

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON TRIBAL AFFAIRS**

February 10, 2026
8:03 a.m.

DRAFT

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Maxine Dibert, Chair
Representative Ashley Carrick
Representative Andi Story
Representative Justin Ruffridge
Representative Rebecca Schwanke
Representative Jubilee Underwood

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Robyn Niayuq Frier

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S) : COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES TO ALASKA'S FOOD SYSTEMS

- HEARD

PRESENTATION(S) : AVIATION SUPPLY CHAINS FOR FRESH FOOD

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

ROBBI MIXON, Executive Director
Alaska Food Policy Council
Homer, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-offered the Collaborative Approaches to Alaska's Food Systems presentation.

TIKAAN GALBREATH, Chair
Indigenous Foods Working Group
Alaska Food Policy Council
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-offered the Collaborative Approaches to Alaska's Food Systems presentation.

MICHAEL JONES, PhD, Research Assistant Professor of Economics
Institute of Social and Economic Research
University of Alaska Anchorage
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Gave the Aviation Supply Chains for Fresh Food presentation.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:03:11 AM](#)

CHAIR MAXINE DIBERT called the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting to order at 8:03 a.m. Representatives Carrick, Schwanke, and Dibert were present at the call to order. Representatives Underwood, Ruffridge, and Story arrived while the meeting was in progress.

PRESENTATION(S): Collaborative Approaches to Alaska's Food Systems

[8:04:03 AM](#)

CHAIR DIBERT announced that the first order of business would be the Collaborative Approaches to Alaska's Food Systems presentation.

[8:06:17 AM](#)

ROBBI MIXON, Executive Director, Alaska Food Policy Council, co-offered the Collaborative Approaches to Alaska's Food Systems presentation, via PowerPoint [hard copy included in the committee file]. She began on slide 2, which introduced the Alaska Food Policy Council. She described the council's formation and its mission to connect, advocate, and inform. She moved to slide 3 and she stated that the Alaska Food Policy Council envisions a food system that is healthy, secure, culturally relevant, and abundant. She moved to slide 4, which introduced the staff of the council. She moved to slide 5, which introduced the governing board of directors.

MS. MIXON moved to slide 6, which highlighted food security week. She offered food security statistics, including that 95 percent of food in Alaska is imported and one in five children face chronic hunger. She described the complicated logistics of

moving food across the state, particularly to communities off the road system. She moved to slide 7 and she explained that the Alaska Food Policy Council conducts statewide assessments on food security. She moved to slide 8, which displayed three conference flyers. She moved to slide 9, which highlighted the working groups that the council conducts.

[8:12:39 AM](#)

TIKAAN GALBREATH, Chair, Indigenous Foods Working Group, Alaska Food Policy Council, moved to slide 10, which highlighted the Indigenous foods working group. He stated that there is tribal representation in every working group, which can provide lived experience and policy insights that support tribal programming. He highlighted some challenges the council addresses, including a decline in critical species, increased climate events, and changes in migratory patterns. He also highlighted food security gaps, systemic barriers, and uncertainty surrounding the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). He said that the lack of U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) processing facilities creates barriers to inspected meats. He stated that there is an increased need for tribal consultation, jurisdiction, and representation, and noted that, at the federal level, leasing of aquaculture plots lacked input from local tribes. He emphasized that tribal members should be represented at all levels of government and on all committees.

[8:19:37 AM](#)

MR. GALBREATH continued his explanation of the Indigenous foods working group. He stated that the working group provides opportunities to strengthen the well-being and sovereignty of Native people, including salmon habitat restoration through culvert removal, federal hunts, and recognition of traditional ecological knowledge. He said that the working group assists in purchasing and distributing local foods and that federal dollars support the local economy and are reinvested in our neighbors.

MR. GALBREATH stated that the Alaska Food Policy Council evaluates potential impacts to the food system. The council works to increase the public's familiarity with USDA and state regulatory policies. He highlighted the barriers that are created by lack of plain language in these policies. He summarized that food sovereignty is health sovereignty and it anchors identity and resilience. He emphasized that we need to protect both traditional foods and language. He concluded that

tribes need the authority to operate their own programs without bureaucratic barriers.

[8:28:45 AM](#)

MR. GALBREATH, in response to a question from Representative Story, stated that "producer" is defined by USDA, which is often misunderstood. He explained that the [Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018] ("Farm Bill") considers the number of producers by state or region, and allocates funding based on producer density. He emphasized the need to increase education on the definition of producers to ensure that tribal farmers receive the benefits they are eligible for.

MS. MIXON added that the agricultural census is taken every five years and the last one was taken in 2022.

MR. GALBREATH added that the council partnered with a previous Farm Service Agency (FSA) administrator to increase access and demystify the farm industry. He expressed hopes to deepen the public understanding of the programming available and further clarify language within programs. He provided examples of two pilot programs and emphasized that a lot of money has been tribally designated in the state yet remains not accessed.

MR. GALBREATH, in response to another question from Representative Story, explained the challenges of working through permitting processes to effectively operate on state and federal lands.

[8:37:55 AM](#)

MR. GALBREATH, in response to a series of questions from Representative Carrick, stated that there is a link on the council's website to join the Indigenous Foods Working Group. He emphasized that the council turns nobody away and that all voices are important in this work. He said that, currently, more members are in urban areas, due to accessibility and working priorities, but there are also many rural subsistence users.

[8:40:46 AM](#)

MR. GALBREATH, in response to a series of questions from Representative Schwanke, stated that home gardening is critical, but cannot sustain communities. He noted the importance of incorporating traditional plants in home and community gardens.

He highlighted the challenges of a dual management system and that the tribal perspective is one of harvesting from abundance, not from high yield.

[8:47:51 AM](#)

MS. LORD highlighted that the council works collaboratively with stakeholders across the state. She moved to slide 14, which highlighted the food policy framework for Alaska. She described the council's work in many different reports. She moved to slide 15, which provided a screenshot of priority recommendations the council has received.

MS. LORD moved to slide 16, which listed guiding questions regarding different policy themes. She emphasized that strong food security policy addresses multiple themes, not just one sector. She moved to slide 17, which listed questions to ask oneself when considering food-related policy or funding decisions. He moved to slide 18, which highlighted the Alaska Food Policy Council's efforts to advocate and inform, including weekly legislative updates, a bill tracker, and policy briefs. He invited the committee to reach out to the chairs of the council's working groups for more information. She moved to slide 19, explaining that the Alaska Food Policy council draws on cross-sector expertise to address long-term issues. She emphasized the need for more data to improve food supply chains. She moved to slide 22, which highlighted the Alaska Food Systems Atlas & Data Dashboard. She said that the goal of a dashboard space is to share the data that the council has collected. She moved to slide 23, which included a link to the council's StoryMaps. She explained that StoryMaps offer a way to share data, images, and videos and that they follow food's transportation from its origin to its destination in Alaska. She moved to slide 27, which highlighted the Alaska Food Value Chain Coordination Council. She explained that this council has only had two meetings so far and she described the wide variety of representatives from the food supply chain that have attended those meetings.

[9:00:35 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:00 a.m. to 9:01 a.m.

[9:01:44 AM](#)

MS. MIXON, in response to a question from Representative Ruffridge, stated that USDA has funded the council through

grants and noted that a \$7 million grant was terminated in July 2025. He said that private foundations fund specific projects. He noted that there is \$50,000 left on a said state matching grant \$50,000 and that he would provide the council's budget and projects to the committee.

[9:04:52 AM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 9:04 a.m. to 9:06 a.m.

PRESENTATION(S): Aviation Supply Chains for Fresh Food

[9:06:26 AM](#)

CHAIR DIBERT announced that the final order of business would be the Aviation Supply Chains for Fresh Food presentation.

[9:06:50 AM](#)

MICHAEL JONES, PhD, Research Assistant Professor of Economics, Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), gave the Aviation Supply Chains for Fresh Food presentation, via PowerPoint [hard copy included in the committee file]. He began on slide 2, explaining that the presentation would focus on supply chains for fresh foods and medicine the delivery system, specifically for "off-road Alaska." He highlighted that this is a blend of work funded by state and federal grants. He said that there are many food systems across rural Alaska, including wild food collection. He stated that food often travels many miles before it reaches consumers. He noted the importance of retail food systems, especially as a risk-management system and for broadening diets.

DR. JONES moved to slide 3, which showed a map of air cargo delivery across the state. He highlighted that rural Alaska has an extreme dependency on aviation systems compared to anywhere else in the country. He stated that next highest per capita dependence is Hawai'i with less than half. He noted that the supply chains are split in the state, with Southeast Alaskans and Alaskans in the Aleutian Islands receiving goods via barges.

[9:13:28 AM](#)

DR. JONES moved to slide 4, which showed a map of food journeys across the state. He stated that his research has started to measure how many planes are traveling along these "hub and spoke" networks. He moved to slide 5, which showed headlines

regarding Alaska communities struggling to keep food on shelves after aviation disruptions. He highlighted the vulnerabilities off-road communities face and the ripple effects of weather-related disruptions. He moved to slide 6, which showed a chart of frequent weather station outages and a map of frequent challenging weather. He emphasized the importance of weather stations in allowing pilots to make safe and informed decisions about flying. He emphasized the importance of funding Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) technology operators.

[9:22:03 AM](#)

DR. JONES moved to slide 7, which showed a real-time Automated Weather Observing System (AWOS) outage dashboard. He stated that AWOS is expanding its number of sites and highlighted the new sites that will be rolled out for weather observation stations. He moved to slide 8, which showed historical data of daily outage trends. He noted the increase in outages this winter and said he looks forward to running this program again in April to evaluate outage trends in the first part of 2026.

DR. JONES moved to slide 9, which provided a regional breakdown of outages. He noted regional the inequities of outages. He moved to slide 10, which highlighted different ways food moves to communities. He compared the benefits of moving food by the bypass system of the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) and by air freight. He moved to slide 11, which highlighted the low quality that food often arrives in.

[9:30:58 AM](#)

DR. JONES moved to slide 12, which highlighted research from the University of Alaska system. He stated that in rural Alaska, the thinner market, with fewer folks selling, makes it easier to pass costs onto the consumers. He said that fewer fresh produce products are reaching Alaska, as they are the hardest products to move. He moved to slide 13, which provided fresh produce shipping data and spoilage rates over time.

DR. JONES moved to slide 15, which displayed a graph of salad vegetables spoilage in Bethel versus Hooper Bay. He highlighted the issue of produce arriving spoiled at stores, never even reaching the shelf. He moved to slide 17, which displayed a graph of salad vegetables spoilage in Dillingham versus Togiak.

DR. JONES moved to slide 19, which showed spoilage patterns throughout the year by different transportation methods for

bananas and potatoes. He moved to slide 20, which showed the same statistics regarding tomatoes and lettuce. He moved to slide 21, which showed the same statistics regarding berries and salad vegetables, which are particularly sensitive to spoilage.

[9:39:20 AM](#)

DR. JONES, in response to a question from Representative Story, stated that Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS-B) systems broadcast on frequencies that can be detected by ground stations or satellite. He said that he has 30 days of satellite-based ADS-B data, which provides a much higher window of visibility. He stated that a low number of planes in Alaska are equipped with a transponder, but there is a push to increase that number.

[9:43:33 AM](#)

DR. JONES, in response to a question from Representative Ruffridge, stated he has not found an economic analysis of off-road Alaska food production. He said that many people have been surprised by his research findings, explaining that readers often did not realize the situation was so dire. He described the cost drivers of indoor agriculture systems, which make hydroponic systems difficult to establish.

[9:47:45 AM](#)

DR. JONES, in response to a question from Representative Schwanke, stated that he can study only what is visible and what can be quantified. He said that community trips to Costco Wholesale Corporation ("Costco") warehouses are essentially invisible to his research. He noted that surveys, which are expensive, could consider Costco trips.

[9:50:14 AM](#)

DR. JONES moved to slide 23, which focused on pharmaceutical shipping data. He moved to slide 24, which displayed a graph of transit time patterns. He explained that the chart showed the percentages of pharmaceutical shipments that took different lengths of time to arrive at their destinations. He highlighted seasonal dependent delays due to weather and travel spikes. He moved to slide 25, which also focused on transit time patterns and delay frequency. He noted that the mean transit time in days is based on an estimated number of air segments. He moved to slide 26, which showed a map of geographic patterns in

delays. He highlighted the clear difference between road system and off-road system transit times. He moved to slide 27 and highlighted the ongoing construction of his statistical model.

[9:58:20 AM](#)

DR. JONES, in response to a question from Representative Ruffridge, stated that this is data on medication that moves from Southcentral Foundation's pharmacy.

[10:03:50 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting was adjourned at 10:03 a.m.