

## **Alaska Food Policy Council**

*(notes from Sitka's Kerry MacLane on the May 18-19, 2010, first meeting)*

We ate fresh shrimp, sweet braised beets, turnips and parsnips from the root cellar, cole slaw made from wintered-over cabbage, and even a meat and vegetable roll loaf made from elk raised in Delta Junction. The 80 people chowing down with me in an Anchorage plywood palace motel represented every aspect of food in Alaska except the big three food distributors\* and the fishing industry. There were nutritionists, politicians, state and federal government folks galore, Native groups, Alaska ranchers (of reindeer, muskox, elk, goats and even cows), our one creamery, schools, WIC, restaurants, truckers, a food wholesaler, and even some people growing fruits and vegetables. I was honored to represent Sitka at the first meeting of the Alaska Food Policy Council last month in Anchorage.

We agreed to form the Alaska Food Policy Council (AFPC) and spent most of the first day being educated about what other councils around the country have do to influence policies that encourage the production and distribution of healthy food with fewer miles under its belt. We decided to remain outside of government and instead try to influence both government and industry to adopt policies that support our goals. We broke up into committees to get some work done. The committees discussed and prioritized the main aspects of our food system: harvesting, producing, importing, processing and moving it around. I was on the Indigenous Traditional and Cultural Foods for Health and Food Security committee. We identified plenty of strengths, mainly an abundance of food supplies like fish, moose and berries. The big problems involve storage and transportation issues, as well as policies that excessively limit subsistence harvests.

There are a numerous benefits that food policy changes could mean for residents of Southeast Alaska. The bycatch regulations could be modified to encourage great recovery, processing and distribution. This would result in affordable fish in local markets, schools, health institutions, and statewide. Federal, state and local government institutions would have more incentives and few restrictions to include local food in their purchases. More economic development funds could be made available to food system related entrepreneurs. State and federal storage of emergency food supplies could be in our communities instead of in Portland, Ore. The AFPC can help Alaskans increase our self reliance and be more prepared for the coming rise in fuel costs. A USDA grant is funding the creation and organization of the AFPC. Diane Peck, of the AK Division of Public Health, is coordinating the council. Most of our communication will be done via email and teleconference. For more information you can call Diane at 907.269.8447 or email her at [diane.peck@alaska.gov](mailto:diane.peck@alaska.gov).

\* Costco, Fred Meyers and Carrs Safeway