Tribal Food Security & Conservation Districts

Why This Matters

- Tribal food security is tied to land stewardship, conservation, and self-determination
- Alaska Tribal communities face unique geographic, climate, and infrastructure barriers
- Tribal Conservation Districts play a key role in aligning food systems with conservation goals
- USDA funding can support with planning tools and technical assistance to improve food security

Workshop Goal

- Equip Tribal Conservation Districts with examples of food security infrastructure, equipment, and facilities and related challenges opportunities

Alaska Tribal Food Security Context

- **Challenges Tribal Communities Face**
- Remote access and high cost of imported food
- Short growing seasons and climate variability
- Limited processing, storage, and preservation infrastructure
- Workforce and capacity constraints
- Difficulty meeting standard USDA eligibility or match requirements
- **Opportunity**
- Funding opportunities can reduce vulnerability and increase resilience

Why USDA Programs Ma

USDA Can Support Food Security Through

- Technical Assistance with conservation plans
  - Food security (processing, storage)
  - Equipment (production, processing, preservation)
- Technology (climate control, monitoring, energy efficiency)
- Conservation-aligned food production
- Community-wide benefit projects

Key Point

- Many food security projects are eligible when framed through conservation, resilience, and access

Core Community Food Infrastructure Needs

Frequently Requested & High-Impact

- Commercial kitchens
- Mobile or regional slaughter units
- High tunnels
- Greenhouses (including arctic-adapted systems)
- Food preservation infrastructure:
  - Walk-in freezers
  - Dehydration
  - Canning
  - Smokehouse

Note

- These projects often serve multiple purposes: food access, training, culture, and economic opportunity

Innovation in Practice: Knik Tribe Commercial Kitchen

What Worked

- Commercial kitchen significantly improved food security
- Supported cultural nights and community meals
- Enabled local food preparation and preservation

The Challenge

- Kitchen located within a charter school
- Required extensive coordination and agreements
- Severe limitations on supporting cultural activities

Lesson Learned

- Even successful projects can create constraints when facilities are not fully community-controlled

Additional Tribal Food Security Investments

Often Overlooked but Highly Eligible

- Community root cellars / cold storage
- Fish processing and flash-freezing facilities
- Community smokehouses
- Seed-saving facilities and storage
- Composting and soil-building systems
- Irrigation and water access improvements
- Renewable energy for food facilities

Why This Matters

- These investments strengthen local food systems without long-term operational funding

Equipment & Technology That Expand Capacity

Scalable Tools for Remote Communities

- Hydroponic and aquaponic systems
- Climate-controlled growing systems
- Remote monitoring (temperature, humidity, energy)
- Small-scale food processing equipment
- Packaging and labeling equipment
- Cold-chain logistics:
  - Insulated transport
  - Refrigerated trailers

Outcome

- Technology reduces labor strain and improves reliability in remote locations

Cultural & Subsistence Food Support

Eligible When Framed As

- Food security
- Conservation and stewardship
- Climate adaptation
- Community resilience

Examples

- Community freezers for shared harvest
- Facilities for fish, game, and berry processing
- Equipment for traditional harvesting
- Spaces for youth training and intergenerational knowledge transfer

Aligning Projects With USDA Eligibility

Successful Applications Often

- Demonstrate community-wide benefit
- Tie food production to conservation outcomes
- Address climate resilience
- Focus on infrastructure or equipment
- Show sustainability beyond the grant

Tip

- Facilities and equipment are often easier to fund than ongoing operations

Role of Tribal Conservation Districts

Why TCDs Are Critical

- Trusted local governance
- Long-term land and resource stewardship
- Ability to convene partners
- Natural alignment between conservation and food systems

Result

- TCDs can serve as anchors for regional food infrastructure

Building Tribal Food Sovereignty

Key Takeaways

- Food infrastructure and building technical capacity
- Tribal-led solutions are the most effective
- USDA funding can unlock long-term resilience
- Conservation Districts are well-positioned to lead

Next Step

- Identify priority infrastructure and align it with conservation and community benefit

Food Security in Tyonek

Tyonek Grown

est. 2012

1+ acre Community Garden

- Average annual production of 1436 pounds
- Weekly farmer's market
- Two NRCS-funded High Tunnels
- Drip irrigation
- Solar power
- Community garden beds

Hydroponics

- 1 large deep water culture system for ~96 plants
- 3 hydroponic towers
- Curriculum with Tebughna School
- Supplies school snack and meal programs

Youth Employment & Education

- 5-6 youth employed annually
- Tebughna School seed starting
- Youth intern training in Palmer
- Potato Harvest
- Harvest Party

Tyonek Gather

- Weekly food distribution of orders through the online marketplace
- Community-wide distributions of meat and storage crops
- Food preservation workshops

Food Security & Community Agriculture

Challenges

- Limited cold storage availability
- Vulnerable to inflated pricing without long-term subsidy options
- Limited access to supplies / transportation for building cold storage infrastructure, ex. personal use freezers, repair equipment and parts, building materials
- No grocery store in Tyonek
  - Limited access to fresh/perishable foods during the winter
  - Limited transportation routes for food procurement/distribution
  - Limited space to store bulk quantities of dry goods

Projects

- Rebuild walk-in freezer in Tyonek
- Tyonek Grown community garden and hydroponics
- Tyonek Gather community-wide food distributions
- Use of LFPA funds to buy Salmon from Tyonek Fisherman and re-distribute fish back to Tyonek residents
- Food System Assessment
- Food preservation trainings with the UAF Cooperative Extension Program Agents

TYONEK GATHER

$433,080 of minimally processed food distributed

$116,736 paid to local fishermen

Approx. $50,000 in Tyonek Grown produce during 2025

Community distributions of beef, chicken, cod, bison and storage crops.

Upcoming distributions of silver salmon and bison

Weekly distributions of food orders placed online including:

- Milk and yogurt
- Pork cuts, ground beef and chicken
- Barley flour
- Honey
- Birch Syrup

2772 lbs. of produce harvested from the Tyonek Garden!

TYONEK GATHER

- Funded by USDA **Local Food Purchasing Assistance (LFPA)** "Plus" grant subaward to TTCD from NVT and a USDA **Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP)** grant
- Goal of increasing distribution of **minimally-processed local and regional** foods at no cost to community members
- Opportunity to coordinate with regional producers to establish **continued access** to a **wider variety of Alaskan-grown foods**
- Offers supplies and technical assistance to local food producers
- Funds Food System Assessments for Tyonek community and broader community of Tyonek Shareholders living elsewhere in Alaska

2025 FISH FLIGHT

- 38 of 55 households chose to receive fish
- Worked with fishermen to determine price per fish
- Purchased a total of 2,432 silver salmon from local Tyonek fishermen
  - 304 fish/permit from 8 permits
- Chartered a flight to transport fish from Tyonek to Kenai for processing, trucked fish back to Anchorage for cold storage
- 5700lbs of frozen fillets to be distributed back to households

What is a Food System Assessment?

- Designed to identify **gaps and barriers** in a local or regional food system
- Inform recommendations for **planning, policy, and programming**
- Analyzes the food system holistically looking at **consumer trends** and **food security**, as well as **supply chain, agricultural production, distribution channels, storage, processing, food cost volatility, nutrition,** and **waste**
- Collect and interpret data on multiple levels
- **Phase 2: Provide stakeholders with decision-making power**

ESHELTON@TTCD.ORG
ELUJAN@TTCD.ORG