

YK Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

Food Security Working Group Meeting Notes

1:00 pm – 2:30 pm, Thursday, December 14, 2023

[Link to meeting recording](#)

Attendees (alphabetized by organization)

Attendee Name	Organization	Email Address
Taryn Bliss	Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Family Nutrition Programs	doh.wic.services@alaska.gov
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Diane Atti	Association of Village Council Presidents	datti@avcp.org
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Jonathan Samuelson	The Kuskokwim Corporation	jonathan.samuelson@kuskokwim.com
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Amy Pettit	U.S. Department of Agriculture	Amy.Pettit@usda.gov
Elizabeth Tressler	Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation	elizabeth_tressler@ykhc.org
Serena Fitka	Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association	serena@yukonsalmon.org
Theresa Clark	Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council	tclark@yritwc.org

Meeting Objectives

- Introduce the Purpose and Process of the YK CEDS
 - Learn more at the [AVCP website](#)
- Reminder of the 2020/2021 YK CEDS Food Security Strategy and Actions
- Share what we've learned based on recent interviews and supplemental research, including progress since the group last came together in March 2022
- Discuss solutions to the food security needs of the YK region and priority topics for collaboration this winter

Discussion Notes

Welcome & Introductions: What does food security look like in your community? For your family?

- It's a freezer and fridge full of local meats and local foods like carrots and milk. "I feel food secure when I have access to local foods." And the ability to access healthy fish numbers/wildlife populations during the winter months. Subsistence doesn't end for many at the end of the summer/fall.
- Food security is having enough food for everyone by having enough to share with others.
- It's food sovereignty for the local residents of the YK and AVCP region. Food security is the ability to go out and harvest on traditional lands. Losing the ability to go out and gather from various restrictions (government and otherwise).
- Food security is having clean water to drink.
- It's having affordable foods at the grocery store.
- We've become a mixed-diet people (we eat traditional foods and non-traditional foods). There's security in both of those foods. For non-traditional foods, food security is affordable access to these foods, and they have nutritional value; for traditional foods, it's accessibility – the legal and political security for access to traditional foods and that includes having well-stewarded land to produce and access these foods. Food security is the measure of abundance through the ability to share and care for the full community with nutritious food.
- Food security is no one having the burden of living meal to meal.
- Recap: Food security is accessible, shared, nutritious, culturally appropriate, and affordable (if grocery shopping). It's "the ability to have a stocked freezer!"

Reminder of Yukon Kuskokwim Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (YK CEDS) Purpose

- Our goal for today's working group is to think about how to build inclusive, wide-spread access to food. This will support updating the YK CEDS and renewed efforts on regional food security through the economic development lens.
- Discussed meeting objectives and how this working group is an evolution of the former subsistence and food security working group.
 - Since data collection and access can be challenging, how can we orient to doing this work collectively?
 - Acknowledge salmon's large role in regional food security, but in what ways can we be strategic in how this working group's role focuses on salmon?

Review and Discuss Past YK CEDS Food Security Recommendations

- CEDS work to build a regional economy through increasing regional wealth through locally sourced, made, or value-added products.
- We are currently working on a larger, five-year update that is more detailed than the annual updates. This hopefully will reflect the communities' priorities.
- Discuss how today's priority topics have undergone a slight evolution from the original working groups from 2017.
- There is a lot of participation across working groups, which has provided a more interdisciplinary approach to this work.

- The project team shared the 2020/2021 YK CEDS Food Security Strategy and Actions (copied below) and offered a brief recap of where the group left off at the March 2022 Subsistence and Food Security Working Group meeting (see slides for additional details).

STRATEGY 9: Expand local employment and involvement in natural resource research, management and subsistence decision-making at the community, regional, state and federal levels.

9-A. Maintain a youth seat on CEDS Subsistence working group.

9-B. Develop a career pathway for subsistence and natural resource management.

9-C. Develop an apprenticeship program to guide younger people into high-level resource management positions.

9-D. Establish a small cohort of youth to be mentored and introduced to educational and career pathways in natural resources.

- Prior strategy was very honed into resource management career pathways.
- How can we address the broadness of food security that we defined at the beginning of the meeting?

Identified Food Security Challenges

- It is becoming increasingly more difficult to have accessible, nutritious, shared foods. This includes Indigenous peoples having limited access to game and subsistence foods and/or having to share the limited subsistence opportunities with non-Indigenous peoples.
 - Krista Heeringa shared a [recently published article](#) related to health and traditional harvest practices.
- Climate change.
- Shipping and transportation costs. And there being a narrow time window to send barges up the river before October (when the river freezes up).
- Limited local farming and local produce available.
- Limited storage capacity (limited freezers, dry storage, fuel to support the storage, etc.).
- Lack of infrastructure, dedicated farming land, and energy to support the ability to preserve and keep foods.
- Policy and regulation that restricts access to traditional food sources.

Potential Solutions to Priority Topics

Identify ways to mitigate climate impacts on subsistence resources (e.g., low berry harvests, toxicity in fish, etc.).

- Deepen cross-collaboration.
 - Expand work with the University Extension Services, Cooperative Extension, Rural CAP, AVI, and Alaska Native Plant Society as well as other regional organizations. They could help support the local development of community gardening resources.
 - Strengthen co-Indigenous, place-based stewardship that creates a stronger local workforce, like the [Gravel to Gravel Keystone Initiative](#).
 - Increase advocacy with USDA and AVI.
 - The Alaska Food Policy Council is launching a new program this July called the Regional Food Business Centers. Process build out is happening now but expect more information by July on a number of opportunities to get involved.

- Subscribe to the [Alaska Food Policy Council newsletter](#) or send Colin Peacock (colin@alaskafoodpolicycouncil.org) your email if you want to receive updates.
- Look to other regions to see work they've accomplished and hear lessons learned.
 - St. Paul Island received funding to support an increase in their reindeer population. How can the YK region create a similar effort?
 - Central Council in the Southeast has paid folks to hunt and subsist (Tlingit-Haida).
 - Kenaitze Indian Tribe/Health Corporation, Emmonak, Alakanuk, and Nunam have high tunnel gardens that are utilized to grow and share foods for tribal members.
 - Alaska Long Line Fisherman's Association recently hired Natalie Sattler (Co-Deputy Director) who started a fish house as part of a salmon project out of Dillingham.

Identify ways to grow and produce more food locally.

- Expand local farming.
 - Support land dedication toward farming. If lands are dedicated toward farming, there is support to get farming equipment, and there is community/individual interest, farming in the area is very productive and can truly localize food on a scale that community gardens simply cannot.
 - Bring back community gardens to increase connection with communities that are ready and have champions on the ground.
- Identify funding mechanisms.
 - There are [some upcoming micro-grants available for farming](#) through the State Division of Agriculture. How can we expand funding opportunities?
 - USDA will soon be announcing their awards through the [Indigenous Animals Grant](#) with Alaska being awarded at least two of those projects. More to come soon!
 - The USDA also has a [Farm to School Grant](#) program to support schools growing their own foods.
 - [Rural CAP](#) has supported Community Orchards and food forests.
 - [Alaska Village Initiatives had resources](#) to support community gardens and there should be more grant funding available in the next couple months.
 - Support funding for farming equipment to remove barriers to entry into jobs as local producers.
 - The Intertribal Agriculture Council is also building a Regional Food Business Center that will be another source of food security project and technical assistance funding.

Ensure communities have sufficient emergency food supplies to feed the community in the event of a disaster.

- Improve infrastructure.
 - Identify how to become a food security hub or storage center that has a minimum two-week supply of food, especially in terms of creating emergency food storage/staging place for when foods or goods can't get in due to natural disasters or supply distribution challenges, i.e. Aniak Center. Ensure those food hubs are closer to home or near fish camps – an expansion of the Fish Wheel.
 - Need improved engineering to support local food production. Farming in Alaska is very difficult; farms didn't produce this year because it was too cold. Ensure there is balance covered gardening can get cooked in the summertime.

- Having underground farms is the most productive way to farm in the YK, it is sustainable and also can be expanded to offer dry storage space for excess produce which is a perfect companion for localizing food security.
- Need for adaptation planning centered around food security.

Expand local employment, youth involvement, and mentorship in natural resource research, management, and subsistence decision-making at all levels.

- This priority topic was modified to be a supportive food security data indicator. While local employment in food security-related work needs to occur, there first must be stronger educational efforts related to community and personal gardening to increase local production and knowledge.

Increase the use of SNAP, WIC, and other benefits across the region.

- This priority topic was mentioned during the meeting but didn't get much traction in thinking through potential solutions.

How do we measure our progress and success? (Food Security Data Indicators)

- Number of applicants for jobs to show the level of interest in local production and other food security-related work.
 - Measures of programmatic success include job applicants but is reliant on job training. We need people to become engaged and interested because the current situation feels like folks are unaware of available jobs or that they don't have the training or capacity to do those jobs in communities. We were not farmers; we were gatherers so there needs to be education around our local plants to increase knowledge of local plants and incorporating those foods into local food systems and schools.
- Reindeer husbandry numbers.
- Food costs coupled with household income and household sizes.
- Changes in food consumption habits – moving away from processed foods to more traditional foods.
- Cost and availability of equipment for subsistence, i.e. gas, bullets, processing equipment/spaces, storage.
- Identify the number of farms and gardens (both community and personal).
 - Increase education and resources to support gardening and knowledge of local plants as well as how to process these foods.
 - Develop a how-to document on community gardening that describes the process from idea to implementation.
 - [Heidi Rader's YouTube channel](#) focuses on a wide range of topics on gardening in Alaska.
 - Proper soil and peat are necessary for quality gardening (the Delta is really silty). One measure of success would be to have strict controls on invasive species and/or disease coming into the region.
 - The State of Alaska is putting funds toward bison in Shageluk. If replicated in the YK, this opportunity could be a measure of success that helps the control of invasive species and disease.
 - Increase land dedicated to farming, much land isn't designated as such which inhibits prospective farmers.

- Decrease in empty store shelves – grocery prices are outrageous. This links back to infrastructure and flight access. How do we localize food so we have accessible, abundant food available to community members?
 - Thinking expansively to energy costs and impacts, this affects how far people are able to harvest and hunt for traditional foods.

Wrap up and Next Steps

- Slides, notes, and the meeting recording will be sent out to all participants.
- The project team will be convening other working groups over the coming months.
- The [YK CEDS Work Session](#) will be happening this winter in early February 2024. This will be when the food security working group comes back together.