

June 4, 2018 House Resources Food Security Subcommittee

Summary of meeting:

The first meeting of the new House Resources Food Security Subcommittee was held from 1 pm to 3 pm on Monday June 4 at the Anchorage Legislative Information Office. Committee members included Rep. Geran Tarr, Rep. Harriet Drummond, Rep. Chris Birch, Rep. Justin Parish, Rep. David Talerico and Rep. George Rausher. Alaskans from across the state including Soldotna, Wasilla, Kenny Lake, Juneau, Palmer, Anchorage, Delta Junction, the Mat-Su Valley and Fairbanks participated in an interesting discussion about the opportunities to improve Alaska's economy and health by strengthening our food system. Speakers included Cara Durr from the Alaska Food Policy Council, Sarah Khlifi from the Alaska Food Coalition, Amy Seitz and Bryce Wrigley with the Alaska Farm Bureau, Mat Su Valley goat raw milk farmer Suzy Crosby, and Florida lawyer and food freedom expert Pete Kennedy.

The meeting opened with an overview of the different ways people might perceive food security – from food access to emergency preparedness to agricultural readiness to traditional food gathering. The bulk of the presentation was an update about what's happening across the country with laws and issues governing food freedom, increasing direct producer to consumer sales, and raw milk production and distribution. The meeting ended with information from Alaska's state veterinarian about how the Department of Environmental Conservation regulates the food industry by assessing risks for public safety and sanitation.

Speakers for June 4 – House Resources Food Security Subcommittee

Cara Durr, Alaska Food Policy Council

Cara is the Director of Public Engagement for the Food Bank of Alaska, overseeing their policy and advocacy efforts. She holds a MA in International Studies with a focus on Development, and a Certificate in Nonprofit Management. She serves on the Governing Board for the Alaska Food Policy Council and holds a seat on the national Feeding America Policy Engagement and Advocacy Committee. Born and raised in Alaska, she enjoys the challenge of increasing food access in her home state, where there are few roads, high prices, and unique cultural considerations.

Summary: Overview of what Food Security means to different people

1. Emergency Preparedness
2. Poverty and Hunger (100,000 Alaskans get federal food assistance in SNAPP program – these federal dollars - \$191 million - also support rural grocery stores)
3. Traditional food gathering/subsistence

Sara Khlifi, Alaska Food Policy Council (Alaska Food Coalition)

Summary: Talked about hunger and poverty and access to SNAPP dollars to purchase Alaska Grown goods in farmers markets. Alaska Farmers Market Association got a USDA federal grant and they are looking at ways to get assistance on federal technol

Amy Seitz and Bryce Wrigley, Alaska Farm Bureau

Amy Seitz is a 3rd generation farmer on the Lancashire Farms of Soldotna. She serves as the Executive Director of the Alaska Farm Bureau, a non-profit working to improve the economic well-being and expansion of agriculture, and to enrich the quality of life for all Alaskans. She works closely with Bryce Wrigley, the President of the Farm Bureau, who is the founder of the Alaska Flour Company in Delta Junction.

Summary: See powerpoint presentation included in online documents for more information – discussion of need to grow Alaska farm production to have a three month supply of food for emergency preparedness.

Pete Kennedy, Esq.

Pete Kennedy is a lawyer and consultant living in Florida. For the past fifteen years he has worked on issues governing raw milk production and distribution. From 2004 to the present he worked with the Weston A. Price Foundation (WAPF), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to restoring nutrient-dense foods to the American diet; it is the leading raw milk advocacy group in North America.

From 2007 to 2017, he worked as an attorney for the Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund (FTCLDF), a 501(c)(4) nonprofit designed to protect the right of farmers and consumers to engage in direct commerce. For FTCLDF he consulted on and drafted raw milk legislation and herdshare agreements. I worked on embargo, seizure and recall cases involving raw dairy products and investigated claims of foodborne illness outbreaks attributed to raw milk consumption. In most cases, raw milk did not turn out to be the cause of illness.

Summary: Overview of laws in other states relating to food freedom and raw milk production and distribution. A dozen states allow raw milk sales at farmers markets. 17 states allow raw cream. 10 states allow raw butter. Each state different in how laws are applied. Might need a study to look at a shared facility for processing dairy products. Herdshare agreements are a property rights issue. Will follow up with legal opinion from Michigan on raw milk production.

Robert F. Gerlach VMD, Alaska State Veterinarian

Dr. Gerlach works for the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation as the Alaska State Veterinarian. He is responsible for animal health regulations, animal disease surveillance, manages the State's Fish Monitoring Program and is the State's Fish Advisory Program Coordinator.

Dr. Gerlach graduated from the Pennsylvania State University with a BS in Veterinary Science; he then received his Veterinary Degree (VMD) from the University of Pennsylvania. After several years in private practice he returned to academic pursuits and completed a Post-Doctoral Fellowship in pathophysiology and toxicology at the Lovelace Inhalation Toxicology Institute. As attending veterinarian his research involved studying the effects of age on pulmonary function, as well as, evaluating the impact of different toxicants on respiratory function and the immune system.

In 1987, he moved to Alaska and worked in private practice until being hired by the state to manage the State's Fish Monitoring Program in 2001. Working with state and federal partners and commercial, recreational and subsistence fisherman over 10,000 fin fish and invertebrates, over 90 species, have been collected and analyzed for environmental contaminants. The data generated by the program is used by Department of Health and Social Services to develop fish consumption advice for Alaska residents. In 2003 Dr. Gerlach became State Veterinarian.

Summary: Efforts to grow the dairy industry in Alaska should be informed by market research and a strong business plan. The Department of Health and Social Services should be included in future meetings to discuss known outbreaks in Alaska of listeria and other health risks associated with dairy consumption. Provided information about how the Department of Environmental Conservation regulates the food industry by assessing risks for public safety and sanitation.

Please note: The “official” audio recording of this meeting is posted online at http://www.akleg.gov/basis/Committee/Details/30?code=HRES#tab2_7. These notes are an unofficial summary. For more information and to get on an email list for notices, please email the chair of the House Resources Food Security Subcommittee, Rep.Geran.Tarr@akleg.gov or call (907) 269-0144. This subcommittee will last through summer and fall of 2018 and may include tours and town hall meetings throughout the state.