Sustainable Livestock Production Systems in Alaska: production practices and marketing

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Alaska Red Meat System
Alaska Red Meat System Discovery Conference

Goals:
Identify components and strategies necessary to define research priorities and develop programs in education and extension for sustainable livestock production in Alaska, specifically:

• Identify best practices that work - from the production of healthy meat to the health of the ecosystem.

• Identify barriers to sustainable red meat production - from farm to market issues and consumer attitudes, preference and choice.

• Identify how the university can work in collaborative ways to support the development of sustainable agriculture through research, education and extension.
There were 86 registered participants representing the following categories:

~ 35 producers (44%)
~ 9 livestock related businesses (11%)
~ 22 University personnel  (University 28%)
~ 7 students (8%)
~ 5 federal - 5 State Of Alaska employees – (Government agencies 12% - state and federal)
The workshop was divided into 3 sections:

- Production
- Processing and distribution
- Marketing, Retail and the Consumer

◊ Within each section a series of questions focused the discussion.

◊ Responses to the questions were captured on tablets and at the end of each section participants voted for the ideas they felt had the greatest potential to move Alaska’s livestock Industry forward.

◊ Responses from each table were collated and the top 3 responses from each table recorded. On day 2 the top responses to each of the questions were discussed again and voted on a second time.
PRODUCTION
What elements, resources and/or strategies are needed to develop a sustainable red meat system capable of feeding more Alaskans?
Education

1. In Alaska we need more site specific information on sustainable practices that will work under our northern conditions.
2. In general it was felt that Alaska’s livestock industry is best suited to grazing.

Affordable quality and quantity of feed

1. More research is needed on efficient production of local feeds – what crops are best suited to different regions.
2. More development of native forages is needed along with cultivating a diversity of feedstuffs and feed storage capacity.

Availability of land for agriculture

1. Alaska may be the largest state in the union but available agricultural land is at a premium.
2. Some government programs are contradictory, i.e. CRP takes land out of production while at same time other programs are attempting to expand land availability.
What kind of information or strategies would help livestock growers plan for and remain adaptable to social, economic and/or ecological change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Improve Communication</th>
<th>Demonstration Projects</th>
<th>Social Networking</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
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**Better communication between producers and the University**

1. Create an Advisory Group for red meat production
2. You Tube, social media, other internet media, radio and television as tools for communicating
3. Need to develop an Alaskan presence for sustainable agriculture through the internet and extension

**Research and demonstration of locally grown feed**

1. Grass roots workshops and ‘schools’ led by farmers and ranchers with proceeds back to participating teachers
2. Open door farms, on-farm mentoring
3. Producers need to see before and after effects of grazing strategies.
4. University needs to be more interactive with producers.

**More social networking & information on agriculture**

1. Education and outreach on the benefits of red meat for Alaskans
2. Customize e-Extension program for Alaska
3. Agricultural lifestyle and economics
What should we be doing to help recruit new farmers

- Youth Involvement: 80 votes
- Specialized Workshops: 80 votes
- On farm work and hire Alaskans: 36 votes
- Land disposals, incentives, venture capital: 57 votes
- Fair wages & health care: 20 votes
Youth Involvement
1. 4-H, FFA, other organized youth in agriculture activities
2. Alaska Agriculture Day
3. Agriculture education in schools

Specialized Workshops and Learning
1. How to raise livestock
2. Curriculum development
3. Hands-on programs using the Agriculture & Forestry Experiment Station

On farm work and hire Alaskans
1. Farm-work programs (through the state?)
2. Preference for hiring Alaskans
3. Internships

Land Disposals, incentives, venture capital
1. Small-scale Agriculture and homestead land disposals
2. Incentives - tax breaks, work to own, predator mitigation through control and reimbursement
3. Venture capital
PROCESSING
What kinds of processing infrastructure can cope most effectively in Alaska, considering the huge distances between farms and markets and the rising cost of fuel.
Regulatory
1. Review & revise transportation regulations of agricultural products
2. Improve policy and regulations on live animal importation and produce educational materials on how to import.
3. Use locally available species that don’t require importation

Isolated Communities
1. Investigate alternative ways of processing: community canning, drying, & smoking
2. Invest in storage facilities
3. Recycle waste locally i.e. fish waste into animal feed

Social Structures
1. User-operated slaughter facilities, cooperative effort for killing & cleaning & inspection
2. Distribution center & sale barn
3. Farmers’ cooperatives for timing production and scheduling slaughter

Mobile Facilities
1. Specialized mobile processing units i.e. for kill floor or for processing
2. Mobile processing facilities
3. Butchering/processing education
Given the highly seasonal nature of farming in Alaska, how can we avoid swamping limited processing resources while minimizing risks to farmers?

- can't swamp the processors: 44 votes
- Diversify: 75 votes
- Comparative slaughter charts: 43 votes
- Management strategies: 21 votes
**Will not swamp the processors**
Generally felt that there are not enough livestock producers in Alaska to swamp the processing facilities.

**Diversify**
Wild game harvest and livestock all arrive at the slaughter facility in the fall. Need to diversify livestock thus spreading out slaughter times.

**Comparative Slaughter Charts**
Set up charts for different species and slaughter times.

**Management Strategies**
Look into the potential for manipulating breeding/birthing times to shift slaughter from peak processing in the fall.
Marketing, Retail and the Consumer
What kinds of organizations of programs are best suited to help connect the farm to the consumer, institution, and/or the restaurant?

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<th>Option</th>
<th>Number of Votes</th>
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<td>One Website</td>
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<td>Beginning Farmer Information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intensive Marketing Program</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Farm Cooperatives</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alaska Grown</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buy Direct</td>
<td>58</td>
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**One Website**
A single internet source where businesses can post what they have available now or by date

**Beginning Farmer Information**
Produce a notebook/publication for the beginning farmer providing information on marketing and appropriate use of logos and marketing venues. This should include legal templates.

**Intensive Marketing Program**
Model a program after Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute designed specifically for marketing locally produced meat in-state.

**Farm co-operatives**
Cooperatives for collectively marketing locally produced meat

**Alaska Grown**
Make more use of the Alaska Grown logo and State marketing efforts

**Buy Direct**
Buy directly from the producer.
What are some marketing strategies to increase the consumption of locally produced meat and decrease our dependence on imported meat?

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<tr>
<th>Number of Votes</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
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<td>Better Labelling</td>
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<td>41</td>
<td>Producer Bonds</td>
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<td>42</td>
<td>Differentiate your Product</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>Support through local business</td>
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<td>Educate the Consumer</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Third Party Certification</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Alaska Livestock Marketing Institute</td>
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<td>Marketing studies</td>
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**Better Labeling**
Use pictures, story of family or the farm to create a profile and a personal touch.

**Producer Bonds**
Cultivate and support relationships formed between the producer and customer.

**Differentiate Your Product**
Consistent pricing is important as well as informing the consumer why your product may be more expensive.

**Support Through Local Business**
Encourage restaurants and stores to promote local providers by using and advertising locally produced meat.

**Educate the Consumer**
Need more promotion for the benefits of locally produced meat.
What are some advantages of locally produced meat that can be used for marketing?

- Supporting Local Economy: 49 votes
- Know Your Producer: 34 votes
- Health Advantages: 18 votes
- Fresher by Far: 30 votes
How have we used these data?

Holistic Grazing Planning and Development
Development of Livestock Associations
You Tube Videos