

SERVING TRADITIONAL FOODS AT HEAD START CENTERS

For centuries, the Alaska Native people have lived off the land by hunting and gathering. These activities provide good nutrition, exercise, affordable food, and preserve cultural heritage. Traditional foods are natural, do not contain additives or preservatives, and are a food source of many minerals and vitamins. For these reasons, it makes sense that Alaska Native communities want to serve traditional foods at the local Head Start.

The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and the Department of Education and Early Development allow the use of traditional foods in Head Start when DEC Alaska Food Code is followed. The Code eliminates the option of serving some traditional foods that pose too great a food safety risk. However, there are many traditional foods Head Starts can serve. Food service staff will need to become familiar with the DEC Alaska Food Code regulations before using any traditional foods or local foods.

Head Starts interested in serving traditional foods to their children will need to work with their parents, food service staff, local fisherman, hunters, and gathers to achieve regular service of traditional foods.

A community meeting about the donation of traditional foods to the Head Start will increase interest and knowledge about donating. The meeting should include information on what foods can and cannot be donated. Guidance should be clear about the harvest of the animal including sanitation and butchering. Expectation regarding the transportation, refrigeration, and sanitation of the donation should be clear. Donation will become more regular and more useful, if the hunters, fisherman, and gathers are clear on the expectations for donated foods.

Requirements for Traditional Foods in Institutions and Non-Profit Programs

Traditional wild game meat, seafood, plants, and other food may be donated to some institutions and non-profit programs. Institutions and non-profit programs for this purpose are defined as residential child care facilities licensed by Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, school lunch programs and senior meal programs.

The following is a description of the requirements that should be followed when receiving and using traditional wild game meat.

Receiving

Inspect the food when it is received to assure that it is whole, gutted, gilled, and in quarters or roasts. Make a reasonable determination that the animal was not diseased; that it was butchered, dressed and transported in a way to prevent contamination; that no undesirable spoilage or deterioration occurred, and that the food does not pose a significant health hazard or potential for human illness.

Further preparation or processing of traditional food must be done at a different time than the processing of other food in the establishment or done in a different space to prevent cross-contamination.

Cleaning and Sanitizing

After the traditional food is prepared or processed, surfaces and utensils used must be cleaned and sanitized.

Storage

All donated food is labeled with the name of the food and stored separately from other foods either in a separate refrigeration unit or a separate compartment.

Prohibited Foods

Because of the significant health hazards and the potential for human illness, food establishments are prohibited from serving the following foods:

The meat from fox, polar bear, bear, and walrus

Seal oil and whale oil, with or without meat

Fermented game meat, such as beaver tail, whale or seal flipper, and muktuk

Fermented seafood products, such as salmon eggs or fish

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