



# Bethel

## Town Hall Meeting Report

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Wednesday, April 16, 2014

5:30 PM – 7:30 PM

*Solo Café*



# Background

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In 2014, the Alaska Food Policy Council (AFPC) is hosting seven (7) community food system meetings for the general public. The goals of the meetings include:

1. Increase awareness about Alaska food issues among the general population
2. Increase involvement in local food issues by community members
3. Gain a perspective of local food issues to inform the AFPC and policy makers
4. Recruit new members for the AFPC.

At the end of 2014, the AFPC will be nearing the conclusion of its first strategic plan. Information about the Alaska food system received through the 2014 Town Hall meetings will assist the AFPC to evaluate the impact of their current priorities, and will frame key issues for use in developing the next 5-year strategic planning cycle.

This report summarizes information gathered through the Bethel Town Hall meeting. All of the materials used for promotion and unedited comments gathered are included in the appendix.

## Overview

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### PLANNING

A Town Hall Meeting Committee comprised of AFPC Governing Board members and local members met twice via teleconference. The group provided input on all aspects of the meeting from logistics and promotion to implementation and the agenda, including an appropriate public engagement framework. Additionally, the committee provided valuable and relevant contacts in Bethel to ensure there was a broad representation of attendees at the meeting.

Gary Ferguson represented the AFPC Governing Board at the meeting.

A final teleconference was held about 10 days prior to the meeting to finalize details. This teleconference included the meeting facilitators, AFPC Governing Board representative attending the meeting, and most importantly, critical partners on-the-ground in Bethel who agreed to assist the team with final logistics and promotion.

### PROMOTION

A flyer was created for the event and was distributed and shared via social media outlets including the AFPC Facebook page. The flyer was also shared via the AFPC's action alert email list serve. The flyer was emailed to local partners in Bethel who posted it on community bulletin boards and local businesses.

The event was added to the Tundra Drums (newspaper) calendar of events.

A public service announcement was submitted to the local radio, KYUK.

The flyer was posted on the Bethel town-wide Facebook group, 'It's going on in Bethel!' the week before and then again the day of the meeting.

Additionally, a press release went out generating press coverage at the event including KYUK and the Tundra Drums.

### ATTENDANCE

10 people were in the room; 9 signed in. Of note in attendance were local producer Tim Meyers and two individuals representing the local media, one from Tundra Drums and the other from KYUK.

# Meeting Logistics

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## LOCATION

The meeting was held at the Solo Café at the Longhouse. The venue was very comfortable for the topic, the number of people in attendance, and it provided the basic services required (kitchen, power, screen for powerpoint presentation and local catering).

## DATE AND TIME

Although the planning committee double-checked calendars to minimize community conflict, the attendance was very low in comparison to the previous Town Hall meetings. The committee was aware of a housing conference at the same time, but the recommendation was that this would not deter interested parties. In hindsight that might not have been the case.

## FOOD

Providing the meeting food differed from the typical challenge faced in the previous three Town Hall meetings, which reflected the difficulty of finding healthy food in many Alaska communities. Solo Café catered the event and offered fresh soup, salad, and bread as well as water and lemonade.

# Meeting Agenda

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Based on feedback from Governing Board members about the Nome and Juneau Town Hall agendas, the Town Hall meeting committee suggested a slight modification of the meeting agenda and information collection methods in order to streamline the meetings. The Bethel Town Hall began with an overview presentation on the AFPC, followed by gathering of individual input then small group discussions on solutions. Public input was gathered using open-ended questions as opposed to framing the issues and driving the discussion toward preset topics.

Participants sat at tables, each containing 2-3 people. Governing Board members and facilitators were spread out evenly throughout the room and recorded the discussion at each table. During the first half of the meeting, facilitators collected the following information from all participants. Participants were given 5 minutes to answer each question. There were no limits on the amount of answers they could write. Information was gathered using post-it notes which were categorized by the participants into sectors of the food system. The following broad questions were asked:

1. What do you LIKE about the food system in Bethel? What are the positive things about food in Bethel? What do you like? What is working? Are there new and innovative things happening that you want to share?
2. What do you NOT like so much about food in Bethel? Do you face issues, challenges or barriers that you think need to be addressed?
3. If you had unlimited resources, what would be your vision for an ideal food system in Bethel?

The second half of the meeting was a longer, more in-depth discussion about specific issues. Groups gathered around food system sectors of their choosing from the “short-answer” exercise, and then those groups discussed the issue(s) of that sector in detail and brainstormed potential solutions or actions to improve the issue(s). The groups then reported back to the larger group about their issue and potential solution.

All comments from the three short exercises, the long exercise and the general table notes were collected and have been organized and documented in the appendix. The following provides a summary level recap of the input received through both exercises.

# Summary of Bethel Public Input

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## What do Bethel residents LIKE about the food system?

### CONSUMPTION

Subsistence foods are delicious.

### DISTRIBUTION

Food bank, soup kitchen.

### POLICIES AND REGULATIONS

Catcher/seller fishermen.

### PROCESSING

Subsistence activity and good sources of organic food.

### PRODUCTION & HARVEST

Community garden, Meyers Farm, wild game and berries.

## What do Bethel residents DISLIKE about the food system?

### CONSUMPTION

Expensive groceries.

### DISTRIBUTION

Lack of freshness, bulk food, choices. Food is expensive.

### POLICIES AND REGULATIONS

Limit subsistence, fishing laws do not serve local needs.

### TRANSPORTATION

Delivery costs.

### PROCESSING

Lack of storage

### PRODUCTION AND HARVEST

High cost of gas and food. Few sources of food in winter.

## Conclusion

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The Bethel Town Hall meeting was fun, informative and met the identified goals of successfully collecting new information from an interior Alaska hub community about food system issues. The information gathered from the Bethel Town Hall meeting will be further analyzed alongside the other Town Hall meetings as they occur. This information will be critical in setting the stage for the forthcoming AFPC strategic planning process.

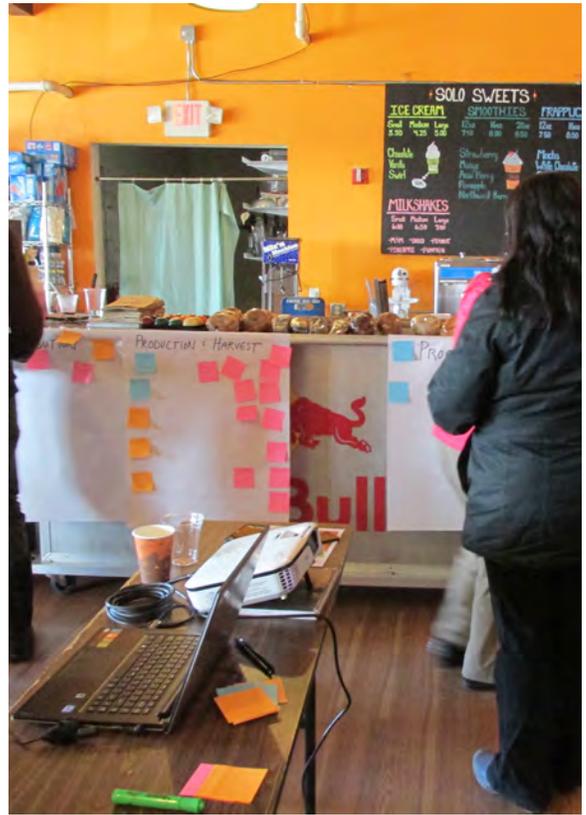


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# Longhand Notes

Wednesday, April 16, 2014  
5:30PM – 7:30PM  
Solo Cafe

Notes from meeting to be used for formal report

▶ **Participant Input:** *What are the positive things about food in Bethel? What do you like? What is working? Are there new and innovative things happening that you want to share?*

## CONSUMPTION

- Must be more restaurants per capita
- Berry picking, blueberry my favorite
- I love salmon

## DISTRIBUTION

- We have a good shipping infrastructure
- Food bank
- Supper club
- Soup kitchen
- Food bank

## POLICIES AND REGULATIONS

- Subsistence
- Fran Rich catcher/seller salmon fishing

## EDUCATION

- Kids in the kitchen

## PROCESSING

- The activity of hunting, fishing berry picking and the food
- Good sources of organic food

## PRODUCTION AND HARVEST

- Community garden
- Meyers farm
- Caribou and fish and berries etc
- Tim Meyers farm home grown!
- Wild game
- Community garden
- Blueberries
- Salmon and access to other wild foods
- Meyer's farm
- Meyer's farm
- Meyers Farm
- Lots of locally grown food



**Participant Input:** *What do you NOT like so much about food in Bethel? Do you face issues, challenges or barriers that you think need to be addressed?*

## CONSUMPTION

- Groceries are expensive at the store

## DISTRIBUTION

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freshness</li> <li>• Restaurants are expensive and unhealthy</li> <li>• Expense</li> <li>• Cost</li> <li>• No bulk food for ‘make your own’ type flours, seasoning, bins (like Fred Meyers, Carrs, etc)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited choices</li> <li>• Milk 9.99!</li> <li>• Food is expensive</li> <li>• Cost</li> <li>• Eating out prohibitively expensive</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

## POLICIES AND REGULATIONS

- Low King Salmon returns/king salmon closures limit subsistence
- Fishing laws serve commercial needs and not local needs

## TRANSPORTATION

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivery costs</li> <li>• Prices</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cost</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

## PROCESSING

- Storage

## PRODUCTION AND HARVEST

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gas high</li> <li>• Food high</li> <li>• Food prices are too closely tied to fuel prices</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dwindling King Salmon run</li> <li>• Winter (few sources of food)</li> </ul> |
|--|---|

 **Participant Input:** *Vision. Talk about the issues in detail and brainstorm potential solutions or actions to improve the issue. If describing a positive issue, explain why it is working.*

CONSUMPTION

- I guess buy people healthy foods

DISTRIBUTION

- Foodbank now only once a month – more money more volunteers and more often food bank
- Food banks

POLICIES AND REGULATIONS

- Subsidized store prices for rural Alaska

RESEARCH

- AK Earthships feasible in the environment of the Y-K Delta

EDUCATION

- Kids in the kitchen back
- A program to bring and teach gardening to villages

PROCESSING

- Community cooperative cold storage and food processing facilities HERE for community to use
- Community Prep Place (Example: freezers, places to process game, access to food processors/canners)

PRODUCTION AND HARVEST

- More resources like Meyers Farm (access to home grown food)
- Build some farms and grow food for the whole state this would be easy
- Meyers Farm
- The subsistence lifestyle
- Community garden

WASTE AND RECYCLING

- A food thrift store – people know where to donate food

### **Distribution**

- There's enough food but cost limits what people can get
- Super club Friday in winter, summer kids food program
- Food banks – limited to once a month, need more volunteers, money, storage, etc
- Quest cards
- Subsistence: needs to budget feeding family, first choice in food for Alaskans, the activity of it, health
- Restriction: political sonar could be set wrong
- Distribution center for Native food, outside of existing state food regs, hunters and fishers could go beyond their own family and help other families
- Community processing, storage, freezing: explore more famring and gardening
- Past success: Tundra center distributed excess test fisheries caught fish

### **Production and Harvest**

- More farms like Meyers Farm
- Last spot on planet that hasn't been farmed that's available – Kuskokwim valley and Bristol Bay (Nat Geo '08)
- 5 empty jets leaving Bethel every day
- Training on nutrition, taste to eat locally grown veggies
- YK has put up \$ to subsidize food, matching funds at Quest Program
- Carrots, potato, cabbage, strawberries, radishes, rutabaga, dicon radishes grow well here
- CES – canning and pickling, freezers
- Organic
- Diabetes \$
- Public/private partnerships
- Training programs
- 'turn key' farms – economic development
- Native allotment use of land/partnerships
- Garden vs farm – efficiency and production
- YKHC
- Public health
- Schools
- For-profit corps
- University
- Rasmuson
- laws distributing food – subsistence, make it easier to use local resources to feed local community, should be easier to help local community, changing regs to share food, new farm bill will help!

### **Education**

- Existing group/organizations working with a group and time that already is ready
- Teen center, TWC, headstart parents, boy scouts (eagle scout project), girl scouts, elementary schools, service to others, summer camp program, AYE (Alaska youth for environmental action)
- What can you do with what you've got?
- Looking at difference foods and using different ways
- Educating at the food bank
- Teach gardening in villages

Comment at the end of the meeting: the native/local voice is missing.

### **SMART Goals**

**Specific**

**Measurable**

**Action-Oriented**

**Realistic**

**Time dependent**



## The Alaska Food Policy Council **Invites you to attend a**

# TOWN HALL MEETING

- WHEN:** Wednesday, April 16, 2014 – 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.  
**WHERE:** Solo Cafe, 751 3rd Ave, Bethel, Alaska  
**FOOD:** Light refreshments and beverages will be provided.  
**NOTE:** There will be a **DRAWING** for a \$50 FUEL CARD!

### **Why is food important to you?**

The Alaska Food Policy Council (AFPC) invites you to attend a community town hall meeting to gather your ideas and opinions about local food. The AFPC is interested in hearing input from local community members on local food system issues.

The purpose of these meetings is to increase awareness of Alaska food issues, promote involvement in local food issues by community members, and gain a perspective of local food issues to inform AFPC and policy makers.



photo credits: nomemade-nomealaska.blogspot.com, visitnomealaska.com

### **What is the AFPC?**

The Alaska Food Policy Council works to strengthen Alaska's food systems to spur local economic development, increase food security, and improve nutrition and health. The Council serves as a resource for information on local and state food systems, and works to identify and propose policy and environmental changes that can improve the production, processing, distribution, health, security and safety of our food.

For more information, visit [akfoodpolicycouncil.wordpress.com](http://akfoodpolicycouncil.wordpress.com) or call **907.575.8583**



**PRESS RELEASE**

For Immediate Release

January 30, 2014

Media Contact: Chelsea Ward-Waller, 907.575.8583

**The Alaska Food Policy Council to Host Seven Statewide Town Hall Meetings:  
Information gathered from Alaskans will guide statewide food policy.**

**Anchorage, January 30, 2014** - In 2014, the Alaska Food Policy Council (AFPC) will be hosting seven statewide town hall meetings to gather information and ideas from Alaskans about food in their communities.

The purpose of the meetings is to increase statewide awareness about Alaska food issues, promote involvement in the local food system by community members and gain a perspective of local food issues. The information gathered will be used by the AFPC to inform institutions, organizations and policy makers to improve and strengthen the Alaska Food System.

The first town hall meeting is scheduled for Friday, January 31 at 4:00 PM in Nome at the Mini Convention Center (102 River Street).

The second town hall meeting is scheduled shortly thereafter on Monday, February 3 at 6:30 PM in Juneau at the Juneau Douglas High School Commons (1639 Glacier Avenue).

Planning is underway for meetings in Bethel and Fairbanks in April and Palmer, Homer and Anchorage in the early fall, 2014.

The Alaska Food Policy Council is an independent, statewide organization with a vision for a food secure, healthy Alaska. The AFPC works to strengthen Alaska's food systems to spur local economic development, increase food security and improve nutrition and health. The AFPC serves as a resource for information on local and state-side food systems and works to identify and propose policy and other changes that can improve the production, processing, distribution, health, security and safety of food in Alaska.

For more information about the Alaska Food Policy Council, please visit <http://akfoodpolicycouncil.wordpress.com/> or LIKE the Alaska Food Policy Council on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/akfoodpolicy>.

###

Alaska Food Policy Council



## Bethel Town Hall Meeting

Wednesday April 16, 2014

5:30 PM - 7:30 PM

Solo Café at the Long House

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### Agenda

- 5:30 – 5:45 PM: The Alaska Food Policy Council welcomes you! Come on in, find a seat, grab some food, we're so happy to have you!
- 5:45 – 6:00 PM: Who is the Alaska Food Policy Council? What are we here to accomplish tonight?  
Presentation by Alaska Food Policy Council Governing Board Member:  
Gary Ferguson, Community Health Services Director, Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium
- 6:00 – 6:15 PM: Group Exercise #1
- 1: What are the positive things about food in Bethel? What do you like? What is working? Are there new and innovative things happening that you want to share?
  - 2: What do you NOT like so much about food in Bethel? Do you face issues, challenges or barriers that you think need to be addressed?
  - 3: If you had unrestricted resources and budget, what would be your vision of an ideal food system in Bethel? OR Do you have any creative ideas for projects that you think would work in Bethel?
- 6:15 – 6:45 PM: Group Exercise #2  
In depth discussion about the issues or projects identified in Exercise #1. Talk about the issues in detail and brainstorm potential solutions or actions to improve the issue.
- 6:45 – 7:15 PM: Groups Report Back
- 7:15 – 7:30 PM: Closing: What happens next? Did we miss anything important that you want to tell us?

# TOWN HALL MEETING



Alaska Food Policy Council  
Bethel, Alaska  
April 16, 2014



## Did you know?

Alaskans spend \$2.5 billion dollars  
on food each year at grocery stores  
and restaurants.



Alaska Food Policy Council

## Did you know?

It's estimated that 95% of Alaska's food is imported.  
That makes Alaska vulnerable in times of disasters.



Alaska Food Policy Council

## Did you know?

Alaska's food system creates a lot of jobs.  
About 115,000 jobs are food-related.  
That's 1 in 7 jobs in Alaska.



Alaska Food Policy Council

## Did you know?

For each dollar invested in local Alaska food, \$3-6 circulates in local economies of our own food supply.



Alaska Food Policy Council

## Did you know?

Rates of chronic disease related to lifestyle choices are escalating in Alaska.  
That means high healthcare costs borne by the state.



Alaska Food Policy Council

## Did you know?

\$459 million annual medical care costs are attributable to obesity in Alaska.

The State of Alaska pays one quarter of those costs.



Alaska Food Policy Council

## Did you know?

Chronic diseases—such as cancer, heart disease, and diabetes— are related to unhealthy eating and physical inactivity.

These are among the most prevalent, costly, and preventable of all health problems.



Alaska Food Policy Council

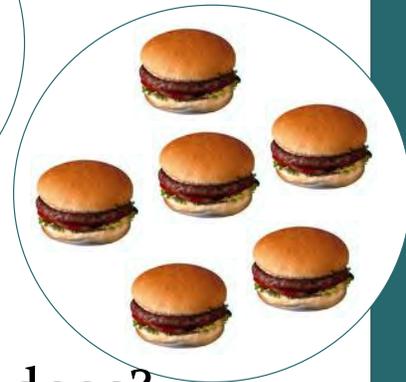
## Did you know?

Increasing everyone's access to fresh, healthy food through programs like Farmers Markets or Community Supported Agriculture can reduce rates of chronic disease.



Alaska Food Policy Council

IRON



IRON....

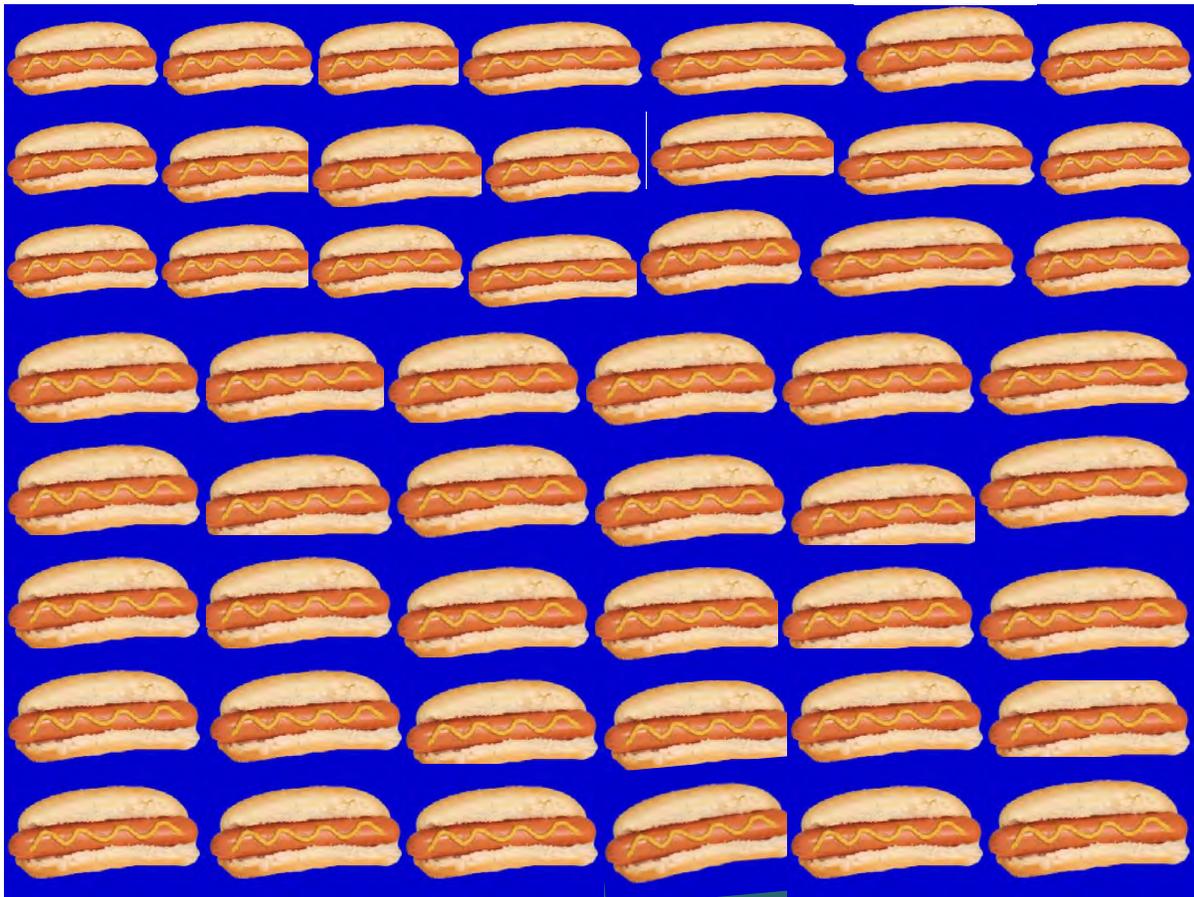


how many hotdogs?

**Country food is good for you and your family**



Alaska Food Policy Council

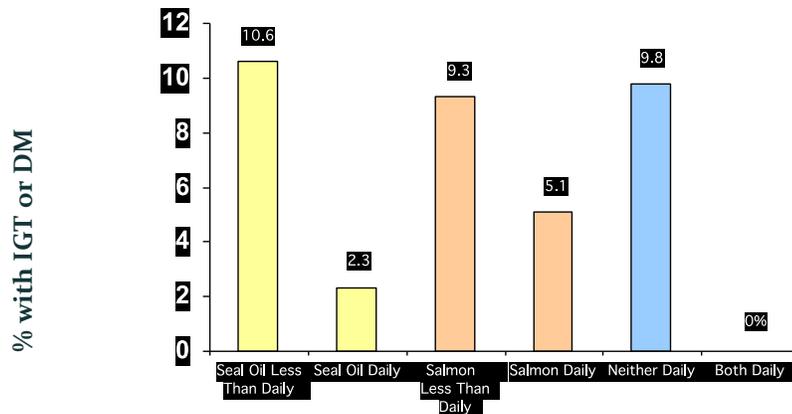


Alaska Food Policy Council



Alaska Food Policy Council

### The Effect of Seal Oil/Salmon on Glucose Intolerance



**Glucose intolerance is less common among those who eat seal oil and/or salmon daily**

*Daily Consumption of Seal Oil or Salmon Associated with Lower Risk of Non-Insulin Dependent Diabetes Mellitus and Impaired Glucose Tolerance in Yup'ik Eskimos and Athabaskan Indians in Alaska. Circumpolar Health 1993:270-273.*

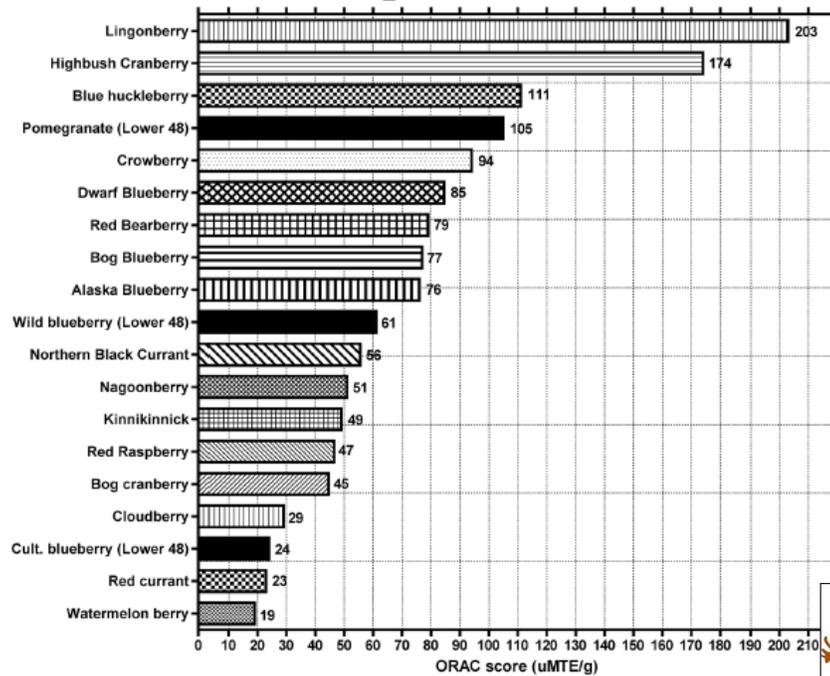


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## Comparison of berries



Alaska Food Policy Council



# Our Food System



Alaska Food Policy Council



## What is food policy?

Food policy is any activity that addresses, shapes or regulates the food system.

Alaska Food Policy Council



## Who is the Alaska Food Policy Council?

Over 200 individuals and agencies across the state – driven by the need to strengthen our food system.



Alaska Food Policy Council

## Alaska Food Policy Council Vision:

A healthy, secure food system  
that feeds all Alaskans.



Alaska Food Policy Council

## AFPC's Core Values



Alaska Food Policy Council

## AFPC Goals

- **Goal 1** All Alaskans have access to affordable, healthy (preferably local) foods
- **Goal 2** Alaska's food-related industries have a strong workforce and operate in a supportive business environment
- **Goal 3** Food is safe, protected and supplies are secure throughout Alaska
- **Goal 4** Alaska's food system is more sustainable
- **Goal 5** Alaskans are engaged in our food system



Alaska Food Policy Council

# Tonight we want to hear from YOU.

- We want to hear about the Food System in your community.
- What is working? What isn't working? What challenges do you face every day?
- Share your food system priorities the Alaska Food Policy Council so we can communicate with legislators, local and tribal government representatives.



Alaska Food Policy Council

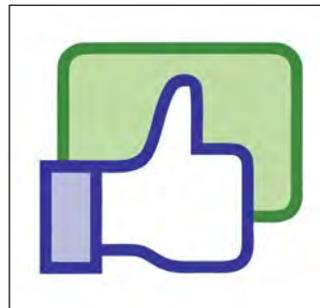
## Keep up with Food Issues in Alaska!

Visit our Blog



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Alaska Food Policy Council

## Contact the Food Policy Council

[foodpolicycouncil@gmail.com](mailto:foodpolicycouncil@gmail.com)



Alaska Food Policy Council

## Community Processing, Farming Discussed at Bethel Town Hall on Food

by DAYSHA EATON on APRIL 25, 2014

Members of the Alaska Food Policy Council hosted a town hall meeting in Bethel last week to gather information they'll use to guide statewide food policy.

Bethel community members gathered around tables at a local café to brainstorm ideas about how the food system in the Y-K Delta could be better. Subsistence hunting and fishing along with gardening and farming were noted as strengths in the Y-K Delta, while high prices at grocery stores and problems finding places to process and store food were among the problems discussed.

The Alaska Food Policy Council is an independent, statewide advocacy group with a vision for a food secure, healthy Alaska. Partners include the state of Alaska and non-profits, among others.

AFPC Board Member, Gary Ferguson says one of the Council's main goals is to make healthy food more available and affordable.

"Alaska is very dependent upon outside food. Over 95 percent of our food comes from outside of the state of Alaska, so less than 5 percent is locally grown. And we spend a lot of money on food. We need to look at having more of that food sourced locally. And also it provides an economic base. It provides jobs. It provides more nutrient dense food as well," says Ferguson.

Food Bank of Alaska officials say that 14 percent of people are food insecure in the state. In rural Alaska, those numbers are higher. Studies show that in the Bethel Census Area nearly 30 percent of children don't know where their next meal is coming from. Food insecurity is defined as not having enough access to food in socially acceptable ways.

Bethel Cooperative Extension Director, Leif Albertson, participated in the town hall. He says lack of local, community processing facilities was a major barrier to food security discussed in his group.

"It's hard to have local food because there's so many barriers to processing, sort of hoops you have to jump through – things like commercial kitchens or standards of practice for processing local food that really are cost prohibitive for small producers in rural areas," says Albertson.

Bethel farmer, Tim Meyers says many people in his group discussed expanding farming in Bethel as an opportunity.

"A local solution would be growing a lot of food. I think we have the ability to grow a tremendous amount of food. In fact I think we could grow enough food to feed the majority of the state. We just need to try some different techniques about getting that type of a system going," says Meyers.

Town Hall meetings were already held in Nome, Juneau and Fairbanks. Additional meetings are planned for Anchorage, Palmer and Homer in the fall.

The information gathered at the town hall meetings will be used by the Council to inform institutions, organizations and policy makers.

Like 4

Tagged as: Alaska, Alaska Food Policy Council, Bethel, farming, food processing, Food Security, Gary Ferguson, High prices, Leif Albertson, Tim Meyer, Town Hall



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Unification Project Application: Apply to build a KYUK repeater in your village

Congratulations to 2013 Alexie Isaac Memorial Scholarship Recipients

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Our Underwriters

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53810

\* Type the numbers listed above.

Send Tip

### MOST VIEWED

Missing Boy Reportedly Fell Into Katik Slough

### YUP'IK NEWS

Yugtun Qanemcit, Cupun 29, 2014

### ENGLISH NEWS

English newscast for Wednesday, May 28, 2014

### APRN NEWS

As Chinooks, Chums Enter the Yukon, Fishermen Chafe Under Tight Restrictions

Alaska Journalist Bob Tkacz Found Dead

Name Of Helicopter Pilot Killed In Crash Released

### LEG HEAD

As Chinooks, Chums Enter the Yukon, Fishermen Chafe Under Tight Restrictions

### NEWS ARCHIVES

May 2014

April 2014



## Alaska Food Policy Council Hosts Bethel Town Hall Meeting

By Daysha Eaton, KYUK - Bethel | April 24, 2014 - 5:41 pm

16 people like this. Be the first of your friends.

Members of the Alaska Food Policy Council hosted a town hall meeting in Bethel last week to gather information they'll use to guide statewide food policy.



### COMMUNITY CALENDAR

- How to Write a Business Plan - Anchorage & Webinar**  
Thu, May 29, 2014, 12pm  
430 West 7th Avenue, Suite 110 Anchorage, AK 99501,  
Anchorage, AK 99501-3550
- Musk Oxen to Mermaids: AFAA Student Art Showcase**  
Thu, May 29, 2014, 4pm  
Alaska Fine Arts Academy, 12340 Old Glenn Hwy, Eagle River,  
AK 99577

# Meyers: Let's build more farms

By Zachariah Bryan  
Drums Editor



April 24, 2014 | Vol. 42, No. 8 | View PDF

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Zachariah Bryan | The Tundra Drums  
Tim Meyers of Meyers Farm talks with Food System Economist Ken Meter about how his model of farming has worked for Bethel.

Last week, when the Alaska Food Policy Council visited Bethel to understand the region's food problems, Tim Meyers of Meyers Farm had a simple message -- "We should build some farms. We should train some people. We should grow lots and lots of good food," he said.

In a region plagued by dwindling subsistence harvest and sky high prices at the grocery store, Meyers said building farms in the Yukon-Kuskokwim isn't as crazy as it sounds. After all, it's worked out for him. Last year he said he grew 40,000 pounds of food and next year he thinks he can grow more, as much as 70,000 to 80,000 pounds.

Meyers said the Yukon-Kuskokwim region is one of the only areas in Alaska that is truly fertile. Attempts at agriculture in Palmer or Fairbanks will never be very successful, he said, because the land there is no good.

"How lucky can I be?" he said of the jackpot he found in the Delta.

Still, no one else seems to have caught on. Despite his farm's success, he remains the only farmer on the Delta.

"People have to start being adults about this and start asking where can we grow food and how can we do it?" he said. "It'd be really cool seeing people growing more and changing the diet of the region. It's just more economical."

Meyers contended that there was too much focus on small scale projects like the Community Garden, which could never grow large enough to act as a significant supply of food. Leif Albertson, who works at the Cooperative Extension Service, agreed that the community garden was not necessarily a means for producing a sustainable amount of food.

"If you have your plot at the community garden, you might have a salad at the end of the season, and that's good for some people. If you want to bring your kids to learn about where food comes from, that's cool too. As a nutrition source, it's limited," he said.

There are certainly lots of myths surrounding farming in Alaska. It's too dark, too cold and you can't grow anything in the permafrost. The problem with those ideas, Meyers said, is that people are thinking inside the box, not outside of it. By thawing the permafrost, building underground and through some creative engineering, he's been able to prove doubters wrong.

What's more, Meyers said it would be fairly cost efficient to reproduce his model.

"It'd be cheap," he said without hesitating. "You open up the tundra and I can have it grow organic food by next year."

At the food policy town hall, attendees also said they would like to see more food education in the schools, a way to make food more affordable for low-income people and an expanded food bank. Attendees also expressed concern over the low king salmon run and the impending subsistence harvest restrictions.

The Bethel town hall is just one in a series of seven food town halls held by the AFPC across Alaska. They have already visited Nome and Juneau.

According to an AFPC press release, "The goal of these meetings is to increase awareness of Alaska food issues among the public, increase involvement in the food system, gain perspectives on food from across the state, recruit new members for the AFPC and inform the AFPC and our state policy makers on the real food issues facing Alaskans on the ground."

The AFPC will be using comments from the town hall as well as research gathered by Food System Economist Ken Meter to make specific policy recommendations.

Meyers said he hoped that policy could be changed to make it easier to open up the land to agriculture.

"There's nothing good to eat in the stores anymore. We need to fish for salmon and plant some carrots and start eating healthy again," he said. "Let me show you how easy it can be. Let's not do it the hard way. It's ridiculous to do it the hard way."



Zachariah Bryan  
Local farmer Tim Meyers has seen success in the tundra by building underground.

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