

# 2020 Hoonah Food System Assessment

## Recommendations Summary



Photo credits: Ian Johnson, Hoonah Indian Association; Bethany Goodrich, Sitka Conservation Society; Jennifer Nu, Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition; all, Sustainable Southeast Partnership

*Prepared by:*

**Jennifer Nu**

Sustainable Southeast Partnership

Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition

Local Foods Program

1107 W. 8<sup>th</sup> St.

Juneau, AK 99801

(907) 205-4028

<https://www.alaskawatershedcoalition.org/>



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## Executive Summary

The Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition (SAWC) and the Sustainable Southeast Partnership (SSP) collaborated with the Hoonah Stewardship Council (HSC) and the Hoonah Indian Association (HIA) to initiate a targeted community food system assessment for Hoonah in the winter of 2019 and spring 2020. The assessment aimed to gather specific information about prioritized sectors of Hoonah's food system as identified by the Hoonah Stewardship Council. The assessment gathered information using a local producer survey, a retailer survey, and a community survey. This report summarizes findings from these surveys alongside other relevant information about Hoonah's food system to provide an overview of the community's food system. This report also includes recommendations for priority projects, programming, and next steps.

**This report summary includes only recommendations for priority projects, programming, and next steps. Detailed findings can be found in a comprehensive report called the *2020 Hoonah Food System Assessment*.**

While projects for physical infrastructure are often seen as a solution to support local food systems, it is important to remember that the key to success and longevity of these projects is developing human capacity. Investing in education and program development for capacity-building, training for community members and youth will provide benefits that will yield returns for many generations to come. Outreach to increase awareness of the importance of local food system work and appreciation for those who work in these sectors will also be key to ensuring long-term support and prioritization of the local food system.

This assessment can be used by community leaders to identify and advance current local food priorities, support planning and grant proposals for future projects, and take further steps to gather feedback from diverse community members in order to better inform programming to support a local food system that is integrated with economic development, regenerative tourism, natural resource stewardship, and renewable energy initiatives in the community.

The project was supported by funding from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Local Foods Promotion Program.

## Agricultural Potential

**RECOMMENDATION:** Agricultural efforts to grow domesticated vegetables and fruits in Hoonah should take place in already disturbed and developed flat areas close to town or in homestead areas such as the Game Creek community.

### Next steps:

- Increase vegetable production with season extenders and small-scale high-intensity outdoor systems requires soil and soil amendments.
- Make soil and soil amendments from locally-sourced waste materials is highly recommended to save money on shipping and to provide other community benefits.

## Fish Waste into Compost

**RECOMMENDATION:** Invest in and develop a commercial composting operation that uses timber waste and commercial fishing waste.

### Next steps:

- Learn about similar composting operations that took place at Kake Tribal Corporation and that are currently taking place at Petersburg Indian Association. Fish composting operations in Kodiak and Anchor Point in Southcentral Alaska are examples of successful fish composting operations. Partners could include Hoonah Indian Association, City of Hoonah, Huna Totem Corporation, and the Sealaska Corporation.
- Inventory quantity of fish waste produced at the cold storage, commercial/sports fishing operations, and households interested in diverting fish waste.
- Inventory wood waste

### Resources needed:

- *Infrastructure:* Land, equipment for grinding wood waste, covered facility to store compost in stages of decay, electrified fence to keep out bears and land-based pests, vehicles for transporting fish and wood waste
- *People:* project coordinator, training for management and staff, education and outreach to residents, students and business staff.

### Community benefits:

- Produce local soil and soil amendments for local food production
- Conserve landfill space
- The cold storage reduces the costs of grinding and the environmental monitoring required to monitor water quality and ecological impacts of the waste on the ocean and shoreline ecosystem.

- Job creation and/or small composting-related businesses that would be considered essential during a pandemic or recession due to the consistent need for solid waste disposal services.
- Potential to export soil amendment product to customers in Juneau and other markets in Canada and northern Alaska.

## Local Soil and Soil Amendments

**RECOMMENDATION: Plan and implement a municipal composting program** to collect household food scraps and food waste from institutions such as the school, senior center, Icy Strait lodge, grocery store, and restaurants. Food waste from cruise ships and visitor boats can also be collected.

### Next steps:

- Conduct waste stream analysis that includes the grocery store, food service providers, additional restaurants, and households to gather additional information on compostable scrap from Hoonah's waste stream
- Attend or organize trainings/community presentations with Gustavus's municipal composting program, which has been in operation for over a decade
- Design a pilot project that would include training for participating institutions and households, training for food scrap collectors, building of a small covered facility protected from bears, and an evaluation plan for measuring cost-benefits, landfill diversion, compost yield, and resident support
- Invite restaurant owners, including Icy Strait Lodge, grocery store owners, including Hoonah Trading Company, and residents to provide input on the pilot design

### Resources needed:

- *Infrastructure:* Land, equipment for grinding wood waste, covered facility to store compost in stages of decay, electrified fence to keep out bears and land-based pests, vehicles for transporting food scraps
- *People:* project coordinator, training for management and staff, education and outreach to residents, students and business staff

### Community benefits:

- Produce local soil and soil amendments for local food production (gardeners, commercial growers, Tlingit potato project)
- Conserve landfill space
- Reduce cold storage costs of grinding and annual DEC-mandated inspection/audit of fish waste released into the water
- Foster job creation and/or small composting-related businesses that are essential during a pandemic or recession-proof since solid waste services are always needed.

## Supporting Local Food Producers

### Next steps:

- Diversify Hoonah's supply chain and increase the amount of local foods sold at Hoonah Trading Company.
- Set up contract to sell local seafood from Hoonah Cold storage and set up contracts with direct marketers and regional seafood companies in other Southeast Alaska communities
- Collaborate with community groups to provide input for and participate in a pilot municipal composting program
- Set up opportunities for youth to set up farm stands for foods that they grow in the community garden or at the school

### Resources needed:

- *People:* Store managers authorize dedicated staff time for the store to be involved in community food efforts

### Community benefits:

- Reduce vulnerability of Hoonah's supply chain
- Provide a precedent for purchasing from local producers as an incentive for commercial growers in Hoonah and around Southeast Alaska
- Create a clear opportunity for the grocery store to sell local foods for local producers

## Tlingit Potato Project Potential

**RECOMMENDATION: Maximize local agriculture potential, develop educational programming to revive and expand planting Tlingit and Haida heritage potato cultivars in home gardens, public lands, and traditional fish camp sites.**

### Next steps:

- Store seed potatoes from the 2020 harvest
- Plan and coordinate educational programming for fall/spring 2021.
- Search for existing curriculum on Tlingit potatoes from Goldbelt Heritage and other educational institutions. Teach lessons at the school about the cultural history and biology of Tlingit potatoes using existing curriculum
- Research and map traditional Tlingit potato gardens in and around Hoonah
- Distribute video and handouts from Sitka Tribe of Alaska and the US Forest Service's Tlingit potato planting 2020. Work with local Tlingit potato growers and elders to create additional educational materials such as videos and brochures.
- Identify places to plant the Tlingit potato in people's gardens, public spaces, historical areas
- Prepare these areas using seaweed, compost, coffee grounds, fish heads, and other amendments.
- Coordinate seed distribution and planting in spring 2021.
- Monitor the yield from each of the plots as a way to generate data on yields to support further support for the initiative.
- Share information with the community on storing potatoes for winter
- Build larger community root cellar or storage facility to help store seed potatoes for following year. Education on long-term root storage.

### Resources needed:

- *People:* Staffing for a community Tlingit potato program coordinator
- *People:* Transportation support to traditional Tlingit potato growing areas, potentially accessible only via motorboat/canoe.
- *Materials:* Supplies for printing educational materials, tools for gardening, gathering soil amendments, constructing garden beds, root cellar

### Community benefits:

- Revitalize and honor a traditional food, and acknowledging the direct connection to those who have preserved this practice
- Reconnect to places where Tlingit potatoes were traditionally grown, such as fish camps, old longhouse sites, provides an opportunity to heal and engage in food sovereignty practices
- Increase local food production and reduce dependence on vulnerable food supply chain
- Increase knowledge and skills for self-reliance

- Increase pride in ancestral knowledge, skills, resilience, foods
- An opportunity for youth and adults to learn and spend time together- strengthening connections within the community
- Long-term investment in capacity and infrastructure for local food production

## Commercial Greenhouse Recommendations

### Next steps

- A design for a biomass-heating system has been approved for Hoonah. A commercial greenhouse could be incorporated into the design for this system.
- Site selection
- Design a commercial greenhouse that is energy efficient
- Determine partnership/ownership structure

### Resources needed

- Hire a greenhouse coordinator for construction, programming, outreach
- Consult with Rob Bishop & Alaska Village Initiatives for training opportunities
- Offer training opportunities for greenhouse operators
- Funding for construction
- Business plan for economic sustainability
- Marketing and distribution of greenhouse produce

### Community benefits

- Increased local food production
- Employment and business opportunity for local entrepreneurs
- Healthy, fresh food available year-round to residents, retailers
- Potential for exporting food to Juneau to increase profitability
- Increase security of food supply chain by localizing it

## Community Gardens Recommendations

### Next steps

- Local vegetable production program- integrate growing vegetables with the school curriculum and school lunches. Pacific High School in Sitka and the school in Haines are strong models for incorporating local foods and hands-on learning into the educational curriculum.
- “Immunity gardens” or “victory gardens” and high tunnels- another program could also involve constructing and maintaining vegetable gardens throughout the community at places that provide meals, such as the senior center, Icy Strait Lodge, other restaurants. Outreach to local residents who want to host these gardens on their property, such as the local sawmill
- Coordinate local gardening workshops and recruit long-time gardeners and producers such as Rob Bishop to provide basic training as well as ongoing mentorship on growing vegetables, maintaining fruit trees, and other topics related to farming. A community garden conference or a series of instructional videos released at appropriate times on social media for Hoonah residents

- Coordinate with Rob Bishop and others at Game Creek for an apprentice program where locals can learn to garden by interning or volunteering on the farm.

### **Resources needed**

- *Financial:* Hoonah City Schools could apply for a Farm-to-School grant to support staffing to coordinate building infrastructure and programming that involves youth and community members
- *People:* Hire a program coordinator. Staff time to hire locals to build and maintain vegetable gardens. It can be part of vocational training, community service programming, or other funding source
- *Financial:* Compensation for garden instructors, supplies, and arrangements for logistics and transportation for community members to travel back and forth between Game Creek and town

### **Community benefits**

- Increased local food production available to residents, programs, retailers
- Reduce vulnerabilities to the food system caused by supply chain failures and transportation disruptions.
- Diversify local workforce skillset in an essential services sector – food production, processing, and storage. Protect from economic vulnerabilities caused by disruptions in tourism sector
- Increase the amount of healthy food available to local residents

## **Wild Food Resources Recommendations**

### **Next steps**

- Traditional food education in school, after school, summer harvesting workshops, and harvesting field trips to gather food for events, donating, school, etc.
- Traditional food processing, storage, and distribution- encourage harvesters to put away extra for those in need and to institutional food service providers. Provide cold and dry storage to receive and/or donate directly to the senior center, food pantries, school.
- Connect youth to traditional harvesters and encourage experienced harvesters to mentor and teach youth.
- Research programs such as the Sitka Tribe of Alaska's Traditional Food Program, and the Hunter Support program at Maniilaq Association in Kotzebue.  
<https://www.maniilaq.org/siglauq/>
- Compile guidelines for ethical wild harvesting based on Hoonah's traditional harvesters, including stories, photos, and archived information from Huna Heritage Foundation.
- Organize traditional plants as food and medicine gatherings and workshops throughout the spring and summer to encourage local and regional plant harvesters to share their knowledge and inspire a new generation of respectful plant harvesters of all ages.
- Hire community members who are experts with traditional plant knowledge, hunting,

fishing, and gardening as para-educators to teach and mentor students through project-based learning.

- Hire local intern to reprint the “Root, Stem, and Leaf: Wild Vegetables of Southeast Alaska,” book written by Glen Ray with the help of Carol Williams and other Hoonah elders. Share copies of this local resource to community members.

#### **Resources needed**

- *People*: Hire a traditional foods program coordinator to coordinate the projects above.
- *People*: Transportation support for traditional harvesting, hunting, fishing field trips in remote areas to reduce harvesting pressure close to town for education and also for those who are harvesting for community emergency food supplies. These costs include maintenance, fuel, and other supplies.
- *Materials*: Supplies for processing wild harvests for storage and distribution to local institutions such as the senior center, school
- *Infrastructure/equipment*: cold storage, infrastructure such as USDA certified kitchen, and staffing for processing the hunter’s catch. Use commercial kitchens that are currently being underutilized such as the senior center and the school.

#### **Community benefits**

- Multiple generations of community members have the awareness, knowledge, and skills to participate in the local food economy.
- Harvesting, processing, sharing, and eating local plants and other subsistence foods becomes part of everyday life for all adults and youth.
- Social, mental, emotional, psychological benefits of participating in purposeful cultural food activities.

## Closing

Responses to the assessment's surveys suggest that despite access to subsistence resources, most individuals in Hoonah are highly dependent on the grocery store and outside shipments of food to meet their household food needs. The survey highlights a need to increase opportunities for the community to engage in local food activities.

These include programs to promote education and support for harvesting traditional foods, setting up infrastructure and vocational training to grow local produce in gardens, farms, greenhouses, and high tunnels, and developing supply chains that connect these local producers (growers and harvesters) to retailers (institutions, stores, restaurants).

One of Hoonah's greatest strengths is the cultural connection that Hoonah's Tlingit leadership continue to cultivate for all residents through school programs, culture camps, engaging in subsistence activities, valuing their elders, and sharing traditional foods with each other. It is highly recommended that future projects recognize the mutually beneficial aspects of revitalizing cultural knowledge, practices, and values in order to also support resilient community food systems.

The reduction in cruise ship visitors for the 2020 season and potentially future seasons negatively impacts tourism-related livelihoods, such as lodge owners, restaurants, tour guides, gift shops, and excursion businesses. Because food is essential, food-related services are essential in emergency situations such as a pandemic, it is critical for the community's organizations to collectively prioritize and build capacity for a local food economy. This includes vocational training in local food growing, wild food harvesting, processing, storing, and distribution activities will contribute to Hoonah's food security and local economy. Capacity building necessarily includes investments in infrastructure, vocational training, and encouragement for community members to actively participate in and increase local food production and harvesting activities that are part of both the cash and subsistence economy.

This targeted food assessment provides a snapshot of targeted components of Hoonah's food system. The findings and recommendations provide a starting point for immediate action and direction for medium and long-term planning, capacity building, and policy development. The Hoonah Stewardship Council is well-poised to take on this role since its members derive from diverse entities in the community and because inspiring stewardship of natural resources is an integral component of Hoonah's local food system.

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