

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF DARREN SNYDER,
MEMBER OF THE GOVERNING BOARD, ALASKA FOOD POLICY COUNCIL,
BEFORE THE HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE, ALASKA LEGISLATURE,
LEGISLATIVE HEARING ON HCR 24, A RESOLUTION RELATING TO THE
ESTABLISHMENT AND OPERATION OF A STATE FOOD RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT
WORKING GROUP

FEBRUARY 29, 2012

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, my name is Darren Snyder. I am a member of the governing board of the Alaska Food Policy Council. I am here to testify in strong support of HCR 24. This resolution recognizes the importance to all Alaskans of developing a strong and secure food system that can provide jobs, support healthy communities, and increase food security to feed the hungry and insulate us from potential disruptions along the food supply chain.

Over 130 Alaskans have joined the Alaska Food Policy Council (AFPC) because of their concerns of the many food challenges we face, and are looking for a way to tackle them in a comprehensive way. Some of these challenges include:

- Businesses see that over a billion dollars a year that Alaskans spend on food is being exported to communities in the lower 48. These "food dollars" could be staying right here in our communities, putting people to work.
- Health professionals continue to see more children and youth struggling with weight issues, and deaths from diet-related disease, like diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. Families and food safety advocates are worried about death and illness from contaminated food.
- Teachers see kids in school performing poorly because they are hungry or eating too many empty calories and junk food.
- Families in communities with high fuel prices are forced to choose between paying for heat or for food, and food is losing.

The vision of the AFPC is healthy, secure food systems that feed all Alaskans and its mission is to improve our food systems for the benefit of all Alaskans. Initiated in 2010, the AFPC is an independent organization open to anyone interested in improving Alaska's food systems. Today, over 130 people representing federal and state agencies, tribal entities, university programs,

farmers, fisheries, food systems businesses, and health and hunger agencies participate in the AFPC.

Over the past two years the AFPC has been working to connect people from different areas of the food system, focus attention on our food system problems, and elevate policy as a strategy for strengthening our food system. AFPC members have been working together to strengthen the Local Agricultural and Fisheries Products Preference Statute to increase state agency purchases of Alaska agriculture and fish products. AFPC members are also working together to implement a farmers' market –Quest program to help Food Stamp recipients use their benefits to purchase local, healthy foods at farmers' markets.

The AFPC recently released its 2012-2015 strategic plan. The goals of the AFPC are:

- All Alaskans have access to affordable, healthy (preferably local) foods.
- Alaska's food-related industries have a strong workforce and operate in a supportive business environment.
- Food is safe, protected and supplies are secure throughout Alaska.
- Alaska's food system is more sustainable.
- Alaskans are engaged in our food system.

We are pleased to see the Alaska State Legislature support the work of the Alaska Food Policy Council and encourage the Governor to establish a new state food resource development working group. The primary goal of the new working group -- producing more locally grown and harvested food items to be consumed in Alaska, by Alaskans -- support several of the goals of the AFPC. The Alaska Food Policy Council looks forward to collaborating with the new working group and all the state agencies involved in our food system to address Alaska's critical food challenges.

We are pleased to see that the following state agencies are identified to work with the proposed state food resource working group: the Department of Natural Resources, Department of Fish and Game, Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development, Department of Health and Social Services, Department of Education and Early Development, Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs, and the University of Alaska. However, we respectfully recommend that the Department of Environmental Conservation also be included in this group of agencies because of the key role it plays in many critical elements of our food system.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony to the committee.