Attract participants and engagement from underserved and under-represented communities in Anchorage
- 3) Develop 1-3 deliverables to educate and inform the broader community on the needs and challenges of food security in Anchorage

## **Kitchen Table-Talks:**

The AFPC determined that the format for the meetings with community members of under-represented groups in Anchorage should be smaller more informal discussions that mimic discussions around the kitchen table rather than larger town hall meetings. These meetings should include 20-30 people for an hour or so and focus on what food security and access means to the different groups in Anchorage.

Over the course of the project, three distinct stakeholder groups engaged in conversations, brainstorming sessions and round-table discussions on the themes of food security in Anchorage. Table-talks were conducted at the Center for Community Engagement & Learning's Think Tank, on March 2 at the UAA Consortium Library, at the Municipality of Anchorage Mayor's office on March 5, and with Bridge Builders of Anchorage on March 14th.

Participants were invited to engage in thought-provoking discussion, spurring answers to questions such as:

- What comes to mind when you think of food in Alaska?
- What do you think of when you think of hunger in Anchorage / Alaska?
- What do you think Alaska's biggest food challenges and opportunities are?
- How could more cultural groups become more involved?

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- What is food's connection to tradition?
  - What role does food play in cultural exchange?
  - Where does your food come from?
  - What role does food play in connecting you to your identity, sense of belonging and tradition values?
  - How have you had to change your traditional recipes in the new cultural setting of Anchorage/Alaska?
  - Abundance and Deprivation: How does seasonality impact your relationship to food?
  - How have you engaged in the food system in Anchorage / Alaska? What have these experiences shown you?

Approximately forty Anchorage residents participated in these kitchen-table discussions.



### **Recommendations to AFPC:**

Based on the input received during the three meetings, the following recommendations are outlined for the AFPC Board's consideration.

#### **1. Municipality of Anchorage**

The Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) is particularly interested in increased opportunity and solutions for:

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- 1) Food Entrepreneurship
  - 2) Urban Agriculture
  - 3) Food Resiliency

Our recommendation to AFPC is to host a “Town-Hall” style session at the November 2017 AFPC Food Conference on opportunities for food entrepreneurship and urban agriculture.

Suggested speakers could include someone from Urban Greens or Yarducopia. Discussion topics could include local and regional economics and how they impact food businesses; sources and types of funding and financing available for the various sectors of the food industry, and business development resources to assist small and startup food ventures. This will provide an opportunity for the MOA to share its goals and objectives on improving food-security, as well as an opportunity for residents to provide input to the MOA on its plan.

It is highly recommended that AFPC continue to engage and work with Mr. Rivera on addressing cultural food security concerns within Anchorage. Recently elected Assemblyman Felix Rivera, representing Midtown, attended the UAA Think-Tank session and has an active interest in food security for underrepresented cultural groups in the Anchorage area.

There have been several efforts in the recent past that are exploring the feasibility of a food hub in Anchorage. It would be beneficial to the MOA to be a part of these conversations sooner rather than later. This proposed food hub would address the first two goals directly while resiliency would be an indirect benefit of the food hub.

There are a variety of municipal departments that could use guidelines to help them support the three areas of interest of the Mayor. AFPC should review its resources and tailor these guidelines to the mission of each of the relevant departments.

Food entrepreneurship in Anchorage is often stifled by a lack of commercial kitchen space. MOA should consider what its role is in alleviating this hurdle. There have been suggestions in the past to utilize the school district’s kitchens after hours, on weekends, and in the summer.

Urban agriculture can be promoted by streamlining the permitting process for indoor agricultural facilities and community gardens, as well as opening more areas of public land to agricultural activities.

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## **2. University of Alaska Anchorage Community**

The greater University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) community showed great interest during the Think Tank session, on improving and increasing local food production on University property. Students and faculty identified systemic food-waste concerns in the University and Anchorage School Districts, as well as a general sentiment that there is a lack of connection between on-campus students to the food system in Alaska.

1. AFPC should consider an on campus student representative as a full Board Member to provide insight and perspective to the day-to-day food security concerns within the University of Alaska system.

2. Create a student or campus sub-committee/chapter which connects the major campuses of UAF, UAA and UAS with satellite campuses to provide AFPC with a truly statewide food system engagement.

## **3. Bridge Builders of Anchorage**

The mission of Bridge Builders of Anchorage (BBA) is the promotion and celebration of harmony and respect among all cultures in order to make Anchorage, Alaska the first city without prejudice.

BBA expressed major concerns over food security, affordability, supply and transit barriers, lack of food education programs, lack of farmer education programs and extreme difficulty with year-round consistent access to traditional and cultural foods. Regarding cultural foods, there was concern over the MOA's food-safety regulations that hindered many cultural groups from accessing, preparing and serving cultural foods for social gatherings and public events.

The cultural groups within BBA recommended that if AFPC wanted to increase its outreach to BBA member groups, then it is necessary to utilize communication methodologies that are used by each group. Traditional Western methods have little impact on reaching these groups and it is essential to understand how each group prefers to be contacted, and who the main contact for that group is.

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There was also a suggestion made that AFPC translate its notices and sections of the website into several of the more popular languages to increase the impact of AFPC's communications.



**Traditional AK Native Foods:**

We reached out to Michael Brubaker at the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium who recommended we contact Gregory Nothstine. Danielle reached out to Greg but received no response. We reached out to Yaari Walker and Loren Anderson at the Native Heritage Center and also received no response. Danielle called ANMC, AFN, and Southcentral Foundations' Elder lunch program. There were some roadblocks in organizing a specific Native group meeting because there are a number of different Alaska Native entities and organizations in Anchorage; and they sometimes collaborate on events but more often, not. There was no response from any of the organizations that we reached out to.

Compiling a list of the all the Native organizations and corporations would be a good next step and to reach out to those already doing health and food programs (like Southcentral and ANTHC) to see if the AFPC could partner with them on events. If the AFPC did a session at the Alaska Tribal Conference on Environmental Management (ATCEM) in October; that presentation would reach audiences in rural areas of Alaska as well. One idea that Michael Brubaker suggested was creating a "Alaska Native Foods" group on Facebook. Perhaps this, along with other cultural groups, could be the next years' cohort project at Leadership Anchorage.

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## **Additional Recommendations**

In addition to the recommendations that were made at the table-tops talks, the Project Team has several additional recommendations based on discussions after all the meetings were concluded.

While the Project Team did its best to meet the requirements of the project and prepare a clear set of deliverables, it became apparent that this project ended with more to-dos than it started with. While reaching out to under-represented group within the community sounds easy enough, especially utilizing a group such as Bridge Builders of Anchorage, there are nuances within each of the groups that needs to be taken into consideration.

It was found that each group had its own methods of communicating and disseminating information amongst its members. This was unknown going in to the meetings but probably one of the most useful insights coming out of the meetings. To effectively engage these groups it will be necessary for AFPC to reach out to each of these groups, identify the most efficient means of communication and dissemination for each group, and then utilize these protocols for further engagement.

The Project Team believes that this may be a valuable deliverable as part of a Phase 2 project that utilizes the Leadership Anchorage 21 cohort beginning in October 2017. There is plenty of work still to be done from the project this year that an additional year and a more focused scope of work should yield valuable results.

The Project Team also recommends that the AFPC create an Outreach and Community Engagement Committee that focuses on identifying under-represented groups throughout the state, and develops clear engagement protocols and plans to maximize efforts, given that the organization's resources are limited.

In addition, it may be a worthwhile exercise for the Board to discuss the following question, "How does diversity better help AFPC meet its mission?" The reason for this is that every board and entity believes that increasing diversity is a good goal to pursue, but generally no one asks why. The question of what diversity means for AFPC should also be discussed to determine what kind of diversity would provide the most benefit to the organization. We believe that answering these questions may help to focus the organization's efforts to maximize its outreach efforts and better prepare the board for the new members.

To increase participation by a more diverse stakeholder set, it is recommended that speakers and topics of interest to these groups should be added to the agenda of the annual conference.

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APPENDICES:

Notes from UAA Think Tank, March 2, 2017

Food security definitions:

- Local production and limitations
- Food sustainability
- Ability to purchase (i.e. PFD energy addition a few years ago, people couldn't pay for energy and good quality food)

Where food is available

How to preserve / harvest / put up

Food safety – contamination/expiration/preservation

Food systems – educating the campus population about food options

Food security – the components of the system that exist

Food waste as a society

\*\*example – Fred Meyer new store opening – lack of food on shelves\*\*

Food System Definitions:

- Where food is grown and how it gets distributed
- Transportation – how to get food from source to sink (Farming equip/seeds/etc)
- Likened to an ecological system – everyone within a food system has their niche
- Preservation and storage
- Influences on food system – costs/pesticide/natural occurrences
- Community infrastructure – farm to table, we need to have laws and regulations in place so that when we get our food it is safe, wholesome, nutritious, labeled appropriately etc.

What comes to mind when you think of food in Alaska?

- SALMON



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- Moose's tooth
  - Quality
  - Potatoes
  - Mat Su Valley
  - Imported food (95% ish )
  - Bringing fresh food from other vacations we visit – hard to find good quality fruit
  - Regulations – coastal zone rights – Halibut

What do you think of when you think of hunger in Alaska?

- Poverty
- Faces at local food bank
- Climate – affecting availability of subsistence and traditional foods (migration patterns, whales, seals)
- Hunger vs famine
- Waste – in school food being offered and kids don't like it
- Hungry kids – kids are vulnerable and so young
- Hungry kids go to school and don't learn very well
- Homelessness
- How much food is thrown away in a restaurant?
- Lack of opportunity – finding food is harder
- Starving polar bears, bears, seals because we take all the salmon – or humans have an impact on the resources that wildlife depend on à and they end up hungry -> ecosystem impacts

Education – people don't know how to cook and use every aspect of a food – kids don't know about what they are eating and why?

Composting – access and availability in Alaska

How much we take food for granted

People that are a lower socioeconomic class – the food that they do get isn't as nutritious – physical hunger vs. malnutrition (lack of nutrients and quality food)

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It's not always the direct relationship that's important – how are living wages and health care related to food security (livable wage – difference between ramen noodles and a tuna fish sandwich for a college kid, healthcare – good nutritious diets can reduce healthcare costs – healthcare costs go up when you have poor nutrition and limited access to good food)

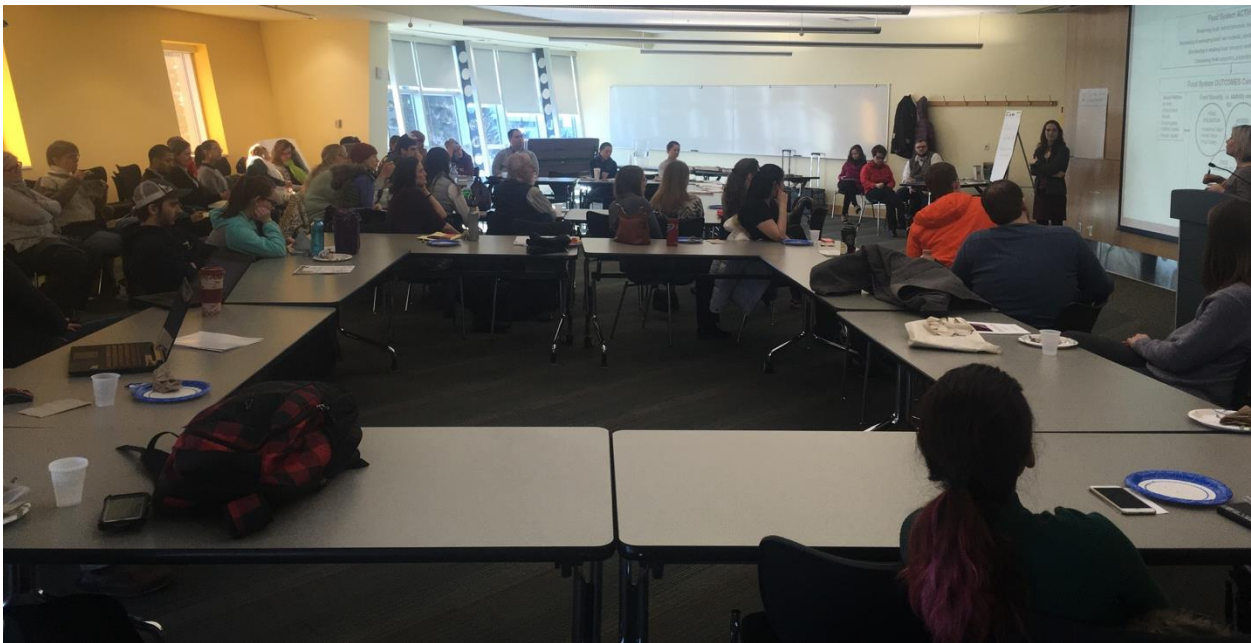
What ways have you engaged the food system:

- Enviro health lab – test ready to eat foods, dairy, seafood, testing foods
- Composting – overwintering in rubber totes
- Alaska Pacific University Spring Creek Farm – manage market
- CSA
- Harvest berries, catch fish and shrimp – ice fish
- Survey on UAA student food and housing insecurity
- Organized a can food drive for Greek Week
- Volunteers with community gardens
- Coffee roaster – farmers get the chafe for compost
- Cash-rent to farmer in Minnesota, worked for treatment facility that started a therapeutic garden

Dean of Students – a lot of food insecure students at UAA, free food options for students, employees gather food and when students come in that are hungry will give them food

People come out of high school so uneducated about food systems

1. Co-host cooking / food classes
2. Cultural representation and sessions at AFPC 2017 conference



**Bridge Builders Meeting - Notes (March 14, 2017)**

Food Security

- Disaster Relief – only 2-3 days food supply in the event of a disaster
- Concerns with food security if there are issues that constrain the supply chain
- Look at what other Arctic nations are doing regarding their food systems, and identify successes that may be applicable in Alaska

Affordability

- Concern over affordability of food for students and other lower income groups – also related is

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the limited accessibility for people without their own transport who cannot shop around for cheaper prices.

- Interest in price inflation of foods - “What can we do to lower food prices in general?”

#### Supply

- Look to expanding the existing capacity of growers in order for them to make it into the box stores – bring local produce to the main market rather than just farmers’ markets
- Exploration of incentives for food production should include urban farming. See Detroit.

#### Education

- Education programs to teach Alaskans how to provide for themselves – vegetable growing, fishing, hunting etc.
- Creating education opportunities for under-represented groups – Cooperative Extension Service
- Consider early education programs to help develop future farmers
- Elders educational program about nutrition - Health benefits - Food awareness

#### “Culture Foods”

- Polynesian Association – difficulty in finding traditional “culture food” for community and social events
- Difficulty with the Muni’s food safety regulations to provide “culture food” for community and social events
- The different cultural groups are somewhat adaptable to finding substitutes to ingredients that are not available here. Unfortunately, those substitutes are not the same, thereby diluting the food experience.
- What can be done locally, to satisfy the demand of culture foods?
- Consider a small business opportunity for the creation of a co-op for a wide range of culture foods
- Idea of “How does food play a role in your cultural identity?”

#### Contact

- On the question of the best way to reach the different cultural groups - Bridge Builders has number of culture ambassadors.
- Need to determine the best means to connect with each group, e.g. weekends are best for the

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Filipino community; flyers do not work; bulletin boards are a better bet, especially at churches.

- Change approach to communication - make it more culturally appropriate for the different groups
- Multiple language postings / flyers at churches



### Bridge Builders Meeting Participants

<u>Participants</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Contact Information</u>
Elsa Sargento	Filipino Community	602-3941
Lucy Hansen	Polynesian Association of AK/BBA	
Marie Husa	AK Fed. of Filipino Americans	<a href="mailto:marie.husa@gmail.com">marie.husa@gmail.com</a>
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Maurion Darci Smith	Brazil/Bridge Builders of Anchorage	333-6778
Lourdes Linato Crawford	Bridge Builders of Anchorage	<a href="mailto:locraw4d@yahoo.com">locraw4d@yahoo.com</a>
Bajek Deng	South Sudan—Had a question about fresh food*?	