

SITKA COMMUNITY FOOD ASSESSMENT INDICATORS REPORT



2014

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INTRODUCTION

The Sitka Community Food Assessment project was birthed at the Sitka Health Summit held in late September 2012. A work group quickly formed and pursued the Community Transformation grant funding through the SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (SEARHC). The work group was awarded a \$15,000 grant which was used to hire a Food Assessment Coordinator, contract with a data specialist, and help with survey costs and publishing of the *Sitka Community Food Assessment Indicators Report*.

The work group agreed to use the USDA Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit as a framework to guide our process. The Toolkit includes four parts:

- completion of a community food resource profile,
- conducting focus group research,
- surveying households on a variety of food security issues and
- collecting food cost data.

The work group decided early on that we needed to add Sitka specific harvest data for wild fish and game to the framework, work to collect information on gardening/foraging and to substitute the UAF Cooperative Extension Service's Food Cost Survey for the Food Store Survey. Courtney Bobsin, Jesuit Volunteer with the Sitka Conservation Society (SCS), completed the Community Food Resource Profile by early February 2013 thanks to the generous donation of her time by the Sitka Conservation Society. Sitka's Food Assessment Coordinator, Lisa Sadleir-Hart contacted Dr. Philip Loring in the UAF Center for Cross-Cultural Studies for permission to adapt the Kenai Peninsula Food Security Survey to use in place of the USDA Household Food Security Survey.

The Sitka Food Security Survey, an adaptation of Kenai's survey tool, was launched in March 2013. It was available online at Survey Monkey as well as a hard copy available at the Kettleon Memorial Library, Alaska Department of Health & Social Services' Public Assistance office, Salvation Army and the end-of-season celebration of the Sitka Native Education Program. In addition to questions on fish and seafood modeled after the Kenai Peninsula Food Security Survey, the questionnaire included questions on game hunting, foraging, wild harvesting, gardening, food preservation and shopping. 484 Sitkans completed the survey, but only 422 verified their zip code. The smaller number was used in the analysis of the survey and select results are provided in the Sitka Community Food Assessment Indicators Report.

The work group set an ambitious goal of completing seven focus groups in Sitka over late spring and early summer. The focus groups targeted key informants (elected leaders, clergy, public assistance and public health staff, concerned citizens), food producers, food shoppers, and those potentially at risk for household food insecurity. We were unsuccessful in recruiting Sitkans who were currently participating in food assistance programs for a focus group, so the decision was made to conduct individual phone interviews with participants on the WIC program in its place. A total of 49 Sitkans participated in the focus groups and interviews. Summaries of the focus groups are provided in this report.

The work group felt strongly that we needed to create an opportunity for Sitkans to respond to our findings about our food system and to ground truth our findings. This would allow the community's voice to resonate in the final writing of the Sitka Food Assessment Indicator Report. To that end, we undertook the planning and implementation of the Inaugural Sitka Food Summit on November 14, 2013. Close to 60 Sitkans attended the event and participated in a "food data walk" that allowed attendees to interact and comment on the data gathered by the work group. The data walk was followed up with facilitated, spirited discussions on a range of food data themes which pointed to the potential energy that may be garnered to address Sitka's food system issues and laid the foundation for future food focused strategic planning.

We hope the Sitka Community Food Assessment Indicators Report can guide future food system planning and plant seeds for innovative responses that will strengthen Sitka's food landscape. The Sitka Community Food Assessment Indicators Report uncovers many weaknesses in our food system as well as some incredible assets that define Sitka's food culture - a rich ecosystem filled with nutritious gems from the land and sea plus a generous spirit of sharing with our neighbors. Now that we've defined the current foodscape in Sitka, let's work together to build a more resilient food system that can deeply nourish the entire community for generations to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to cultivate hope for a more resilient Sitka food system,

Lisa Sadleir-Hart, MPH, RDN, CHES
Sitka Community Food Assessment Coordinator
31 March 2014



Sitkans at November 2013 Food Summit

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SITKA FOOD FACTS

Did you know that....

52% of Sitka Food Security Survey respondents garden.

75% of Sitkans eat less than 5 fruits and vegetables per day. The recommendation is to eat 9-13 servings of fruits and vegetables each day.

77% of Sitka Food Security Survey respondents preserve or put up food for later use.

22% of Sitka Food Security Survey respondents had less than a week of food stored in case of an emergency or natural disaster.

415 of **422** Sitka Food Security Survey respondents reported that they shopped locally for food.

60% of STA's Tribal Needs Assessment respondents reported not being able to consume as much of their traditional and customary foods as they'd like.

48% of Sitka Food Security Survey respondents access fish & game through actually hunting and fishing. Another **24%** receive it as a donation from their family or friends.

132,748 pounds of deer meat was harvested in 2011 in Game Management Unit 4.

7,274 pounds of halibut was harvested in 2010 & 2011 in Sitkans.

7,351 pounds of king salmon was harvested in 2010 & 2011 by Sitkans.

9,998 pounds of sockeye salmon was harvested in 2010 & 2011 by Sitkans.

One high tunnel was approved for Sitka by the USDA in 2012.

Six high tunnels were approved for Sitka by the USDA in 2013.

8% of Sitka Food Security Survey respondents borrow money or food to feed their households each week.

\$1,645,702 Food Stamp dollars were redeemed in Sitka in 2012. That's a **\$201,000** increase over 2011.

1,410 Sitkans and **766** households participated in the Food Stamp program in 2013.

229 individuals received food pantry assistance from the Salvation Army in **2013**.

7,243 meals were served Monday-Friday at the Salvation Army in 2013. That's up from **5,513** meals in 2012.

56 children at Baranof & Keet Goshi' Heen Elementary schools participate in the Blessing in a Backpack program during the 2013-14 school year. That's up from **50** the 2012-13 year.

26% and **56%** of Sitka School District and Mt. Edgecumbe School High School, respectively, qualify for free or reduced price lunch.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF SITKA AND FOOD SECURITY SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

What?

The Sitka Food Assessment work group launched the Sitka Food Security Survey (SFSS) in March 2013. The work group used an online venue as well as printed hard copies that were distributed at the Kettleton library, Office of Public Assistance and at the Sitka Native Education Program end-of-year celebration. 484 Sitkans completed the survey, but the selected results shared in the food assessment only used data from the 422 surveys who verified their zipcode.

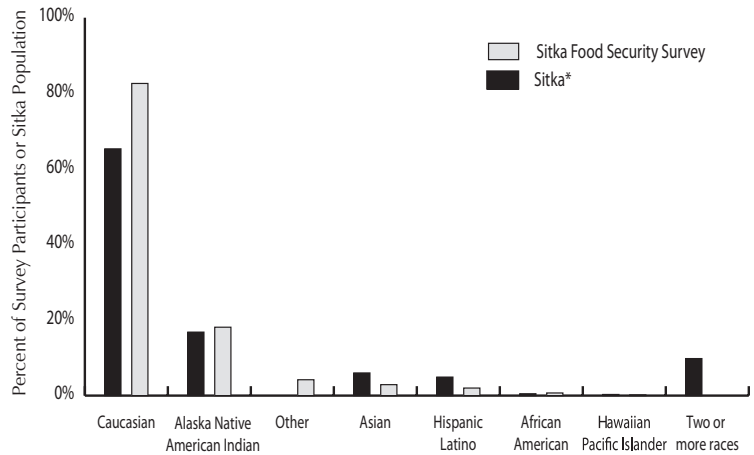
Two of these charts compare the survey participants to the overall Sitka population. Survey respondents were more likely to be Caucasian. Alaska Native representation was consistent with Sitka’s overall population profile, but the survey didn’t effectively reach the other Sitka ethnic minority populations.

In terms of income, participants who were lower or higher income were under represented in the survey. Low-middle, middle and high-middle income were either on par or over represented in the convenience sample.

So What?

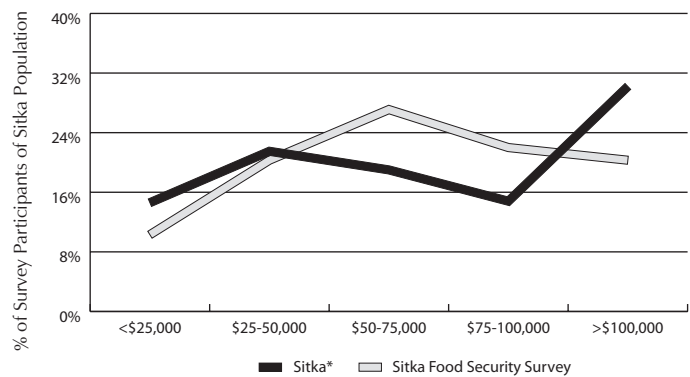
While there were pockets of under and over representation, the work group feels that the survey results provide important data about the food environment in Sitka. Additional indicators were selected to help us paint a truer reflection of the food “climate” for Sitkans who are struggling financially. These included running focus groups aimed at household food security at the Swan Lake Senior Center and Sitkans Against Family Violence shelter.

Ethnicity of Sitka Food Security Survey Participants Compared to Sitka Population



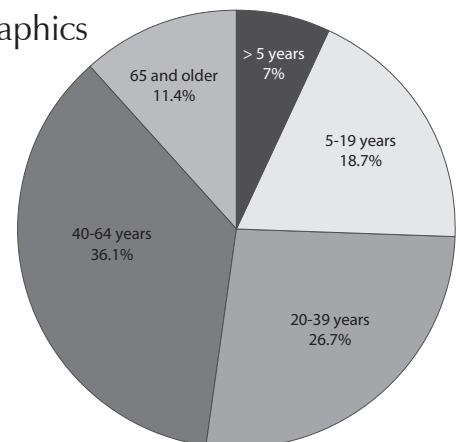
(Source: 2010 Sitka Census Quick Facts)

Household Income of Sitka Food Security Survey Participants Compared to Sitka’s Population



Source: *2007-2011 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates U.S. Census

Sitka Age Demographics



Source: factfinder2census.gov

HUNT, FISH, GATHER, GROW

What?

The privilege to hunt and fish in the forests around Sitka is critical for people who want to have a healthy diet of wild fish and game. A strong community tradition of sharing extends this benefit to those who don't have access or the ability to gather for themselves. Although various species of fish are available for purchase for those who can afford it, wild game is not. This makes the informal economy of sharing and bartering important for people of lower incomes and people unable to hunt for themselves.

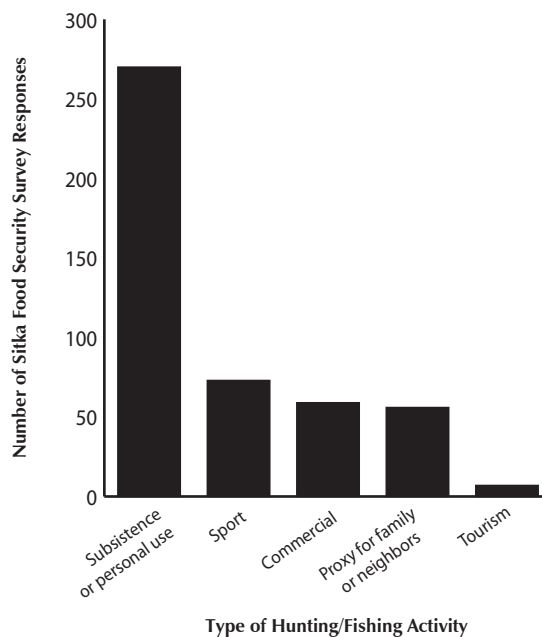
So What?

Wild fish and game are traditional foods among Sitka's Native population and widely used by others as well. Sustaining the abundance of these resources and assuring community access to them are vital for health, economic, and cultural reasons.

What Next?

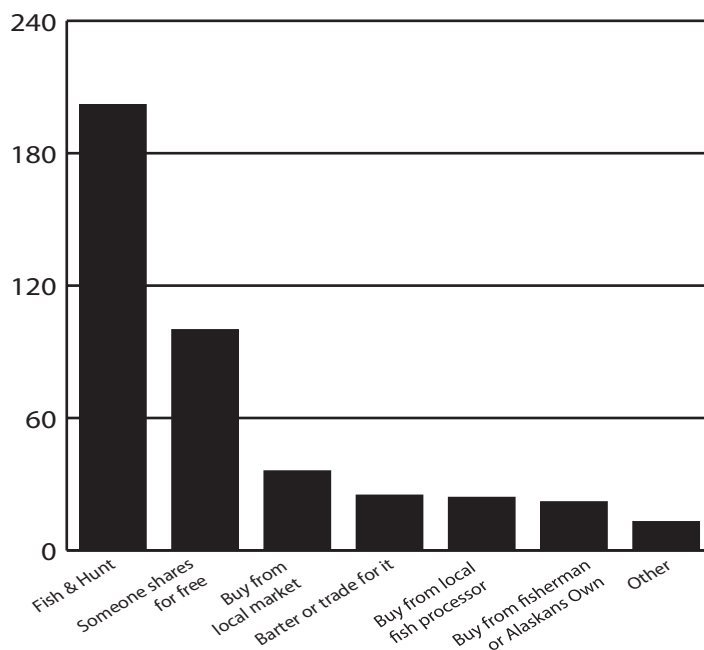
The State of Alaska Department of Fish & Game offers fishing and hunting by proxy for elders and the disabled (http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static-sf/statewide/pdfs/07_proxy.pdf). The proxy program may be another way to get wild fish and game into the diets of elder and disabled Sitka households. Helping spread the word about the proxy program and connecting hunters with elder and disabled households could improve food security for this part of Sitka's population.

Type of Sitka Hunting & Fishing Activity



Source: Sitka Food Security Survey

Most Common Ways Sitkans Access Fish & Game



Source: Sitka Food Security Survey

Frequency of Fish and Game Intake in Sitka

What?

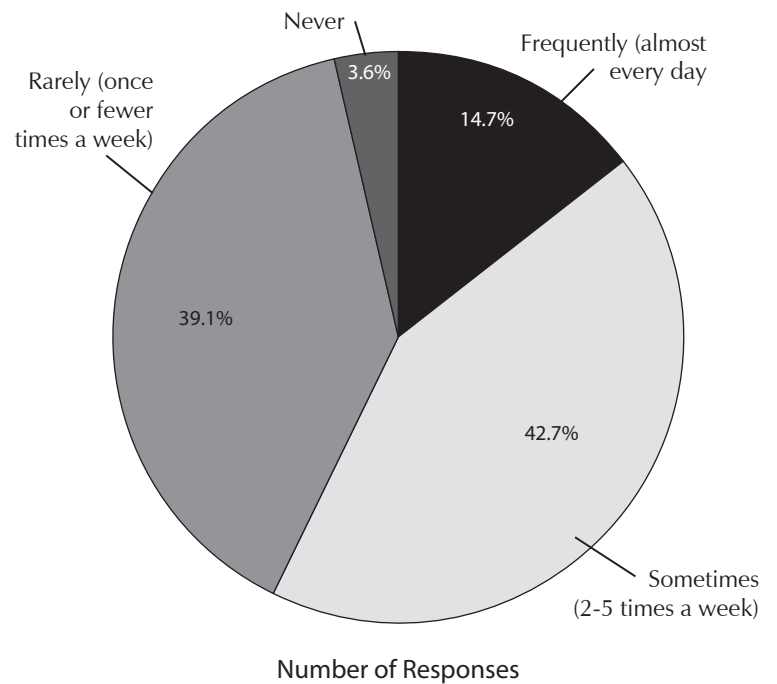
The fact that 57.4% of Sitkans eat wild fish and game several times a week speaks to the importance of these traditional local foods. They are integral to maintaining strong cultural traditions; they provide ways to offset family food budgets; and they provide healthy alternatives to other protein sources found in grocery stores.

So What?

Access to the abundant food resources in the forests and waters surrounding Sitka is an essential factor in the well-being of the community. Healthy oceans and forests are key factors, as is Sitka's "Rural Status" under federal subsistence regulations, allowing Sitkans to fish and hunt of nearby federal lands.

What Next?

Participants in the Inaugural Sitka Food Summit noted that many community members don't have boats or struggle to fuel their boat when living on tight budgets. The idea was floated to consolidate fishing trips with other traditional and customary harvesting i.e. rockfish and seaweed. Finding sponsorships for community fishing trips or pooling resources was also offered up as a way to creatively fund the high cost of fishing.



Source: Sitka Food Security Survey



Sitka Conservation Society

HUNT, FISH, GATHER, GROW

What?

Sitkans rely heavily on wild harvested deer and fish to fill their freezers, cupboards and bellies. Deer, king salmon, halibut and rockfish are some of the most common species harvested. These four species amounted to an estimated 155,734 pounds of high quality protein available to Sitkans who fish and hunt. As part of the Food Assessment, the work group estimated what it would cost to replace these sources of protein if Sitkans were to purchase them or a similar food at local grocery stores (see estimates below).

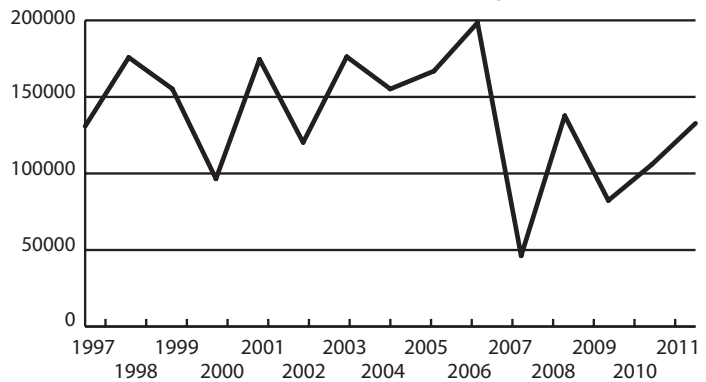
So What?

Sitkans have abundant access to superior sources of protein that are both low in fat (eg. deer, rockfish and halibut) and rich in omega-3 fatty acids (salmon). Purchasing products of this quality in the grocery store would be cost prohibitive for many households in Sitka. This data also speaks to the need to sustainably manage the resource for years to come and the need to maintain Sitka's federal subsistence status, thus insuring future access to these gems from our foodscape.

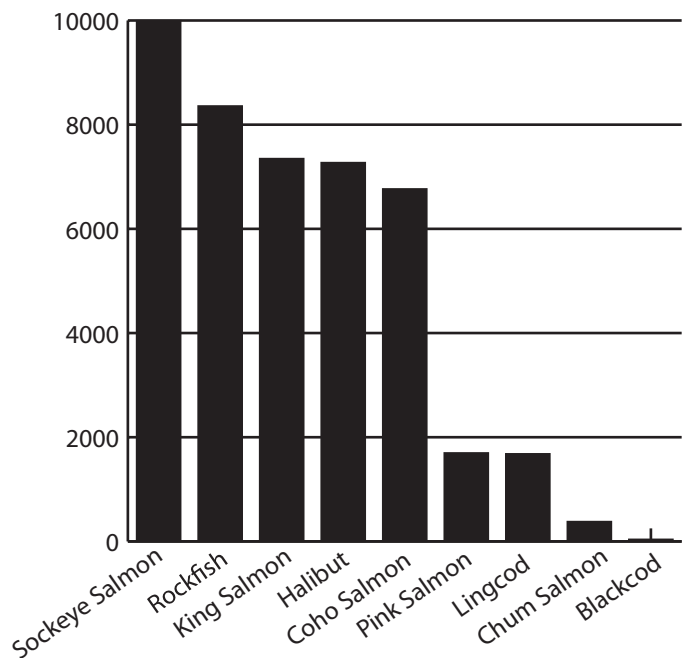
What Next

Working with the Alaska Department of Fish & Game, US Forest Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, US Fish & Wildlife Service and Sitka-based conservation groups to sustainably manage wild fish and game resources is vital to ensuring future stocks will be available for Sitkans to harvest. For more information about the Sitka Management Area, look up the Sitka Sound LAMP or visit the Alaska Department of Fish & Game. The Sitka Tribe of Alaska's Resource Protection program is another good resource as is the Sitka Conservation Society.

Estimated Pounds of Deer Meat over Time in Game Management Unit 4



Average Fish Harvest for Personal Use in Pounds for 2010-2011



Estimated Costs to Purchase Equivalent Pounds of Fish and Deer Harvested in 2010/11

Deer	\$1,279,691	Halibut	\$147,668
King Salmon	\$88,212	Rockfish	\$21,498

What?

Sitkans access local and wild fruits and vegetables primarily through purchases at the Sitka Farmers Market or as recipients of the generous donations of their family, friends or neighbors. Residents are also taking advantage of the Down-to-Earth-U-Pick garden and direct purchases at St Peter’s Fellowship Farm.

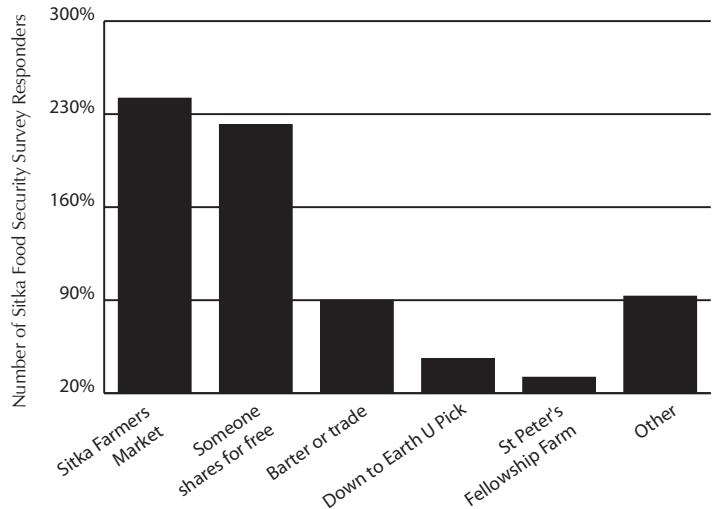
So What?

Increasing access to locally grown and harvested fruits and vegetables helps prevent chronic diseases like cancer and heart disease. It also speaks to the potential of local food as an economic generator in our community. Additionally it demonstrates the generous spirit of Sitka residents and the importance of non-currency exchanges in Sitka.

What Next?

Participants at the Inaugural Sitka Food Summit pointed out that low income Sitkans using programs like Food Stamps or WIC may not have transportation to the Sitka Farmers Market. Currently, the Community Ride bus service doesn’t offer public transportation on Saturdays. To address this barrier, the Sitka Local Foods Network requested City of Sitka grant funding to assist with transportation to the market during the 2014 Farmer’s Market season.

Most Common Ways Sitkans Access Wild and Local Fruits and Vegetables



Source: Sitka Food Security Survey



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What?

Responses to this question were almost evenly split, with 52% reporting that they garden. Of those who garden, 8.4% use the community garden. For those who don't garden, they overwhelmingly gave lack of time and capacity as reasons why they don't garden.

Another barrier was lack of community garden space. Sitka has one community garden with 50, 6' by 12' plots located behind Blatchley Middle School, managed by Sitka Community Schools. All spaces are used by 30 participants who have one or two plots. The cost is 50 cents per square foot per season. There is consistently a wait list for these garden plots.

So What?

Fruits and vegetables are a vital component of a healthy diet AND Sitkans don't eat enough of them. Most fruits and vegetables are imported into Sitka and are expensive. Growing more gardeners in Sitka is crucial to the community's food security. So is educating Sitkans on less time intensive gardening strategies that can work in small spaces, and creating more public spaces to garden.

What Next?

There is a dire need for more community spaces to garden. Could public and private spaces be made available to Sitkans who want to garden? Approaching the City of Sitka, Sitka School District, US Forest Service, University of Alaska Southeast, SEARHC, Sitka Tribe of Alaska and Shee Atika' with requests to allocate public and/or private spaces for gardening was a suggestion offered up at the Inaugural Sitka Food Summit. Additionally, identifying a space to locate a community greenhouse and education center would be another concrete step to increase Sitka's gardening capacity.

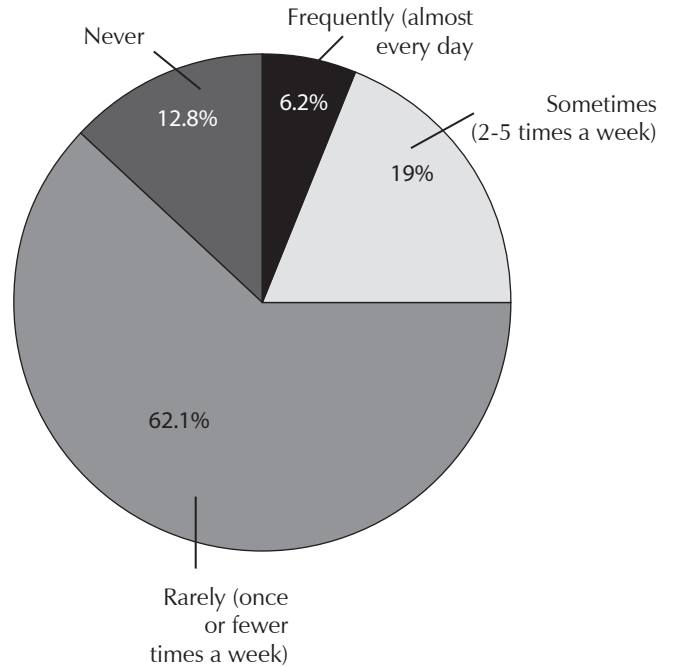
Frequency of Intake of Wild Harvested Fruits and Vegetables

What?

About 25% of Sitkans who took the Sitka Food Security Survey reported that they consume wild harvested fruits and vegetables at least twice each week. When asked about barriers, respondents cited inconvenience, lack of local knowledge, insufficient time, and safety as why they didn't forage. Fear of hiking alone and/or running into wildlife intimidated others when accessing wild foods.

So What?

Locally grown produce or wild harvested plants have a significantly lower impact on the environment. They require little to no transport, especially in a small community like Sitka. From a health and nutrition standpoint, local foods are cleaner and offer the added bonus of exercise when working to produce, gather or harvest these foods. Additionally, higher fruit and vegetable intakes have been cited as a protective factor against chronic diseases such as cancer and heart disease.



Source: Sitka Food Security Survey

What Next?

Participants at the inaugural Sitka Food Summit pointed to the need for more education focused on foraging wild foods, gardening and storing their bounty. Participants also suggested creating a “garden mentor” program where Sitka’s seasoned gardeners could provide on-site coaching on how to best use space or on best gardening practices. It may make sense for UAF Cooperative Extension Service, University Alaska Southeast Continuing Education and the Sitka Local Foods Network to partner and offer more food growing, storage and preservation education. One web-based resource Sitkans may want to access is Preserving Alaska’s Bounty (www.uaf.edu/ces/preservingalaskasbounty).



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HUNT, FISH, GATHER, GROW

What?

Traditional foods are important not only because they help sustain cultural lifestyles, but because they are healthy. Access to traditional foods depends on being able to get into the woods to hunt or gather or out on the water to fish. Those who are unable to hunt, fish, or gather depend on tribal food-sharing programs or friends or family to provide for them.

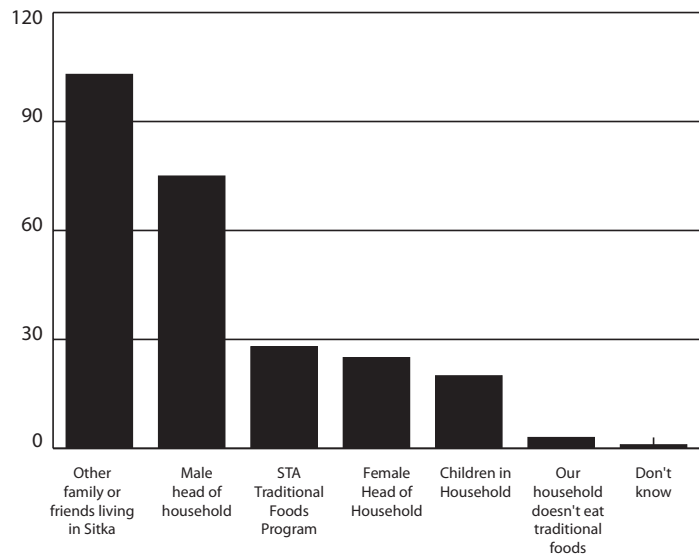
So What?

Households that don't get enough traditional foods are often forced to substitute less healthy foods—foods that can contribute to diseases such as diabetes and obesity. The loss of traditional food traditions can also lead to the degradation of cultural knowledge and values.

What Next?

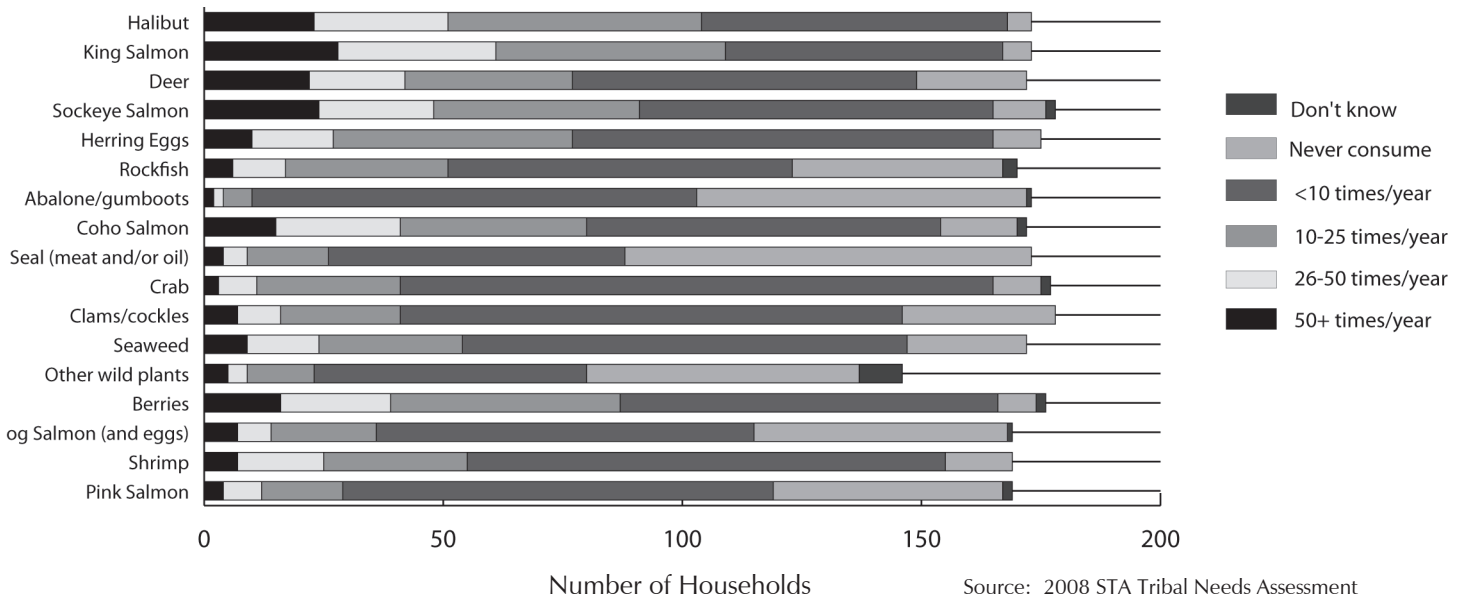
The Sitka Tribe of Alaska recently conducted a new needs assessment among its tribal citizens. It will be important to revisit this data when the new 2013 Tribal Assessment is completed and see if access to traditional and customary foods has changed and to what extent these foods are part of tribal citizen's diets.

Main Providers of Traditional Foods



Source: 2008 STA Tribal Needs Assessment

Frequency of Traditional Foods Consumption and Rank of Importance



Source: 2008 STA Tribal Needs Assessment

FOOD SHOPPING

What?

Food costs in Sitka have steadily increased in Sitka over the last 10 years. Between September 2003 and 2011, food costs rose 43.6%. Additionally, market basket costs were 57% higher than Portland, Oregon, 37% higher than Anchorage, and 21% higher than Juneau.

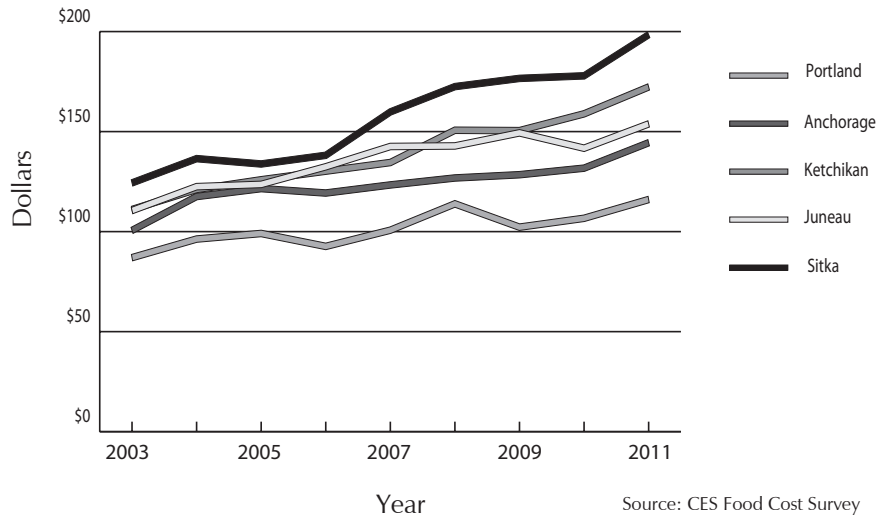
So What?

Rising food costs often require households to make hard choices about what foods they can afford. In the case of elders and others on fixed incomes, higher food costs may force them to choose between paying for heat, medications or food. Sitkans find themselves looking for ways to stretch their food buying power and explore less expensive buying options.

What Next?

Participants in the inaugural Food Summit confirmed that food is expensive in Sitka. They also asked lots of questions, like why does Sitka's food cost 21% more than in Juneau? why is food taxed like other groceries? does food need to be taxed in Sitka? Others wanted to see what the comparisons were to Wrangell and Petersburg. Additionally there was lots of interest in Do It Yourself (DIY) education focused on household resiliency that could mitigate rising food costs like gardening, food preservation, and root cellaring.

Family of 4 Weekly Food Cost Data in Sitka 2003-2011



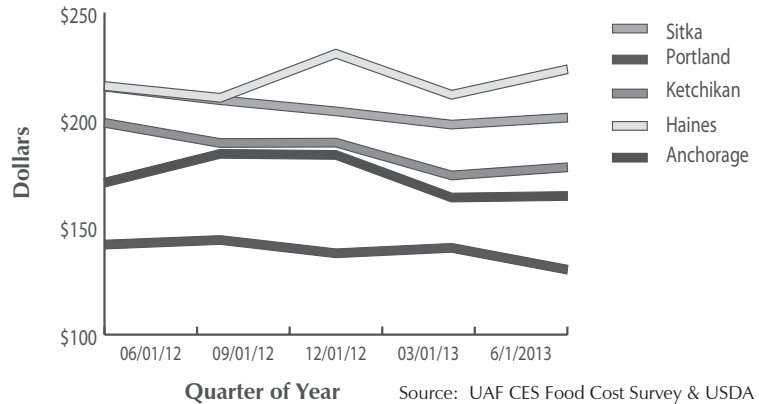
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FOOD SHOPPING

What?

The UAF Cooperative Extension Service (CES) changed the market basket survey approach in 2012. It now uses the USDA Thrifty Menu Equivalent for a Family of 4 rather than the market basket of 38 foods it had used since the mid-1990s. The survey is now better able to compare to national surveys. It's also important to point out that the costs are for what's outlined in the Thrifty Food Plan which is often a portion of the cost of an item rather than the entire unit the item is sold as.

Food Cost Data for Family of Four
June 2012 to June 2013 Using Thrifty Food Plan



So What?

As the CES works with this new approach, it's become clear that a significant change in several foods can drastically alter the overall cost of the market basket. During this timeframe coffee prices sharply declined which partially explains the overall decline in food prices between June 2012 and March 2013. Sitka's food costs in March 2013 were 10.4% higher than Juneau, 13.6% higher than Ketchikan, 21.5% higher than Anchorage, 40.9% higher than Portland, OR and 35.1% higher than the US average. What's contributing to these higher food costs? Increasing food costs worldwide? A truer reflection of the "real" costs of food? Higher fuel costs to move food here? Lack of competition in Sitka?

What Next?

The City & Borough of Sitka, Sitka Economic Development Association and concerned Sitkans need to continue to monitor food prices and explore what's contributing to higher prices in Sitka. Higher food prices adds to the high cost of living in Sitka that can force people out of Sitka or keep people from moving here. Additionally, helping community members investigate lower cost ways of accessing food like establishing neighborhood buying clubs or participating in the Sitka Food Co-op (<https://www.sitkafoodcoop.org>) makes sense for motivated Sitkans who want to reduce their monthly food costs.



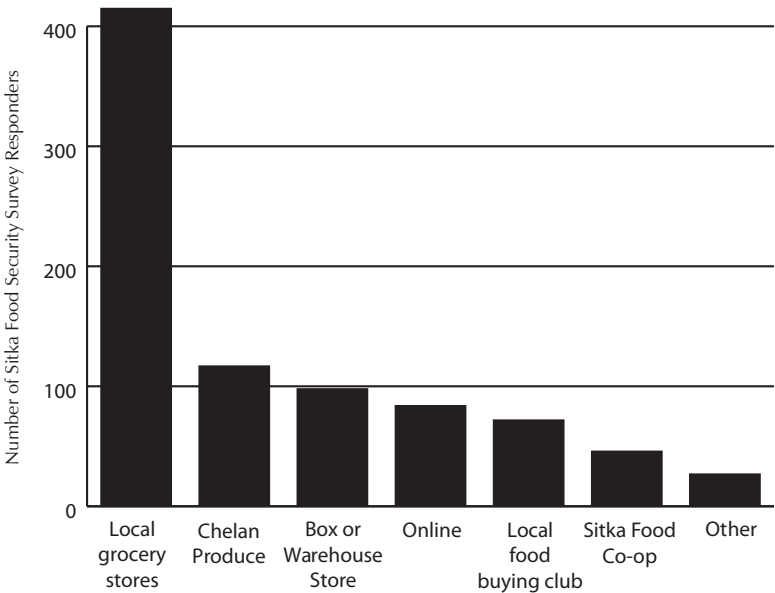
Where Food Security Survey Responders Shop

What?

Sitkans continue to do the majority of their grocery shopping locally. They also support Chelan Produce, a Petersburg based produce vendor that has served Sitka between April and October for close to 35 years.

So What?

While Sitkans grocery shop locally, rising food costs have led many to begin exploring alternate venues for accessing food that is less expensive. Additionally, small pockets of Sitkans are exploring other shopping mechanisms that line up with their sustainability and cooperative values namely through the Sitka Food Coop and food buying clubs. The Sitka Food Coop emerged in 2011 and currently serves 114 households and had \$74,020.37 in sales in 2012.



Source: Sitka Food Security Survey



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FOOD SHOPPING

What?

While over 50% of Sitkans reported household emergency food stores that would last up to two weeks, one in four community members don't have enough food to last even a week. This dovetails with Food Assessment focus group comments which reinforced that low income households and households with limited storage are unlikely to have food to support them if Sitka was faced with an emergency situation, especially if required to evacuate.

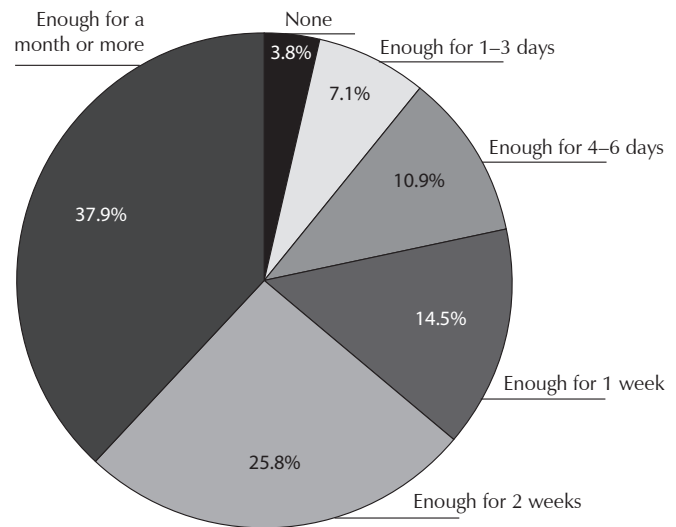
So What?

While it's important for every Sitka household to prepare for an emergency by having the recommended seven day supply of food and water for each household member and pet, it's clear that some households are not in a position either secondary to a shortage of space or resources or both to amass emergency food and water stores. Additionally, given that the primary Sitka food preservation practice is freezing, household bounties of frozen fish, deer, berries and other foods are likely to be lost if the power is out for an extended period of time.

What Next?

Is it time for Sitka to explore a community food caching system to safeguard food for emergency situations? The City of Cannon Beach, Oregon recently undertook a project that may prove useful to the Local Emergency Planning Commission or other community group who wants to tackle the creation of a community food cache system. Additionally, the Emergency Preparedness Work Group of the Alaska Food Policy Council has created a template for community groups to use to create a Food Emergency and Community Resilience Plan. Use of this tool might be a good starting point for the LEPC or interested community group.

How Much Food Households Have on Hand in Case of an Emergency



Source: Sitka Food Security Survey

Preserving Food in Sitka

What?

The overwhelming majority of Sitka Food Security Survey responders preserve food to use at a later time. The primary way Sitkans preserve food is to freeze it.

So What?

As a subsistence community, it's common place for Sitkans to harvest more than they can consume within a reasonable period of time. Preservation of these resources is key to having reliable access to quality food later in the year. The fact that the preferred preservation method is freezing means food stores are vulnerable if Sitka loses power during an emergency.

What Next?

Participants in the inaugural Sitka Food Summit requested more opportunities to learn about food preservation. Is it time to consider the creation of a community canning corps or to increase food preservation education in Sitka? Could the UAF Cooperative Extension Service resurrect the Master Canning/Food Preservation program?

FOOD ASSISTANCE

What?

There is a wide variety of alternate food assistance that takes place in Sitka ranging from eating at friends and relatives to showing up for community meals. The primary food assistance program survey responders use though is Food Stamps followed by free and reduced price school meals and WIC.

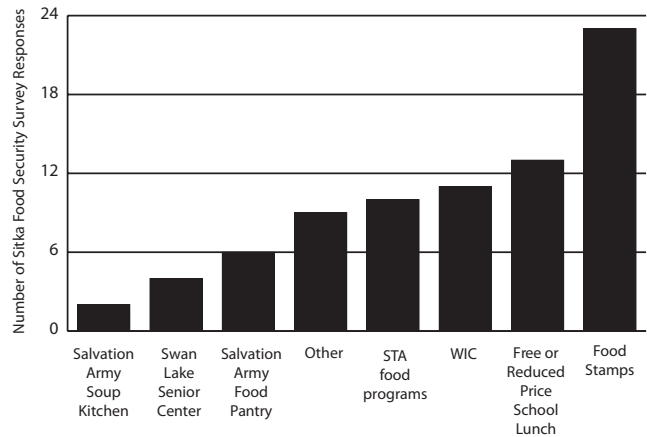
So What?

The data speaks to the resourcefulness of many Sitkans who struggle with food security. It also draws attention to the need to continue to outreach to the community about underutilized programs. Additionally, former WIC Nutrition Educator, Clara Gray, asserts that many families do not meet the income guidelines for programs, but they still need food assistance.

What Next?

Seven Sitkans who participate in food assistance programs were interviewed as part of Sitka's Food Assessment during the summer of 2013. They were unanimous in their agreement that applying for programs was easy to navigate and that the programs were easy to use. However, they did point out that Sitka could do better in our outreach to the community. The creation of a Sitka Food Guide was offered up one way to consolidate all food program information in one place by Sitka Food Summit participants.

Number of Sitka Food Security Survey Respondents Who Participate in Food Assistance Programs



Source: Sitka Food Security Survey

Focus Group Findings

Household Food Security

Two groups of a total of 15 people met to discuss how serious food insecurity and hunger may be in Sitka (although some were not from Sitka). The groups discussed different topics. A majority of younger participants with small children ran out or worried about not having enough food for their family at times. They skipped meals, bought cheaper and less nutritious food, asked for help or relied on others, participated in community events that provide food or access public assistance programs. The senior group planned for going without at times, budgeted food/money and were used to going without, so were not generally concerned about food security.



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FOOD ASSISTANCE

What?

The number of individual Sitkans and Sitka households participating in the Food Stamp program has steadily increased since 2007. Individual participation increased 59.6% between 2007 and 2013; the number of households, 78.6%. This amounts to 16% of Sitka's population and 22% of Sitka's households based on 2010 US census data.

So What?

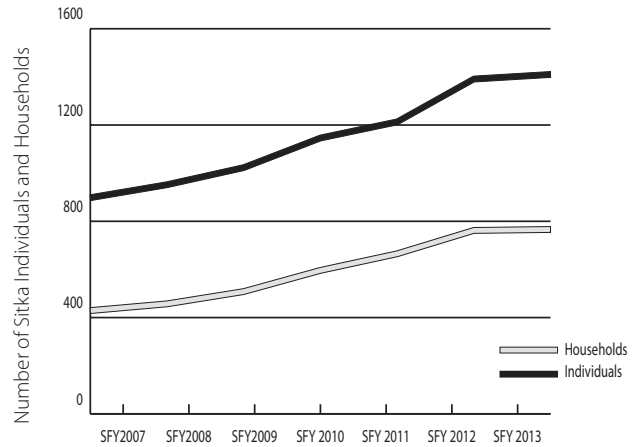
The rise in Food Stamp participation speaks to increasing household food insecurity in Sitka. Benefits in Sitka for an individual are \$226 per month; \$755 is the maximum benefit for a family of four or about \$2.10 per meal per person. To eat in Sitka on this amount of money means a "no frills" diet and requires lots of scratch cooking which means more time in the kitchen using predominantly unprocessed items.

What's Next?

As part of their No Kid Hungry Campaign, Share our Strength developed programming called Cooking Matters and Shopping Matters. These two programs teach meal planning, shopping and cooking skills to food stamp families with children. A program like Cooking Matters or Shopping Matters could assist low-income Sitkan households in stretching their limited food stamp dollars.

Sitkans need to keep abreast of changes in food stamp policies in the Farm Bill and advocate for strong anti-poverty programs. In November 2013, the boost in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP aka Food Stamps) benefit created by the American Recovery and Economic Act in 2009 ended. The reduction was about 5.5 percent of the maximum allotment, so the amount of the decrease depended on the household size. For example, a one person household lost \$11 and a four person household lost \$36, the equivalent of almost two days of food per month.

Food Stamp Participation 2007-2013



Source: USDA Food & Nutrition Service

Food Stamp Redemption Trends

What?

Sitka has seen an approximate \$200,000 increase in Food Stamp expenditures per year in the community since 2010. This reflects both the increase in the number of program participants as well as food price increases.

So What?

The Food Stamp program provides needed grocery money for food insecure households in Sitka. Additionally, it generates revenue for the three primary grocery stores in Sitka. SeaMart and Market Center plus Cascade Convenience Centers are owned and operated by the Sitka-based Hames Corporation. AC Value Center aka Lakeside is owned and operated by the Canadian-based Alaska Commercial Company owned by the North West Company.

What's Next?

Sitka food retailers and City of Sitka leaders need to consider the economic implication of cuts to the Food Stamp program. The benefit reduction that took effect in November 2013 due to the sunset of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and ongoing deep cuts proposed by Congress could translate to reduced revenue for Sitka's food retailers. Is it time for the business community and municipality to weigh in on the consequences of cuts to Food Stamps?

Salvation Army Soup Kitchen Meals Provided January 2012–December 2013

What?

The Salvation Army has provided increasing numbers of meals since Captain and Major Wright have taken the helm. There has been a 35% increase in the number of meals for the months of January through July between 2012 and 2013.

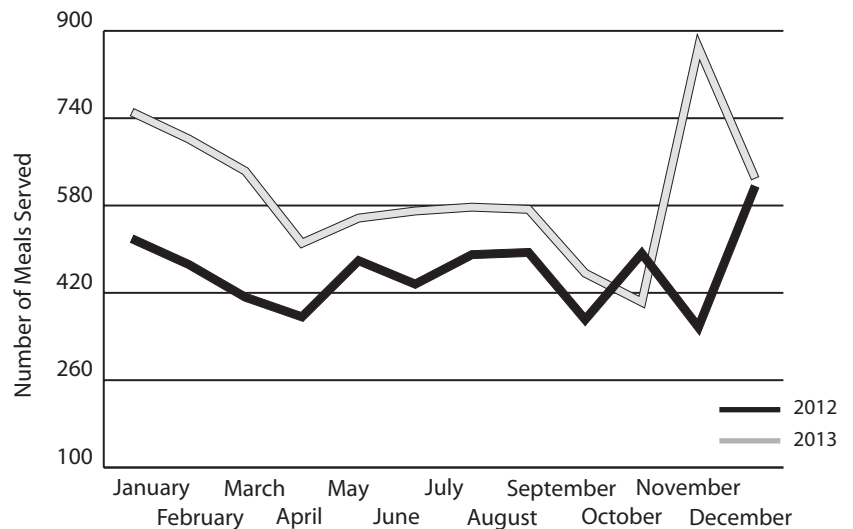
So What?

Increases in emergency meals speaks to increasing food insecurity in Sitka. Major Evadne Wright noted that usually rates go down when folks are out fishing, but participants are not fishing this year. So why aren't the most vulnerable Sitkans able to fish?

She also noted that rates go down when children return to school and Permanent Fund Dividends are distributed.

What Next?

The Salvation Army needs ongoing support by the community to feed Sitka's hungry. How can the community provide consistent resources beyond the efforts focused in the month of November? Could various religious and community organizations each pledge monetary or food support to help Salvation Army carry out it's mission?



Source: Sitka Salvation Army

Focus Group Findings

Food Assistance

Seven participants were interviewed on the phone to discuss their experiences with food assistance programs in Sitka. All agreed that they were very important to them and without them they would struggle to feed their families and are able to purchase more nutritious food. The majority said that there were no problems applying for, using or trying to use the various programs although the local stores seem to have problems. Concerns included not enough food at school, hope that school meals become healthier, and some assistance programs locations are inconvenient.



FOOD ASSISTANCE

What?

The number of requests for emergency food assistance as well as Thanksgiving and Christmas food assistance is on the rise. These numbers include holiday food assistance for 2011, 2012 and 2013 but not 2010. Major Evadne Wright reports that their organization ran out of their food stores mid Summer 2012 due to escalating demand and had to turn families away.

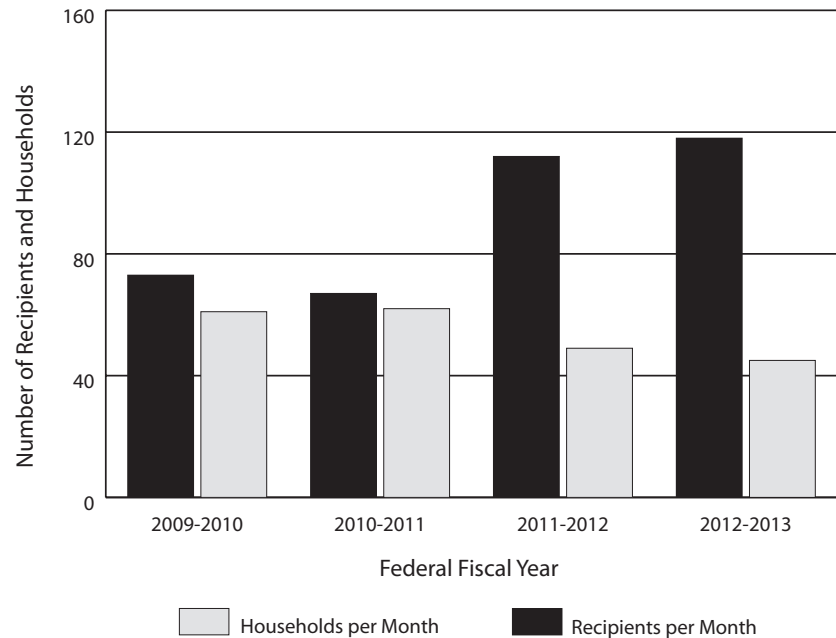
So What?

The increasing number of requests for emergency food assistance point to rising rates of food insecurity in Sitka. The Salvation Army is the primary provider of emergency food assistance after friends and family. Sitkans Against Family Violence and Sitka Tribe of Alaska offer satellite USDA commodity distribution sites. The Salvation Army has seen decreases in what's available through the USDA commodity program, which historically has provided surplus food. The Salvation Army struggles to get available surplus food from Food Bank of Alaska due to the shipping costs associated with moving food into Southeast Alaska.

What's Next?

Given the rising cost of living in Sitka, need for food assistance is expected to continue to increase. One of the 2013 Sitka Health Summit goals included food insecurity and hunger. Two pressing issues for food assistance expansion are high transportation costs to get surplus food into Sitka and lack of sufficient food storage. One of the 2013 Sitka Health Summit work groups is exploring increasing food storage in Sitka.

Salvation Army Food Pantry Participation 2009–2013

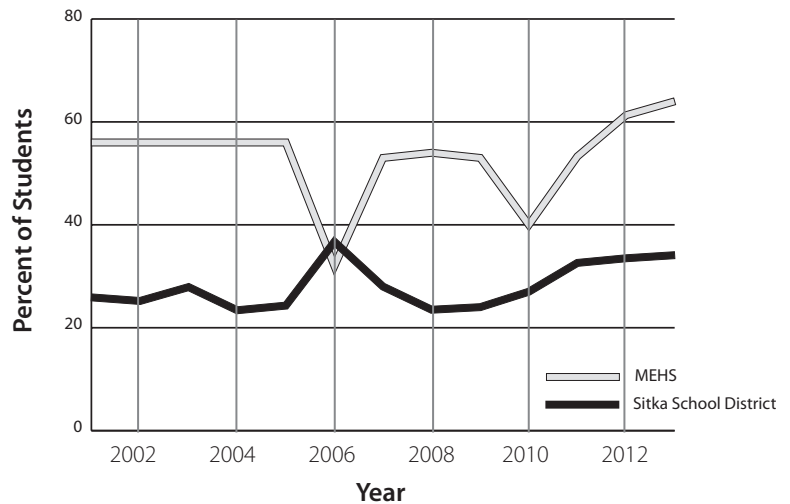


SCHOOL FOOD ENVIRONMENT

What?

Both the Sitka School District and Mt. Edgecumbe High School have seen an 8% increase in eligibility for free and reduced price school lunches between 2001 and 2013. The Sitka School District offers a small reimbursable breakfast at Baranof Elementary and Keet Goshi Heen Elementary (KGH); the district business manager reported that 10-15 students participate at Baranof and 20-25 at KGH. The K-2 social worker reported that they are able to offer breakfast at Baranof and KGH to students who are not qualified for free or reduced price meals through donations from the White E Thrift Store. An informal breakfast program also exists at Blatchley Middle School and is run with donations from the Easter Group.

Free & Reduced Price Lunch Eligibility 2001-2013



Source: Alaska Department of Education and Early Development

So What?

Increases in free and reduced price lunches point to increased food insecurity in the community. Children and youth who are hungry often experience difficulties with learning in the classroom as well as exhibit behavioral issues.

What Next?

According to the Food Research and Action Center, "Expanded availability, accessibility, and participation in the School Breakfast Program is one of the best ways to support the health and academic potential of children, particularly low-income children. Adequate nutrition and freedom from hunger are absolutely essential for good health and academic success, and yet these goals are not always achievable for families who are struggling to make ends meet...Whether breakfast is served in the classroom, from carts in the hallways, or before second period, the flexibility to allow children to eat in the morning during the school day is essential to ensure optimum participation."

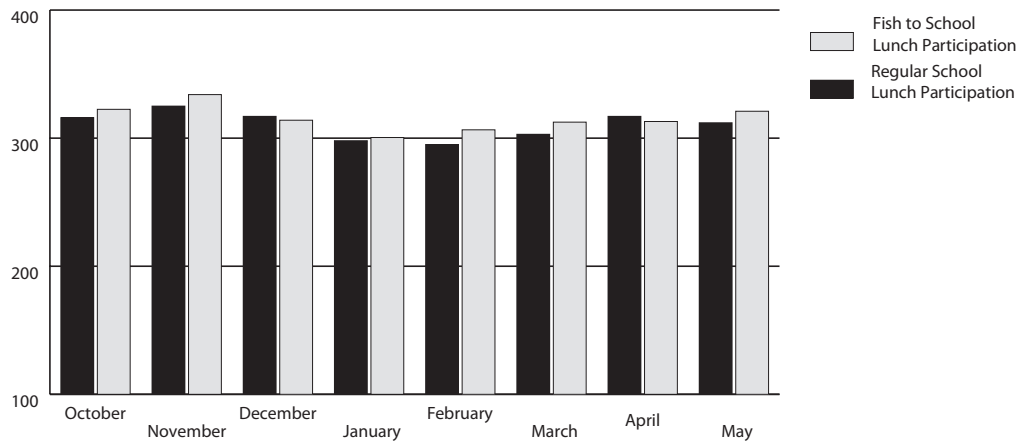
Maybe it's time to advocate for expansion of Sitka's limited school breakfast program. Perhaps the community can work with the district's new obesity prevention and control program to make expanded school breakfast and other school food initiatives a reality?



Kelly van Frankenhuyzen

SCHOOL FOOD ENVIRONMENT

Average School Lunch Participation on Regular School Lunch Days Compared to Fish to Schools Days



Source: Sitka Conservation Society

What?

Sitka's Fish to School (F2S) program was birthed at the 2010 Health Summit. The Sitka Conservation Society took the lead on the initiative and worked with local seafood processors, Food Service, and the Sitka School District to secure donations for the first F2S meals in the spring of 2011 at Blatchley Middle School. Now F2S offers local fish meals twice a month at Blatchley Middle School, Keet Gooshi Heen Elementary, Pacific High, Sitka High, Mt. Edgcumbe High School, and the SEER School. Fish lunches made up 28% of the total lunches served on F2S days during the 2012-13 school year.

So What?

Fish to Schools deepens understanding of local seafood resources by integrating locally-caught seafood into the school lunch program, introducing stream to plate curricula, and fostering a connection to the local fishing culture. F2S connects students to their local food system and helps them understand the impact of their food choices on their body, the economy, and the environment. Local fish has been historically absent from school lunches even though Sitka is the ninth largest seafood port in the United States. Increasing access to nutritious, local food has the potential to improve the local economy, decrease the need for feedlot meats and build a more resilient, regionally-adapted school lunch program.

What Next?

Currently dependent on grants and on fishermen donations, Fish to Schools is looking at sustainable solutions for permanent funding and policy reform. In 2012 a state-funded pilot program, Nutritional Alaskan Foods to Schools (NAFS), was introduced to reimburse school districts for their Alaska food purchases. The Sitka Conservation Society is advocating for permanent state funding so SSD, MEHS, and schools across the state can integrate and plan their meal programs around Alaska foods, like seafood.

Blessings in a Backpack

What?

Blessings in a Backpack was launched during the 2012-13 school year by the Falvey family. The program is part of a non-profit that targets children eligible for free and reduced price lunches. High-risk children are provided with kid-friendly food for the weekend. \$100 per child provides weekend supplemental food for the academic year. The program provided food support to 50 Keet Goshi Heen students the first year, and was expanded to Baranof Elementary, and 56 total students (43 at Keet and 13 at Baranoff) in 2013-14 school year.

So What?

Children who are nourished over the weekends are more likely to show up ready to learn on Monday morning. Program evaluation has shown improvement in test scores, reduction in behavioral issues and improved school attendance.

What Next?

Is it possible for Sitka through charitable donations or other giving to expand the program to meet all the need in Sitka? How do we define this need? How do we overcome the stigma of accepting supplemental food? How do we work to increase healthier foods in the packs given their heftier pricetag?



Sitka Sentinel

FOOD PRODUCTION IN SITKA

What?

The number of food producers in Sitka—especially small scale growers—is increasing. The fish and seafood industry seems to be steady, with three large producer operations and two steady retailers. It’s harder to grasp what’s happening at the household level in terms of gardens and backyard animal husbandry.

So What?

If Sitka is to move toward a more resilient food system, we need to expand the number of growers and food processors. For example, we currently do not have a USDA approved slaughtering facility which makes moving into animal husbandry challenging on anything but a household level. Additionally, if we are going to increase local foods in our school and senior programs, we will need to embrace school and senior center-based gardens. These food-focused endeavours will require capital, education and technical support to succeed.

What Next?

What else could Sitka undertake to increase our food resiliency? Here’s what Sitkans who attended the inaugural Food Summit suggested:

1. Encourage the Sitka School District and Sitka Fine Arts camp to incorporate gardens in their green spaces.
2. Encourage SAFV to use its property for a community garden.
3. Advocate for use of public green spaces especially those accessed by foot to be used for food production activities.
4. Develop a Food Bank garden at Salvation Army for their use.
5. Educate/encourage commercial fishermen to pursue permits that allow them to sell direct to consumers from the dock using web-based apps or social media to connect them to markets.



xlinepix



Sitka Local Foods Network

Community Food Production

Focus Group Findings

Eight local producers met for a focus group to discuss community food production, specifically ways to improve Sitka systems to ensure that every household gets the foods they require and in the quantities that they need. Changes in food production resources noted include an increased number of personal gardens, an increase in regulations and expenses and more food being imported while more seafood is being exported. The group noted that major barriers to making the Sitka food system successful included high costs, lack of access to gardening such as land, knowledge and supplies, and media and government subsidies to make food cheap. They were concerned about the lack of local political support and note individuals and organizations addressing improvement and our informal barter system to take care of each other.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Sitka Community Food Assessment Indicators Report is the result of the focused, hard work of a small dedicated group of current and former Sitkans. These tireless volunteers truly carried the food security torch this last year. They include Abby Long (VISTA Volunteer), Andrianna Natsoulas, Caitlin Blaisdell (AmeriCorps Volunteer), Carole Knuth, Carolyn Servid, Clara Gray, Courtney Bobsin (SCS Jesuit Volunteer), Garrett Bauer (AmeriCorps Volunteer), Jean Frank, Kerry MacLane, Sabrina Cimerol (AmeriCorps Volunteer), Renae Mathson, Lauren Havens (AmeriCorps Volunteer), Marjorie Hennessy, Peter Bradley, Sherie Mayo, Tracy Gagnon, Lauren Fetzer, Walleen Whitson, Christine Davenport, and Charles Bingham. Additionally, we want to thank the following organizations for their collaborative spirit as they supported the project by providing time for many of the aforementioned volunteers to participate:

- Alaska Sustainable Fisheries Trust
- Sitka Community Schools
- Island Institute
- Sitka Conservation Society
- SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium

We'd also like to thank the following individuals and organizations for assisting us with getting our hands on Sitka specific data or with other features of Sitka's food assessment: Philip Loring with the UAF Cross-Cultural Studies Center; Bret Luick with UAF Cooperative Extension Service; Philip Mooney, Eric Conradt, Troy Tydingco, and Karin McCoy with the Alaska Department of Fish & Game; Terry Suminski with the US Forest Service; Samia Savell with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service; Georgina Castillo with the USDA Food and Nutrition Service; Tim Homan with the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services; Major Evadne Wright with the Sitka Salvation Army, and the Sitka Tribe of Alaska. And thanks to Sara Beaver-Fujioka with SEARHC's Planning Department for consultation on the layout of the data charts.

To ground-truth the twenty-nine food assessment indicators, we undertook the creation of a first ever Sitka Food Summit on November 14, 2013. We are in deep gratitude to our sponsors: Alaskans Own, Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association, SEARHC's Diabetes Prevention and Community Transformation programs, Sitka Community Hospital, Sitka Local Foods Network, and the Southeast Alaska Soil and Water Conservation District. We also want to thank our table hosts Peter Bradley, Jasmine Shaw, Martha Pearson and Lauren Havens, as well as our seasoned moderator, Mollie Kabler.

And finally, we need to thank the Sitka Health Summit for creating an avenue for this type of public health work to take seed and bear fruit.