

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE**

March 18, 2019

1:06 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative John Lincoln, Co-Chair
Representative Geran Tarr, Co-Chair
Representative Grier Hopkins, Vice Chair
Representative Sara Hannan
Representative Ivy Spohnholz
Representative Dave Talerico
Representative George Rauscher
Representative Sara Rasmussen

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Chris Tuck

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S): ALASKA TRADITIONAL FOODS MOVEMENT

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

MELISSA CHLUPACH, MS, RD, LD, Assistant Professor
Dietetics and Nutrition Program
University of Alaska Anchorage
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-provided a PowerPoint presentation entitled, "Alaska Traditional Foods Movement" and answered questions.

AMY FOOTE, Senior Area Executive Chef
Alaska Native Medical Center
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-provided a PowerPoint presentation entitled, "Alaska Traditional Foods Movement" and answered questions.

ACTION NARRATIVE

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CO-CHAIR JOHN LINCOLN called the House Resources Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:06 p.m. Representatives Hannan, Talerico, Spohnholz, Rauscher, Tarr, and Lincoln were present at the call to order. Representatives Hopkins and Rasmussen arrived as the meeting was in progress.

PRESENTATION(S): ALASKA TRADITIONAL FOODS MOVEMENT

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CO-CHAIR LINCOLN announced that the only order of business would be a presentation on the Alaska Traditional Foods Movement.

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MELISSA CHLUPACH, MS, RD, LD, Assistant Professor, Dietetics and Nutrition Program, University of Alaska Anchorage, introduced a PowerPoint presentation entitled, "Alaska Traditional Foods Movement." Ms. Chlupach displayed maps of North America and Alaska and pointed out, because of the limited road system in the northern part of Alaska, many food products must be shipped to villages via air, barge, or ferry and thus transportation costs are very high (slides 1 and 2). Slide 3 pictured local grocery markets in villages. Slide 4 illustrated the cost of some items purchased in Kotzebue: Four fruit cups, \$6.79; bottled salad dressing, \$8.19; a can of Tang, \$9.99; infant formula, \$30.49; one gallon of milk, \$9.39. Although some fresh local produce is grown hydroponically, gathering traditional foods is also expensive due to the cost of fuel. She stated the most important, nutritious, and healing foods are traditional foods. Ms. Chlupach asked the committee to imagine a situation focused on the good feelings brought by certain foods; she then asked the committee to imagine a situation in which one is hospitalized far from home.

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MS. CHLUPACH spoke of the changes one suffers due to a medical emergency and experiences found in a hospital setting; she opined familiar foods can bring great comfort to those who are suffering (slides 7 and 8).

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AMY FOOTE, Senior Area Executive Chef, Alaska Native Medical Center, related a circumstance in which a patient was offered a herring egg salad that brought her joy and healing (slides 9 and 10).

MS. CHLUPACH said within the Division of Environmental Health, Food Safety and Sanitation Program, DEC, there is an existing code that allows traditional foods to be donated to facilities such as hospitals, long-term care facilities, schools, and senior meals programs. The code stipulates donated foods must be whole, gutted, or gilled, or as quarters, or roasts without further processing. These regulations are designed to reduce the potential cross contamination that can occur during the processing of ground meat, stew meat, or fillets; a whole product that is donated can subsequently be processed by the recipient or by a processing facility. She related seal oil is widely requested but is a prohibited food item because of the possibility of botulism (slide 12); slide 13 listed other prohibited foods. Ms. Chlupach explained committee the Agriculture Act of 2014 (2014 Farm Bill) included language that allows for the donation of traditional and indigenous foods to certain institutions; although the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Bill) does not include the enabling language, there is no problem because the language has been adopted into Title 25 of the U.S. Code (slides 14 and 15). She further explained in 2017, the Municipality of Anchorage adopted terminology related to donating traditional foods to facilities (slide 16). Ms. Chlupach directed attention to posters and a "toolkit," included in the committee packet, that were created by a group of organizations to clarify the food code about acceptable donations, food storage, and processing (slide 17).

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MS. FOOTE advised prior to enactment of the 2014 Farm Bill, the Alaska Native Medical Center (ANMC) began working with vendors to procure traditional food items; she noted some traditional foods cannot be purchased so she harvested several items herself. Items that can be purchased include reindeer, fiddlehead ferns, beach asparagus, salmon, and fish heads. Ms. Foote personally harvested items such as spruce tips, dandelions, and berries. In addition, the Alaska Professional Hunters Association and others donate game meat (slides 19-21). She said there are 32 ANMC traditional foods donation locations throughout the state that supply foods and ingredients from many regions via partially-donated shipping arrangements (slides 22

and 23). Slide 24 listed ANMC 2017 traditional foods that were donated by professional hunters, recreational fishers, and other sources. In 2018, donations included harbor seal; in 2019, donations so far include beach greens (slides 25 and 26). Ms. Foote described several ANMC menu items and how to prepare herring eggs (slides 27-29).

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MS. FOOTE explained ANMC obtains seal meat from a subsistence hunter in Ketchikan who teaches traditional methods of hunting. The meat is shipped to ANMC where she makes and serves complimentary meals of seal soup to patients every Tuesday, in conjunction with the ANMC culture committee (slide 30). She described additional menu items, noting only wild caught salmon is served at ANMC (slides 31-33). Slides 34 and 35 illustrated the ANMC patient menu which changes as items become available.

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CO-CHAIR TARR asked whether reindeer sausage was made at the ANMC kitchen from donated products.

MS. FOOTE said donated products are labeled caribou, but all products labeled reindeer are purchased from a farm. She described other menu items that are made from donated items. Ms. Foote continued to slide 36 and informed the committee Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC)/Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital implemented its traditional foods program in 2017 with a donation of deer harvested by its chef; additional donations have included mountain goat, fish, plants, and berries (slide 37).

MS. CHLUPACH directed attention to Utuqqanaat Inaat, Maniilaq Association's 18-bed, long-term care facility in Kotzebue, that previously was a senior care facility. Due to differing regulations between senior care and long-term care facilities, traditional foods that were served at the senior care facility were no longer available, and the elders longed to return to a menu including traditional foods. In response, DEC and [the Division of Health Care Services, Department of Health and Social Services] directed that the tundra should be considered the elders' garden and permitted kitchens were allowed to receive traditional game. To provide the game in 2015, plans were made by various organizations for Maniilaq Association to build the Siglaug, a traditional foods processing facility. The first traditional menu item supplied by the Siglaug was 200

pounds of muskox confiscated from poachers by the Division of Alaska Wildlife Troopers (DWT), Department of Public Safety (slides 39-41).

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MS. CHLUPACH added seal meat and seal oil are offered to elders at Niqipaq, a monthly potluck especially for elders (slides 42 and 43). Slide 44 pictured a wheelchair-accessible tundra garden built by the Maniilaq Association. She turned attention to schools and noted traditional foods are challenging for schools because traditional foods must be donated, thus the schools cannot be reimbursed; however, donations can be made by commercial fleets directly to commercial processors through Fish to School programs in Sitka, Cordova, Valdez, Dillingham, and Bristol Bay (slide 46). She continued to the Alaska Food Bank and coalition program, Help Meat (sic) the Need, that allows hunters to donate wild game to the Food Bank of Alaska, which is then processed into ground meat, packaged, and transported by Northern Air Cargo to Anchorage (slide 48).

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REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN asked whether formula and breast milk can be transported by air cargo.

MS. CHLUPACH was unsure and deferred to the Alaska Food Bank or ANMC. She then related inmates at the Department of Corrections need the healing that is provided by traditional foods; at Yukon Kuskokwim Correctional Center fish are donated to the center to minimize food costs and provide traditional foods to inmates (slide 50). Ms. Chlupach returned to the issue of seal oil and advised in 2015, the Seal Oil Task Force - formed by a group of Native organizations and state government - sought to develop safety procedures for traditionally rendered seal oil that would allow the seal oil to be offered to healthcare facilities, long-term care facilities, senior meal programs, and schools. The Maniilaq Association began its own seal oil project with staff at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), Kodiak Seafood and Marine Science Center, who tested pH and water content, and with Professor Eric Johnson, University of Wisconsin, who studied samples of blubber and seal oil related to botulism type E. She said the study continues and is supported by DEC; in fact, once a safe process is developed, DEC will offer a variance of the prohibition [against seal oil] to the Utuqqanaat Inaat elders (slides 51-53).

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CO-CHAIR LINCOLN commented on the use of seal oil in his community.

REPRESENTATIVE RAUSCHER asked for more information on food hazards.

MS. FOOTE acknowledged any food item is potentially hazardous, for example, botulism is found in improperly packed tomato sauce. Seal oil is processed differently in regions of the state and there is a history of safely processed of seal oil in the Kotzebue area, but there are higher occurrences [of contamination] elsewhere. She cautioned all food processing must eliminate opportunities for bacteria growth such E. coli.

MS. CHLUPACH added hazard analysis critical control point (HACCP), relates to problems during the growing, harvesting, hunting, or consuming of food products. She said seal oil is a superfood and the Maniilaq Association seeks to combine thousands of years of Native science with Western science. She advised Alaska has the highest number of botulism cases in the U.S., if not in the world.

REPRESENTATIVE RASMUSSEN asked whether the state utilizes new technology that can test for bacteria that cause food poisoning.

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MS. FOOTE said no. At ANMC, all food is screened, and food safety temperature guidelines are observed; the state has tools to identify parasites in wild game and fish. The policy at ANMC is that donated food in a suspect condition is not served, but may be donated to the zoo or returned to the land.

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REPRESENTATIVE HANNAN gave her personal experience working as a roadkill salvage crew and harvesting and delivering items to local food pantries. She asked whether there are commercial DEC certified meat processors in Kotzebue, Nome, or other communities.

MS. FOOTE advised organizations can write their own policies as to how meat is processed, with the exception of seal. For example, in Sitka, game is processed "in-house."

MS. CHLUPACH described the policy at SEARHC; she concluded there are three best practices for processing: in-house; processing as done by ANMC; processing as done by the Maniilaq Association.

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MS. FOOTE further described how the ANMC program was envisioned and advised each concept must be suited to and supported by the local community.

MS. CHLUPACH related SEARHC educated DWT on certain regulations that were not understood, and now they are "a great resource for Mt. Edgumbe Hospital."

CO-CHAIR LINCOLN questioned whether there are more barriers to the use of Alaska's wild game and subsistence resources.

CO-CHAIR TARR surmised food sharing is common in everyday life; however, the sale of wild [and home] products presents barriers. She restated the undeniable health benefits of wild foods.

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MS. CHLUPACH agreed wild foods improve the quality of life. Slides 57-60 illustrated resources available to support the use of traditional foods; she noted the most important resource is the knowledge of elders (slide 61). Slide 62 listed supporters of the Alaska Traditional Foods Movement. She closed with a quote from the Traditional Food Guide for Alaska Native Cancer Survivors, 2008 (slide 63).

CO-CHAIR LINCOLN asked how the legislature can remove barriers at the state level.

MS. CHLUPACH recalled a proposed bill that would help schools offer traditional foods without having to relinquish reimbursements.

MS. FOOTE stressed processing of the foods is expensive and not being able to collect reimbursement is a barrier to contractors who provide food services at schools; also, contractors need to be informed of new regulations. Finally, she suggested variances should be available for fish because the usual practice is to fillet fish; furthermore, she urged for a system that would keep bycatch in Alaska for processing and use by Alaskans.

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ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Resources Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 2:13 p.m.