

Food Systems in Alaska's Mixed-Economic Communities

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ATTENTION CUSTOMERS!
Food Stamps can buy some Subsistence Items!!
If you qualify for this special program you can purchase items such as this dipnet, a hunting knife, fishing rod, or lines and hooks! Please Ask!



Quagciq: Sourdock
Feast Freely on Organic Greens from the Tundra!

FOOD IS MEDICINE
Get the facts to make healthy choices for your family. Quagciq has tasty green leaves. Eating greens from the tundra, such as quagciq, may protect you and your family from cancer, heart disease, and diabetes. You and your family can enjoy gathering and eating sourdock together. Kids are never too young to learn about tundra foods!

Wild Salmon, Brown Rice, and Quagciq. **438 Calories**

Frozen Fried Chicken, Soda and a Candy Bar. **708 Calories**

Nutrition Facts
Sourdock: Quagciq
Serving Size 1 cup
Calories 25

100% Vitamin A, 54% Vitamin C, 24% Fiber, 2% Vitamin A, 0% Vitamin C, 11% Fiber. Eat 100% of these nutrients daily.



Introduction

In rural Alaska, the food system functions within a mixed subsistence-cash economy; the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is one of many areas in the system that promotes and increases access to both store-bought and subsistence foods through its allowance of qualified rural recipients to purchase subsistence hunting/fishing gear.

% of Rural Alaskans using SNAP
% of Rural Alaskans using Subsistence Resources

In 2015, the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services Family Nutrition Program (DHSS), Alaska Department of Fish and Game Division of Subsistence (ADF&G), and University of Alaska Fairbanks Center for Alaska Native Health Research (UAF) joined together to develop a methodology to explore the relationships between the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the practice of a subsistence in rural Alaska.

This session is a follow-up report to our efforts in understanding the use and impact of the program as well as furthering our understanding of how the overall SNAP program impacts access to fruits and vegetables in rural communities.

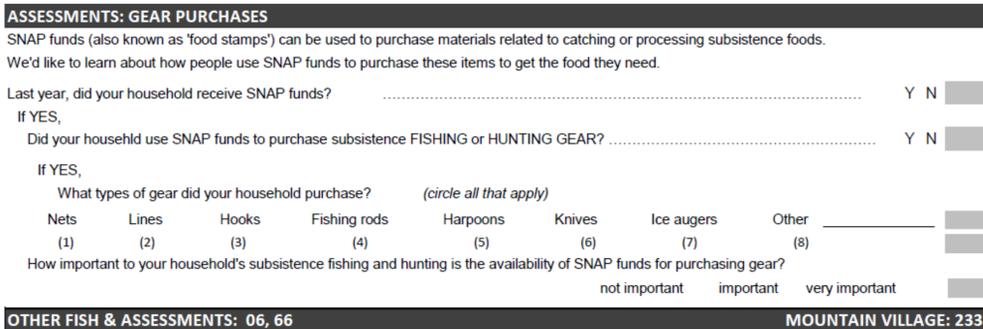
Both years of data collection involved development and field-testing/pilot-testing of new questions

Overview

Year 1

In 2016, household surveys administered by ADF&G to four communities of the Lower Yukon region included a module asking respondents participating in SNAP about their use of SNAP funds to purchase subsistence hunting and fishing gear and the importance of this aspect of the program to the household as this had not yet been systematically assessed.

Figure 1.



Year 2

In 2017, a full-page assessment was developed that asked respondents about the importance of various food sources, importance of SNAP to accessing food and types of food, and about the barriers, benefits, and who they recognize as food leaders in their community.

Six communities were scheduled to receive the survey module as part of the household survey; Field researchers came back to our research group with modifications to the module based on field testing and the survey module was modified based on researcher and respondents feedback as well as researcher needs during the fieldwork (some modules were shortened due to an already uncommonly long survey design). In communities were modified versions of the module were administered respondents provided very specific and insightful information regarding how community members view and use elements of their food system.

Discussion

Purchasing Subsistence Gear with SNAP Funds

Across all communities surveyed during both years, *very few households receiving SNAP funds utilize them to purchase subsistence hunting and fishing gear*. However, for the Lower Kuskokwim communities who were using SNAP funds there were several who reported the purchasing of fishing gear and that this option was important to their household's acquisition of food; in this region of the State subsistence fishing is widely known to contribute to the region's available food.

Desired and Difficult to Obtain Foods

Fruits and vegetables and seafood were reported by respondents across communities as foods that they would like to eat but are difficult to get. Lack of store availability and local production were identified as barriers to consumption of fruits and vegetables. Barriers to seafood appeared to be dependent on the location and harvest practices of the community; interior Central respondent noted location as a barrier to seafood, whereas Hoonah respondents noted regulations and equipment. This distinction highlights the importance of working directly with and supporting communities to identify and meet their specific food needs.

Importance of Food Sources and Food Money (rerunning without non-SNAP recipients in Central)

Benefits of Eating Wild Foods

Responses related to *health impacts, economics, and lifestyle* prevailed as the top reported benefits of consuming wild foods for a household. The local availability and taste preference were also identified by responding households as important benefits.

Food Leaders

Respondents were asked to identify who they consider to be local food leaders in their community. Most commonly identified were,

- *Individuals (such as farmers, recognized subsistence harvesters)*
- *Tribal/Indian Associations*

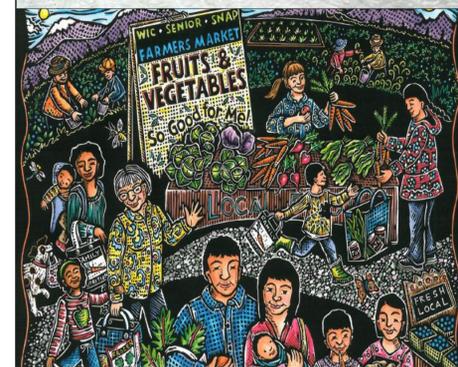
The responses, however included various types of people and organizations including family and Elders, the community as a whole, government agencies and NGOs. There were households that did not identify food leaders stating that they did not believe their community to have any food issues/problems. Identifying issues/problems with adequate access and availability to food should be explored further. Resulting information could be looked at in comparison with other food security metrics and associated factors the community, its food leaders, researchers, and policy makers to determine best approaches to overcome the issues/problems and involve community food leaders to engage across the state to share community-based strategies.

Next Steps – Year 3

A finalized full-page SNAP assessment will be introduced as a standardized module to be administered within comprehensive and select special topic household surveys across rural Alaska in 2018 and subsequent years.

In 2018, SNAP assessment questions will be analyzed alongside factors such as household harvest levels, household structure (single, couple, family, young, mature, elderly, etc.) as well as household food security scores collected in conjunction with the SNAP assessment.

Outreach and education materials on SNAP ... do you have any thing specific that you would like to highlight here?



Division of Subsistence

Family Nutrition Programs

University of Alaska Fairbanks

