INTRODUCTION TO FOOD SECURITY AND LIFEWAYS AMONG ALASKA NATIVE PEOPLES

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This special section of the *Alaska Journal of Anthropology* emerges from papers presented at the 50th Alaska Anthropological Association annual meeting session, "Food Security and Food Traditions among Alaska Native Peoples," held in Anchorage (Koskey and Kugo 2023). This was preceded by a similar panel, "Cooperative Research on Food Security and Food Traditions among Indigenous Peoples in Alaska," at the 2022 American Anthropological Association annual convention in Seattle, Washington (Koskey 2022; Kugo 2022). The presenters included social scientists, Indigenous scholars, and local historians, who shared how Alaska Native peoples have maintained their food security and lifeways in response to the challenges of climate and socioeconomic change. As described by the authors of these papers, food security among Alaska Natives involves sharing local practices of harvesting food; understanding the accessibility of local animals, fish, and plants and the challenges of accessibility under state and federal regulations; adapting to climate change; and comprehending and maintaining the spiritual and physical relationships between humans and animals, as well as between the living and spiritual worlds.

At the 1996 World Summit on Food Security, the notion of food security was defined to consist of four main dimensions: physical availability of food (production and supply), economic and physical access to food (at the international level), food utilization/adequacy (nutritional status/anthropometric measurement), and the stability of the other three dimensions over time such as weather, unemployment, and/or economic crises (Food and Agriculture Organization 2008). This statement of food security concerns conditions of physical and mental health, malnutrition, hunger, and poverty as reflections of the success or failure of the international industrial agricultural system.

By comparison, Indigenous peoples and rural communities understand their locally harvested meat, fish, and plants as integral parts of their lifeways, and the practice of these food traditions continues to fulfill larger socio-spiritual obligations that reflect notions of relationships with the plant and animal sources of food. These are understood in terms of ethics and responsibilities that are central to maintaining proper reciprocal relationships and, by extension, community well-being. Food lifeways among Alaska Native people support health physically, mentally, socially, spiritually, and ecologically (Gerlach and Loring 2013).

Indigenous food systems are inherently related to people, place, and culture, as well as to economic, physical, social, and mental health; colonial histories; and changes in environment and government (Burgess 2017; Whyte 2017). Cultural diversity is a common condition for remote sub-Arctic and Arctic communities because the people must focus on the harvest of locally accessible marine and land animals and plants according to the seasons. Burgess (2017) also points out that the declining population of Indigenous language speakers weakens the capacity to share practical skills across generations, and this threatens local food security and food sovereignty. Food security and sovereignty (the right to culturally appropriate food) is intertwined with Alaska Native ways of life and maintaining spiritual and physical well-being. Thus, outsider researchers must learn about Indigenous food lifeways and notions of food security/sovereignty from local perspectives in their regions, rather than using generalized terms of food security.

The Inuit Circumpolar Council Alaska (2022:17) notes that food sovereignty and food security is far beyond "resource management" because marine and land animals, birds, and plants have worth and cultural relevance far beyond their material values to the Inuit who live in the Arctic. Government resource managers call the hunting and fishing activities "subsistence," but this does not include the multidimensional aspects of society, economics, and spirituality, among other cultural concerns, within Indigenous notions of food security. These and other topics are addressed by the writers in this special section of this issue, which demonstrates the cultural diversity in notions of Arctic food security and how local Indigenous residents have observed, experienced, and adapted through culture to climatic changes affecting local harvests of meat, fish, and plants.

Yup'ik educator Theresa Arevgaq John writes about her personal experience on food security and women's roles in her hometown, Toksook Bay (*Nunakauyak*), on Nelson Island along the coast of the Bering Sea. She learned how to harvest fish and other food sources from her mother and grandmother and recognized the gender roles between men and women. John's experience exemplifies the relationships between animals, people, landscape, and spiritual beings. She describes how the Yup'ik seal party, *uqiiquryaraq*, has modernized during her lifetime by sharing store-bought goods, and she explains how sharing is an important part of community well-being.

The article by Forest Haven focuses on organized efforts by Alaska Native people to protect traditional food resources. It draws attention to the inadequacies of state management policies, which are evaluated through a discussion of the rhetorical strategies employed by settler urban hunters and fishers in the 1970s and 1980s to transform Native traditional food practices into "subsistence," while also working to extend those rights to all Alaskans. Haven explains how rhetorical strategies shape how "subsistence" is currently managed, regulated, and understood within contexts of settler efforts to delegitimize Native claims to subsistence—and thus to sovereignty—by appealing to multiculturalist ideologies, utilizing frameworks of White settler loss, and employing rhetoric that conflates Alaska Native and settler belonging.

Alzred Steve Oomittuk's essay originated from his dialogue with the coeditors Michael Koskey and Yoko Kugo. Oomittuk is a local historian in *Tikiġaq* (Point Hope), Alaska. He shared with us when we visited him in *Tikiġaq* (and in phone visits) his experiences growing up and living in *Tikiġaq*, and how the *Tikiġaqmiut* food lifeways have changed. He agreed that he would like to contribute to the conference session and the publication to share his perspectives with anthropologists, the audience, and readers. His paper emphasizes that continuing their whaling practice has enabled *Tikiġaqmiut* food lifeways to thrive even though they have been challenged by culture and climate change resulting from colonialism and the associated capitalist economy. Oomittuk talks about food security as a part of everyday life, and he uses his life experience as an example. By sharing his story in this section, he continues to guide Native youth and academics alike with the local history and oral traditions of *Tikiġaq*.

Many Point Hope residents recognize Shingo Takazawa, a Japanese man, as a member of *Tikiġaq*. He has been visiting Point Hope during the whaling season for more than 25 years, and he has observed and participated in various local activities with his adoptive *Tikiġaq* family. His paper consists of many photographs that show the changes in whaling activities over the years of his experiences in *Tikiġaq*, demonstrating how an outsider sees another culture and how he became familiar with *Tikiġaq* customs and skills. Whaling technology, including the use and maintenance of *umiat* (whaleboats), weapons, and communication devices have changed over the last two decades of the twenty-first century. Takazawa captures and describes these events and changes from his perspective.

In the final article, Michael Koskey and Yoko Kugo report on their project investigating the study of underground food storage traditions in four Arctic and sub-Arctic communities in Alaska. The project team consisted of natural, social, and Indigenous scientists and partnering communities. A community-based research approach was used (Miller et al. 2013; Sahota 2010) to document local knowledge and observations of the landscape related to underground food storage traditions and to learn local practices from insider perspectives. Using a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach, we partnered with study communities, hiring local assistants who were recommended by the local governments and reviewing and revising some questions with them that are relevant from insider perspectives. The study shows that the food lifeways and current uses of underground food storage vary by region, but partner communities expressed interest in continuing to use underground caches to store locally harvested meat and continue the practice of meat fermentation. For example, Oomittuk commented that the *Tikiġaqmiut* food represents his cultural identity: "Our food is who we are." The authors have smelled and tasted these fresh, frozen, and fermented foods in partnering communities and heard similar comments about how eating their local, Native food helps people to continue to cherish their cultural connection to the land—a connection that is understood as being interdependent. Hunting and harvesting practices, sharing oral instructions through the local, Indigenous language, and treating animals and spiritual beings in respectful ways according to locally defined and understood ethics helps hunters obtain the animals that connect the people to the lands, waters, and their inhabitants, to achieve and maintain local food security with accompanying conditions for food sovereignty.

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