

## NS-6: Support Local Sustainable Agriculture in Alaska

At the last AAG meeting (June 19), the decision was made to remove Option 6 from NS., while ensuring that any concepts dealing with opportunities for agriculture were transferred to the appropriate EA Option.. This was a very significant change to the option, and left food security /subsistence orphaned. Following the AAG meeting, at least one member of the AAG has questioned this deletion, and would like to re-open the issue.

The relevant sections from the chapter and appendix dated early June (the versions that were available for the June 19 AAG meeting) are reproduced below.

### From the chapter:

#### **NS-6 Support Local Sustainable Agriculture in Alaska**

The State of Alaska will develop a program to support sustainable agriculture in Alaska that will improve, secure and sustain the supply of quality, affordable food for all Alaskans, to respond to new challenges and opportunities presented by a changing climate and other future challenges (e.g., increasing food transportation costs to and within Alaska). NS-6 recommends four key actions to increase food security, to be led by the DNR Division of Agriculture:

1. Encourage community-based agriculture.
2. Research the magnitude and composition of food consumption in the state.
3. Research the sources of food supply and the risk associated with high reliance on imported foods.
4. In cooperation an ad hoc Alaska food coalition (including other agencies, University, produced food sources through agriculture, seafood harvesting, and subsistence activities, including enhanced intrastate marketing of Alaska grown products.

Enhancing food security through locally sustainable food sources can address potential interruptions in current sources, increase availability of quality, affordable food for Alaskans, increase business opportunities, improve nutrition and health, and provide socio-cultural benefits.

These actions fit within the framework of the Division of Agriculture's 2008 Strategic Plan – which calls for addressing climate change effects on Alaska's agriculture sector and increasing local sustainable agriculture – and could be implemented in the short- to mid-term. Funding for two positions in the Division of Agriculture is recommended to lead and accomplish these tasks; as well as moderate funding for research on Alaska's food supply and to support meetings of the Alaska food coalition.

## From the Appendix:

### NS-6 Support Local Sustainable Agriculture in Alaska

#### Recommended Adaptation Option

The State of Alaska will develop a program to support sustainable agriculture in Alaska that will improve, secure and sustain the supply of quality, affordable food for all Alaskans, to respond to new challenges and opportunities presented by a changing climate and other future challenges (e.g., increasing food transportation costs to and within Alaska).

#### Option Description

The goal of Option NS-6 is to develop a program to improve, secure, and sustain the supply of quality, affordable food for Alaskans by expanding and enhancing food production in rural and urban Alaska and improving marketing of Alaska-grown products.

Option NS-6 will be incorporated into the Alaska Division of Agriculture's (ADOA) strategic planning process with the purpose of complementing ADOA efforts to expand community-based agriculture across Alaska. (See Objective 3.2 of ADOA's strategic plan, *Challenges and Opportunities for the Future - While Meeting the Needs of Today, 2009*, which calls for addressing climate change effects on the agriculture sector.)

To achieve this goal, one has to look not only at what agricultural products Alaska can grow, but also infrastructure/processing capabilities, marketing, and other considerations. One of the largest hurdles to truly sustainable agriculture in Alaska is the seasonality of our production combined with the lack of infrastructure/processing capabilities and limited marketing. For instance, Alaska is probably capable of producing more vegetables, but only so many of them can be consumed while still 'fresh'. The market for unprocessed vegetables (such as potatoes, which can be stored year round) is also limited. The amount of cold storage available in the state may also be another limiting factor.

Anecdotal observations indicate that well over 98% of Alaska's total food supply is imported. With the current uncertainty in the national and global economies, the security of that food supply is at risk. The impacts of climate change on the food producing capabilities of the state are unknown but can be expected to provide both opportunity and the need for adaptive change. The state has a history of food production including agriculture, commercial seafood harvesting, and fishing and wildlife hunting for personal and community use. There is both an opportunity and a need to build on our history to create a new system of food production that can maximize the potential of the state to feed itself.

#### Option Design

**Structure/design:** Four initiatives or tasks are needed to improve, secure and sustain the Alaskan food supply for the future:

- 1) Encourage community-based agriculture.
- 2) Research the magnitude and composition of food consumption in the state.
- 3) Research the sources of food supply and the risk associated with high reliance on imported foods.

- 4) Develop in cooperation with the University a strategic Alaska food policy to increase reliance on locally produced food sources through agriculture, seafood harvesting, and subsistence activities, including enhanced marketing of Alaska-grown products.

**Targets/goals:**

- ADOA will provide the leadership to create an Alaska Food Coalition of producers, providers, and consumers.
- ADOA will work to support the expansion of locally produced food through farmers markets and community-based agriculture initiatives.
- ADOA will partner with the University of Alaska to design and conduct the research identified above.
- ADOA will facilitate the development of a draft Alaska Food Policy by the Alaska Food Coalition.

**Timing:**

- Year One: begin and complete task 1 above and begin work on task 2.
- Year Two: Continue support for task 2 above and work on tasks 1 & 3 by facilitating the development of research initiatives in collaboration with the Alaska Food Coalition and the University of Alaska.
- Year Three: Continue work on task 2 and support for research initiatives including funding and information.
- Year Four: Begin facilitating the development of an Alaska Food Policy with the Alaska Food Coalition based on new research findings.

**Participants/Parties involved:** The Alaska Division of Agriculture will serve as lead for implementation of NS-6. The UAF Cooperative Extension Service, the UAF School of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences, and others will assist ADOA.

The first task of NS-6 will be to organize the Alaska Food Coalition to include representatives of producers, consumers, processors and providers.

**Evaluation:** Create a data collection system to record production and consumption progress related to the goal of creating a secure and sustainable food system in Alaska.

Continue work with the Alaska Food Coalition to evaluate how programs and policies are meeting the needs identified by the coalition.

**Research and Data Needs:** The research need associated with NS-6 is to conduct an analysis of the demand and supply for food in Alaska, including an analysis of how this demand is currently met. The findings of this research would inform development of a strategic Alaska Food Policy and serve as a baseline to measure future progress of this option. Following the accomplishment of this task, the ADOA strategic plan will be reviewed to see how much of Alaska's supply of food could be provided by local growers in the various communities (i.e., examine potential for import substitution opportunities).

This research is a HIGH priority for implementation of NS-6. The Alaska Food Coalition would have an important role in coordination to accomplish this research.

## Implementation Mechanisms

First: Need to prepare an **analysis of Alaska's DEMAND for food** -- this is for ALL types of food (not just agriculture sector – Note: Need to analyze by sub regions, since there are great differences in different geographic regions and differences rural / urban, etc.):

- What is Alaska's food need?
- To what extent are our current needs met?
- What needs are not met (i.e., current hunger)?
- What are the sources of our food supply?
- What is the risk to our food supply, under different potential change scenarios?

Second: Research findings regarding Alaska's food supply and demand would be incorporated into the ADOA Strategic Planning Process and used to develop a strategic Alaska Food Policy addressing the following questions:

- What is the capacity of Alaska to be self-sufficient in food production?
- How can agriculture contribute to the food needs of Alaskans?
- How can the seafood industry contribute to the food needs of Alaskans?
- How can subsistence and personal use activities contribute to the food needs of Alaskans?
- How can a marketing and distribution system be created to deliver Alaska produced food to Alaskans?

The Alaska Food Policy “Findings” will also identify the need for any legislative action.

The ADOA is well placed to provide leadership for this effort. Implementation of NS-6 will require the creation of a new stakeholder group (the Alaska Food Coalition) to coordinate the activities of agencies and industry involved in food production, processing, and marketing. ADOA will need an increase of professional staffing (2.0 FTE at a minimum) to support this effort.

## Related Policies/Programs and Resources

**Related Policies/Programs/Actions:** There are many state and federal programs with (potential) food related responsibilities that will need to be consulted and/or included in the Food Coalition as stakeholders. (See the ADOA Economic Development Resource Guide at <http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/dcra/edrg/EDRG.htm>)

**Available Resources:** The ADOA is well placed to provide leadership to implement NS-6, but will need an increase of professional staffing (2.0 FTE at a minimum) to support this effort.

## Feasibility

It is very feasible and realistic for the State to implement this option through the leadership of ADOA. However, ADOA has limited resources to take on this additional and important task, and would require a minimum of 2.0 FTE additional professional staff. Additional resources would also be needed to support the Alaska Food Coalition process and research. (See Costs section, below).

## Adaptation Benefits and Costs

**Benefits:** The long-term benefit is to reduce the food supply risks for Alaskans, in light of changing climatic conditions in Alaska and other future challenges (e.g., increased costs for food transportation to and within Alaska.) The short-term benefits will be the development of

information, a coordinating body, and a strategic plan to accomplish the long-term benefits to include:

- A comprehensive analysis and assessment of Alaska's food needs and vulnerabilities -- important to determining how critical it might be for Alaska to have a policy and subsequent actions promoting local sustainable food sources.
- Vital information for identifying market opportunities for locally produced agriculture and other locally produced foods (e.g., seafood).
- Increased economic opportunity for Alaska businesses.
- Improved nutrition, particularly in rural communities (= health benefits). Reduced hunger (by meeting more of Alaska's food need).

**Costs:** Cost of these implementation steps will include:

- Funding for new positions and related support for the ADOA (a minimum of 2 FTE is anticipated).
- Funding for research identified in tasks above (estimated \$100,000) – estimate based on consultation with Dr. Bret Luick, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Cooperative Extension Service regarding implementation of the on-going Alaska Food Cost Survey (See <http://www.uaf.edu/ces/fcs/2008q1data.pdf>)
- Funding to support meetings and work of the Alaska Food Coalition (e.g., travel, staff support, meeting expenses).

Data sources used for the estimates provided in this section and additional references related to Alaska's agricultural sector are footnoted.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alaska Cooperative Extension, University of Alaska Fairbanks. Organizing For Business As a Cooperative. Fairbanks, Alaska: August 1995.

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USDA National Agricultural Statistics Office, [http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics\\_by\\_State/Alaska/index.asp](http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Alaska/index.asp)

## **TWG Approval and Deliberations**

During the ranking and evaluation by TWG members, this option was the ranked last of the six recommended natural system adaptation options, with no minority views, due to its lower rankings for significance, benefits and timing. The TWG is in concurrence about the ranking of this option.

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