



Food Security and Sovereignty IN ALASKA NATIVE COMMUNITIES

Recommendations for Improving Language and Inclusivity in Food and Agriculture Programming

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Executive Summary

The primary goal of this project was to better understand how agriculture fits into broader views of Tribal food sovereignty and security in Alaska.

ALASKA NATIVE COMMUNITIES PURSUE DIVERSE AVENUES FOR ACHIEVING FOOD SECURITY AND SOVEREIGNTY, and while they may qualify for relevant food and agriculture programs, labels like *farmer* or *rancher* may discourage them from applying.

In our experience, as Extension educators, working with Tribes to access these programs, this is often the case. To investigate the impact of language and inclusivity on food and agriculture programming, the authors of this report take the following approach:

- ▶ We first take a look at the historical context of agriculture and Indigenous communities in the U.S. and policies around agriculture.
- ▶ Then we explore Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Foodways in Alaska.
- ▶ Next we report on our findings from surveys and key informant interviews that were conducted across Alaska via a community based participatory research-informed approach with regional advisory committees.
- ▶ Throughout, we highlight Indigenous food stories which capture how Tribal communities are getting food from the land and growing it.
- ▶ Finally, we provide key recommendations to bolster food sovereignty and security in Alaska.

Key Recommendation 1: Use Tribal priorities to guide USDA programs and grants for Tribes.

Key Recommendation 2: When programs aim to improve food security and sovereignty, allow and support wild-harvest and non-economically driven activities with equal priority to agriculture.

Key Recommendation 3: Promote food justice, food sovereignty, greater access, and cultural awareness of foodways and traditions.

Key Recommendation 4: Use relevant food system indicators and evaluation metrics for Tribes in Alaska.

Key Recommendation 5: Fully fund the Federally Recognized Tribes Extension Program with mandatory, non-competitive funds.

Key Recommendation 6: Acknowledge that agriculture has been a source of trauma and associated with colonialism for Indigenous peoples and focus programmatic efforts around healing and resilience.

- ▶ We include appendices that provide an extensive look at Tribally driven food security assessments (Appendix A) as well as agricultural grants and programs that are supporting Tribally driven needs and goals around food sovereignty and security (Appendix B).

Our survey and interview numbers were small; this project should be seen as a demonstrative first step in what should be a more comprehensive approach to documenting Tribal food sovereignty and security in Alaska, especially as they relate to being able to access (agricultural) programs and funding designed to bolster food security. Furthermore, we endeavor to illustrate that by giving preference to traditional means of food production, rather than to a more Western-conceived agriculture—which has been one of the primary avenues of colonization and dispossessing Indigenous peoples from their land—real progress toward food security and sovereignty may be made for Alaska's Indigenous peoples.

Discussion: Analysis of Surveys and Interviews

IN THE PROCESS OF ANALYZING SURVEY AND INTERVIEW RESULTS, WE DEVELOPED CATEGORICAL CODES based on the words, insights and experiences research participants shared with us, and from those codes identified Emergent Themes. The following is a brief description of the most common emergent themes with regard to satisfaction, dissatisfaction and the needs of, and barriers to tribal food producers. These themes feed directly into the recommendations that are made in the next section of this report.

The trends we observed in the survey and interview data indicate that while there is a desire to include more locally grown (Tribally grown) foods into Indigenous food systems, those efforts are often limited for a variety of generalizable reasons across all regions surveyed. Based on analysis of the emergent themes, the single greatest source of food system satisfaction among research participants was: access to wild foods, followed by access to locally produced foods, access to market foods, and sharing networks. meanwhile, the greatest sources of dissatisfaction included: access to fresh foods, high cost of food, and access to resources (e.g. built, natural and financial capital).

With regard to themes pertaining to the barriers and needs identified by research participants, it became clear that there was a great deal of overlap between barriers to increased/successful food production and the needs of Tribal food producers (see Figure 7.1). The following is a summary that further describes the types of challenges or needs with regard to the most-cited themes from this research.

Figure 7.1 Emergent Themes of Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction as Well as Needs and Barriers to Food Security and Sovereignty in Alaska from this Research.



Emergent Themes

PIECES OF TRANSCRIPT FROM RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS WERE INCREASINGLY MERGED AND ABSTRACTED to develop this final list of emergent themes. The most prominent themes (most cited) for each of the four above categories (satisfied, dissatisfied, barriers and needs) has an asterisk after them.

Education

The knowledge and skills required to grow and raise foods that are not part of a traditional or wild-foods based diet are often needed to further engage, grow and utilize more domestic foods.

High Cost of Living

Obtaining supplies, equipment and materials that aid in more local food production was cited repeatedly as the greatest barrier to starting a new food production endeavor (for either domestic or wild foods).

Time

The ability to take or dedicate the time necessary to produce food. This is often a conflict for both wild food and domestic food production—individuals either not being able to take time from their jobs, raising families, or having to choose one priority over another (i.e. to grow a garden or spend summer months harvesting wild foods). One Interviewee expressed:

"It takes a lot of planning and teamwork to make sure a garden is maintained; summer is the season when people come and go to harvest other foods."

Infrastructure

Infrastructure for food production, storage, processing, etc. is a consistently cited challenge with regards to increased local food production and food sovereignty efforts in rural Alaska communities. For instance, many respondents cited the need for greenhouses, raised beds, or cold storage facilities to meet the needs of community efforts to grow, raise and harvest more food.

Community Involvement

In every region surveyed, participants noted that producing food takes time and more effort than one individual is able to accomplish. Some individuals indicated that a viable solution to this perennial challenge would be to create (fund) positions where individuals from the community would be compensated to maintain food production (e.g., grow, hunt, fish, and gather) and distribution for the community.

Funding

Efforts to create food sovereignty movements in a rural community are often borne of the passion of one or a few individuals. Many of these programs or efforts end if those individuals are not able to physically or otherwise sustain their efforts. There are increasing cases of food sovereignty programming that have received more stable funding through programs like Natural Resource Conservation Service, funding from Tribal or regional Corporations or regional health corporations. Identifying more stable sources of funding, supporting, and making more programs available that do provide start-up funds for local Tribally-run food movements would address a major need in many communities looking to start some kind of food production endeavor.

Climate Change

Variability in the seasons, changing weather patterns and the manifestation of those changes in plant and animal populations is something that many participants cited with regard to why there is now a greater need to grow/produce more food within their communities and regions. Being that the greatest source of food system *satisfaction* individuals cited was the access to wild foods, these changes are extremely alarming and disheartening to many Tribal food producers (harvesters).