



Alaska Food Hub Policy Manual

(updated 2/7/22)

An Introduction to the Alaska Food Hub for Participating Produce Growers, Seafood Harvesters, Value-added Vendors, and Crafters

***Note:** This document is not meant to be a comprehensive work but rather an overview of some of the possibilities and considerations for growing a vibrant and sustainable regional market system. No one has all of the answers and there are no guarantees for success. The Alaska Food Hub has been developed with much thought and producer input that anticipates a lot of the issues that might evolve. We will work through unanticipated issues as they arise as best we can. The patience of all involved will be necessary to the success of the Alaska Food Hub.*

For the purposes of this document, the Alaska Food Hub will be referred to as “the Food Hub” and sellers as “Producers.”

NOTE: Alaska Food Hub Policy is subject to change, as the COVID19 situation and mandates are updated regularly. All vendors will be notified as soon as possible of any changes. Thank you for your patience and cooperation.

Cook Inletkeeper initiated the concept of the Kenai Peninsula Food Hub in early 2015. Through the funding of Local Foods Promotion Program, a two-year grant provided by the USDA, the Food Hub will open for business in April 2016. The Food Hub expanded operations into Anchorage, necessitating a new name. As of March 2018, the Food Hub was known as the Alaska Food Hub.

The purpose of this document is to share the vision of the Market steering committee, how the Food Hub will operate, and to define the rights and responsibilities of producer participants.

The goal of the Food Hub is to provide opportunities for Cook Inlet Watershed producers and consumers to connect in a way that will create benefit for both, as well as strengthen the local economies, increase food security, and reduce the carbon footprint created from importing food. In so doing so, the Food Hub will:

- Provide locally produced food and products direct from our producers, connecting producers to consumers
- Serve local consumers of all income levels
- Support sustainable, local, high quality agricultural practices
- Provide a network for the production and distribution of locally prepared foods and locally made non-food products
- Support an Alaska food system that in turn preserves the landscape, water, soil and air vital to a sustainable community

How the Food Hub Works: The Basics

1. The Alaska Food Hub strives to be a business that is financially viable, environmentally sustainable, and socially just.
2. Membership in the Hub is \$40 for producers and \$1-250 for consumers (sliding scale) annually, regardless if you made any sales during the previous year. Membership fees go toward expenses the Food Hub incurs in the administration, aggregation, and sales of the food. Examples of these expenses are staff time, advertising, and monthly web marketplace fees.
3. The Food Hub marks-up products sold 25% (18% for seafood and meats). While grocery stores typically double their cost of products to consumers, Food Hub producers set their own prices based on our 18-25% mark-up. *The Alaska Food Hub is a non-profit venture. The markup percentage will be re-evaluated annually based on the overall volume of the program and how close we are to breaking even. Our goal is to develop a sustainable pricing strategy that will be fair to producers.*
4. Volunteer and in-kind labor helps run the Hub and keeps overhead costs low. Please consider volunteering your time to help the cooperative grow and prosper.
5. Every member of the food hub is eligible to buy products from, and sell products to, every other member; as long as the producer meets the Food Hub's Producer Guidelines and has been approved as a vendor.

6. Producers are strongly encouraged to disclose the practices used to raise livestock/shellfish, harvest seafood, and grow crops to other members of the Food Hub. In this way consumer members can make informed purchasing decisions about producers and products offered. Full disclosure of growing, farming and production practices forms the basis of trust between the producer and consumer members of the cooperative.
7. Producers may only sell products they themselves have grown, processed, harvested or crafted. A producer may not buy wholesale from someone else and then retail the product through the Food Hub.
8. Producer members may only sell value-added products that they themselves make. Purchasing ingredients for value-added products is permitted. Value-added products must use as many ingredients as possible produced by the member, or purchased from Alaskan farmers. Simply changing the form in which the product is offered for sale, such as repackaging into a smaller size, does not add value and is not permitted.
9. Every producer member is responsible to know and follow all appropriate federal, state and local inspections, licenses, statutes and ordinances. Producers must follow all labeling and permitting procedures outlined in the Food Hub policy, and by federal, state, and local policy. The Alaska Food Hub does not take possession of products, but provides a sales platform, customer support, aggregation, and limited transportation.
10. Each completed order is a legally enforceable contract to pick up and pay for the products ordered, unless the products are damaged, broken, or undeliverable. Ordering windows will be pre-determined and publicized to all members.
11. Producers are responsible for dropping off product and picking up their orders during the times specified. Distribution location and time will be pre-determined and publicized to all members.
12. Customers are responsible for ensuring they receive all items ordered and for carefully checking their invoices. All product orders must be paid at the time of ordering by credit card; additional purchases, like Food Hub tote bags and membership fees may be paid onsite with credit card. Prompt payment is a condition of membership.

Remember:

Quality, honesty, professionalism and consistency are what will make customers happy and individual farmers successful. Successful farmers and satisfied customers will make the market successful for all. ***It all starts with YOU!!!***

Food Hub Operations, Policy and Terms of Service Handbook

Operations:

How does the Alaska Food Hub Work?

The Food Hub runs on a “shopping-cycle system,” meaning that product is available at set times each week and varies week-to-week according to season and availability.

Alaska Food Hub: Weekly Order Cycle



- Each week customers shop online:
 - 12pm Friday through 10pm Monday (All Locations)
 - All customers and producers receive a reminder email when the shopping cycle is open and when it closes.
- Customers enter a credit card for payment within their customer profile. This information is encrypted and stored on a third-party server. The card on file will be charged after all products are satisfactorily delivered, regardless if items are picked up or not – you did your part delivering and will be paid for all items delivered in satisfactory condition.
- At the close of the shopping cycle 10:00 PM on Monday, all producers who have received orders will receive an email detailing their order information.

- Producers prepare their products for delivery to:
 - **HOMER:** Homer United Methodist Church, 770 East End Road, between **10:30 am and 1:00 PM** on Wednesdays; *NOTE: we may implement scheduled deliveries throughout the COVID19 Pandemic; location may change should our demand outgrow our space*
 - **SOLDOTNA:** Soldotna Cook Inletkeeper Community Studio, 35911 Kenai Spur Hwy Ste 13 (near the Mattress Ranch), Soldotna between **2:00 and 4:00 PM** on Wednesday
 - **Please note:** Please separate orders by pick-up location for faster aggregation – we’re on a tight schedule and need to be as efficient as possible. *NOTE: it’s really helpful if you group a single customer’s products together, for quicker aggregation; we may require this should our demand outgrow our capacity for aggregation*

- Producers, with the help of volunteer/staff, will be responsible for aggregating their items at the drop site:

NOTE: these are pre-Covid19 procedures:

- Each customer will have designated area, with complete order list
- Producer will place ordered item(s) into each customers’ area, checking off each item on lists
- This process ensures product availability and limits the amount of time products are touched

NOTE: the current COVID19 Operational Procedures will be followed:

- Each customer will have designated container (ie. paper bag), with complete order list
- Producers will deliver all ordered items via wipeable, top covered, bins for disinfecting prior to entering the food hub aggregation site
 - Bins will be delivered at front of drop off location
 - Bins will be labeled properly, identifying location and customer for easy aggregation
 - Food Hub (FH) staff/volunteer should wipe down each bin with disinfectant
 - FH will bring disinfected bins into aggregation site, while producer waits outside for bins
 - FH will aggregate all items into customer orders
 - Once aggregation is complete, FH will return bins outside and call/communicate with vendor that they are ok to leave (if any items are missing, this will be discussed then)

- This process ensures product availability and limits the amount of time products are touched
- **No vendors are allowed inside the aggregation location**
- **Customers will not be allowed inside;** they come to entrance and give attendant their name; attendant will place order on table for pickup to ensure no contact is made

- Customers who have ordered will receive an email reminding them to pick-up their order, when and where

- Producers enter in new product by the **Friday, 12pm**, in preparation for the next shopping cycle and the process repeats!
 - Producers may add more items after the 12pm cut-off
 - They may alter quantities at any time during the cycle- if a product becomes unavailable and has already sold, please contact the Food Hub as soon as possible.

Food Hub Policy:

1. Communication Requirements

The most efficient way for us to communicate is by email, but we're always open to a phone conversation for more complex issues.

All producers will be required to use our online software for listing products and printing pack lists. We regularly use email to contact all our members and producers. Please notify us when any of your contact information changes, most importantly your email address.

When you join the Food Hub, you will be assigned a user name and password so you can access the producers-only pages of our web site. All members will need to keep track of their user name and password to login to the system. If you forget, you can use the software to reset your password.

2. Products Allowed

Quality **Alaskan Grown**/harvested products are the main emphasis of the Food Hub. The Market will also be an outlet for other Alaskan value-added foods and nursery products, as well as handcrafted items made with locally grown, harvested or wild-crafted materials. Crafts made from kits are not allowed; crafts made from non-renewable resources are strongly discouraged. All crafts must be approved prior to selling on the Food Hub.

The Food Hub strictly prohibits RESALE of any kind.

3. Prepared Foods: Value-Added Products/ Cottage Foods/ Baked Goods/ Processed or Dried Foods

The Alaska DEC has granted the Alaska Food Hub a variance for the 2020 season to allow the sale of Cottage Food items through the Food Hub.

Anyone wishing to sell Cottage Foods in areas outside of Anchorage will need to **obtain a FOOD WORKER CARD** prior to selling on the Food Hub:

- (<https://dec.alaska.gov/eh/fss/food-worker-card>)

These rules apply to ALL prepared food, including cottage food and those prepared in a DEC/MUNI kitchen. **Online Listings & physical labeling** on all food products including jams, jellies, pickles, kimchi, baked and dried goods and the like, must include:

- Name of product (i.e., Apple and Kale Salad)
- List of all ingredients
- Name, address and phone number of where food was prepared, and/or

business license number.

- Production date (if shelf stable, month/year is acceptable)
- Storage instructions, if not shelf stable.
- Vendors of baked goods are required to sell items individually wrapped
- If cottage food, label/list with the following statement: "THESE PRODUCTS ARE NOT SUBJECT TO STATE INSPECTION"

Other Cottage Food Requirements:

- Food Handler's Card on file with Food Hub
- Fruits, vegetables, and herbs used in processed foods should be primarily grown or wild-crafted by the producer, or purchased from a local grower
- Prior to selling any of these items, including cottage food, you must clear it with the Food Hub Coordinator.
- A DEC/MUNI approved kitchen is not required for the preparation of baked goods including pastries, cookies, muffins, breads, pies and granolas, preserves, jams and jellies, honey, fruit syrups, dried herbs and teas, and herbal vinegars.
 - This does not include items that require refrigeration like cream pies, cheese cake, or items with all meats including fish and poultry. All vendors must be familiar with and follow all aspects of DEC regulations. These regulations (DEC- Statute 18 AAC 31.012; MUNI- AMC 16.60.105) can be found at:
 - <http://dec.alaska.gov/commish/regulations/pdfs/18%20AAC%2031.012.pdf>.
 - http://dec.alaska.gov/eh/fss/Food/Cottage_Food.html
 - [https://www.muni.org/Departments/health/Admin/environment/FS S/Documents/Produce%20and%20Cottage%20Food%20Vendor%20Guidance.pdf](https://www.muni.org/Departments/health/Admin/environment/FS%20Documents/Produce%20and%20Cottage%20Food%20Vendor%20Guidance.pdf)Some highlights include:
- The individual who makes the food must be the one who sells it directly to consumers.
- Labeling on both physical product & online listing: DEC requires that vendors label each product with the statement:
 - **"THESE PRODUCTS ARE NOT SUBJECT TO STATE INSPECTION"** as well as the vendor's physical address and telephone number or vendor's business license number. The Food Hub will check for this statement.

- In regards to foods like pickles or sauerkraut, refer to DEC/MUNI regulations for the requirements for testing before selling at the Food Hub. It is your responsibility to obtain clearance on food products from the DEC/MUNI prior to selling, and proof of clearance/testing is required.

NON-COTTAGE FOOD PREPARED FOOD PRODUCTS:

- *All items that are not exempt by Cottage Food laws and require a DEC kitchen must have all DEC permits, business license and carry liability insurance, and be on file with Food Hub. It is your responsibility to obtain clearance on food products from the DEC prior to selling.*
- Producers outside of Anchorage are responsible for working directly with the DEC to insure compliance with **Alaska Statute 18 AAC 310** and other applicable regulations, and must provide a copy of their DEC certification and proof of liability insurance to the Food Hub Coordinator.

4. Mushrooms and Sprouts

Wild harvested mushrooms are potentially hazardous and are **NOT ALLOWED** to be sold through the Food Hub.

Producers wishing to sell cultivated mushrooms are strongly recommended to adhere to the Mushroom GAP Standards, as laid out here:

<http://tinyurl.com/mushroomgap>

Sprouts are considered a potentially hazardous food by the DEC/MUNI and must be produced in a DEC/MUNI approved facility in order to be sold on the Food Hub. Producers selling either of these items must provide a copy of their DEC/MUNI certification and proof of liability insurance to the Food Hub Coordinator.

5. Fish/Seafood/Shellfish/Meat

The sale of fish and seafood is regulated by the Alaska Dept. of Fish & Game and the DEC/MUNI. Poultry processed through DEC/MUNI Policy is allowed. All other meat (i.e. pork, beef, etc.) must be inspected and bear the label of the State or federally inspected plant where they were processed and must be in a completely frozen state when brought to the aggregation point. All producers of fish/seafood/shellfish/meat must:

- Comply with all applicable local, state, and federal regulations
- Must provide the Food Hub with copies of their licenses, insurance, permits, and certificates.

- Maintain and use a temperature control transportation plan for the full Food Hub delivery and pick up timeframe, and communicate this to the Food Hub and consumers
- Must provide their own coolers, cooling system, and thermometers, and be responsible for retrieving after pick-up hours
- Products sold through the Food Hub must be caught or raised in Alaska by the producer.

Poultry processed through DEC/MUNI Policy is allowed, but requires permitting and liability insurance. Should any food safety issues arise around meat products, the Advisory Committee may choose to review your product line and revoke Food Hub selling privileges.

6. Regulations

The Food Hub will abide by all applicable local, state and local regulations. We strongly recommended that all producers attend and become familiar with the principles of **GAP (Good Agricultural Practices)** and **GHP (Good Handling Practices)** and have an active Food Safety Plan in place.

Food Safety Modernization Act: Starting in 2018, all producers that sell over \$25,000 (gross) in produce will be subject to FSMA regulations. The Food Hub is actively monitoring what that will mean for the variety of producers represented and is working on resources to help with compliance. Please read about the FSMA here:

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/FSMA/ucm334114.htm>

7. Food Hub Aggregation Location and Hours:

Homer: Homer United Methodist Church, 770 East End Road

Drop off **Wednesdays, 10:30am-1pm, Pick up 3-6pm**

Soldotna: Cook Inletkeeper Community Studio, Soldotna, Wednesdays Drop off Wednesdays, 2:00pm-4:00pm, Pick up 4-7pm

All producers are required to deliver all order products during the specified deliver window. Vendors may choose to sell in other cycles. For example, if a Homer producer wants to sell products in Seldovia, Niniichik, & Soldotna, the Food Hub will provide transportation, but products must be separated. Producers selling in Soldotna are responsible for their own transportation and are encouraged to discuss cooperative methods for moving items.

Please see the drop-off protocol in the OPERATIONS section of this manual.

8. Vendor Application/Fees

Membership in the Hub is \$40 for producers. Memberships are non-refundable and non-transferable. This paid membership fee, along with a completed application, including a signed application & agreement to follow all policy, are required prior to receiving Food Hub producer login information. To avoid contact, payments must be made online:

<https://inletkeeper.networkforgood.com/projects/97482-alaska-food-hub>

9. Liability Insurance

Producers are strongly encouraged to carry individual liability insurance for their products. The Food Hub will not accept liability for any product safety issues/illnesses and the like. The liability lies with each producer, as the Alaska Food Hub does not take possession of products, but provides a sales platform, aggregation, and limited transportation.

Any products requiring a DEC permit/ kitchen will need liability insurance.

If insured, producers may list this in their profiles, making it more attractive to certain entities, like hospitals and restaurants.

10. Quality Control

To protect the integrity of our marketing system, the Food Hub reserves the right to verify via physical inspection, the production claims and geographic production location of products offered for sale through our marketplace.

11. Product Standards

Every producer member is responsible to know and follow all appropriate federal, state and local inspections, licenses, statutes and ordinances. Producers must also comply with any relevant health codes or agricultural laws regarding direct sales of farm and food products to the public. A copy of any licenses or certificates required for your business must be on file with the Food Hub.

Some excellent sources for finding these standards and other tips:

- AK Department of Natural Resources, Division of Agriculture: http://dnr.alaska.gov/ag/ag_is.htm
- Cooperative Extension Service: <https://www.uaf.edu/ces/>
- AK Department of Environmental Conservation, Food Safety and Sanitation: <http://dec.alaska.gov/eh/fss/>

The Food Hub periodically reviews all products and may at any time question a producer about their compliance with Food Hub, local, state, and federal

standards. Products that do not meet these standards may be removed from the availability list by the Food Hub.

The Food Hub reserves the right to prohibit products with objectionable images, messages, or product implications being sold.

Rotted, damaged, sunburned, diseased, insect damaged and unmarketable products will not be received under any conditions. Products reported by customers as unsatisfactory will be issued a refund and producers will not be paid for these items. **Repeated questionable products may result in suspension or termination of producer membership.**

12. Packaging/Labeling Standards

Product must be carefully packaged and clearly labeled as to its contents upon delivery to the Food Hub. Seafood/shellfish, eggs, processed foods and other items must adhere to Food Hub, local, state, and federal regulations.

Other items must be clearly labeled so that staff and volunteers can help producers sort product appropriately (ex. plant starts, lettuce mixes can be especially confusing). *This is a great opportunity to market directly to your consumers with your business information while differentiating your product.* Presentation matters, as these products are ordered sight-unseen.

All products must be labeled in a way that is easily traceable to the producer, for food safety and insurance concerns. This may be achieved in a variety of ways- twist ties, bags, food grade stickers and labels directly on produce, labels stuck to customer order form, etc. [To assist in quicker aggregation, please label all products with customer names.](#)

13. Organic Labeling

To be fair to all producers, the Food Hub asks that you not label "organic" in their name, labeling or marketing. It is illegal for those who make over \$5000 a year to use the word without being certified organic (a very costly process), so it leaves them at a disadvantage and misleads consumers.

Feel free to explain details such as "Alaska Naturally Grown Certified: or "no pesticides" or "all natural" or "grown with ..." or the like. That's the benefit of the Food Hub- customers can get to know their farmer and their food!

14. Changing Availability of Products During Order Cycle

Farming can be unpredictable. If you find that you have more or less of a product than you initially thought, you may sign in and update your quantities. If you have already oversold your product, please contact the manager of any changes or substitutes. The Coordinator will work with producers to remedy any issues.

15. Pricing of Products

Producers set their own prices. The Food Hub takes your listed price and marks it up 25% (18% for seafood and meats) for the customer, who only sees the final marked-up price. There are no additional fees charged to the producer beside the annual membership fee.

16. Sales Tax

The Alaska Food Hub will collect and pay sales tax on products sold through the Food Hub, during appropriate months (June 1- Aug. 31).

17. QUEST Redemption

We are working with the Federal Nutrition Services for authorization to accept food stamps/EBT. Currently there are no food hubs in the entire nation that can accept EBT. There are a few pilot cases being tested for viability. We hope to be able to accept EBT as soon as possible.

18. Getting Paid

[In an effort to reduce our costs and bookkeeper contact during COVID19 pandemic](#), Cook Inletkeeper, on behalf of the Alaska Food Hub, will pay you directly by check, [once a month \(formerly, every two weeks- we will be revisiting this, so stay tuned for any changes\)](#). You should expect a check within 10 days of the month's period closing. For example, if the ordering cycle opens on May 29th, but delivery day isn't until June 3rd, you would receive that payment with the rest of June's cycles.

The Food Hub reserves the rights to refuse products that are not what customers ordered, or which are spoiled or contaminated, or otherwise not acceptable. Refused products will not be paid for by the Food Hub or customers.

19. Advisory Council/Cook Inletkeeper

The Alaska Food Hub is a program of the non-profit organization Cook Inletkeeper, managed by an advisory board representing farmers, fishers, and crafters. The Food Hub Advisory Council will manage all business, advertisement, and other organizational infrastructure. The Food Hub Director and Coordinators, as employees of Cook Inletkeeper acts according to the instructions of the Advisory Council, and ultimately to the instructions of Cook Inletkeeper Board of Directors.

20. Discrimination and Harassment

All members, producers and customers, of the Food Hub, participating in Food Hub, shall not discriminate against any individual with regards to selling of products, discipline, or other matters because of age, sex, race, creed, national origin, sexual orientation, or the presence of any physical or mental disability. Producers shall behave toward all employees, volunteers,

customers, potential customers or other producers in a way that is free of harassment and discrimination. Complaints should be taken to the Food Hub Advisory Board and will be regarded with confidentiality.

Terms of Service

21. Customer Satisfaction/Refunds

Any customer complaints or requests for refunds or return of merchandise will be handled by the Food Hub, mediating between customer and producer. We reserve the right to have the producer handle the complaint directly with the customer in some instances.

In the event of a dispute between a customer and a producer, the matter shall be referred to the Food Hub Coordinator. If a mutually agreed upon solution cannot be found, the Advisory Committee will advise.

22. Customer Expectations

Customers are expected to pick-up orders during the pick-up window. If customers do not pick-up orders, their items will be donated to a local non-profit organization, such as the Food Pantry. The Food Hub does not have a means to keep items until the next week, or to deliver them to you.

Since the growers harvested just for you, and (more importantly) since we paid the growers on your behalf when they brought them to our market, **you are still responsible for paying for items, even if you do not pick them up.** We'll charge your card after all products are delivered.

23. Vendor Expectations

Producers are expected to deliver all items ordered during the drop-off window. The Food Hub operates on a specific time schedule and it is crucial for each producer to be on time.

- If a producer is late more than 2 times, they will be suspended from selling during the following order cycle.
- If a producer is late more than 3 times, they will be barred from selling for the remainder of the calendar year, with no refund of membership fee.
- If a producer fails to drop off sold items 2 or more times, the Food Hub reserves the right to remove the vendor for the remainder of the calendar year, with no refund of membership fee.

- The Alaska Food Hub reserves the right to reject any product sold through the Food Hub that we believe is not up to standards or is delivered spoiled or contaminated, not packaged/labeled according to policy, or does not fit the description of the items sold, and we will certainly do this if we feel necessary. Repeated rejected food may result in termination or suspension of vendor privileges.

Producers are expected to communicate regularly with the Food Hub Coordinator and have reliable access to the internet and email.

Producers are expected to follow all policy outlined in the Food Hub Operations, Policy and Terms of Service Handbook

Revised 2/7/22

-----(Detach this page and include with your application package.)-----

ADMIN ONLY: Vendor Name: _____
Primary Location: _____
Date Paid: _____
Method Paid: _____
Profile Set-up: _____
Additional Documentation: _____

2022 Alaska Food Hub Application and Agreement:

This form must be completed online:

<http://www.alaskafoodhub.org/vend>