

# Alaska (University of Alaska Fairbanks)

## Plan of Work for 2023-2027

Status: Final (Approved 9/30/2022)

### Executive Summary Overview

Alaska is recognized for its immense size, dispersed population and its cultural, geographic and environmental diversity. The state represents a major region of renewable and nonrenewable natural resources in the United States. Its 365 million acres include the nation's largest oil reserves, coal deposits and the two largest national forests. The state contains the largest terrestrial biome on earth - the boreal forest - that it shares with other northern locations. The state also contains an array of mineral deposits, including gold, zinc, boron, molybdenum and rare earth minerals. Alaska has a varied geography that offers soils for production of food, fiber and biomass fuels as well as for a multitude of recreational and tourism activities. Waters surrounding Alaska's shoreline and riparian habitats contain large stocks of salmon, cod, pollock, halibut, herring, crab and shrimp that support thriving commercial, sport and subsistence fisheries. Alaska has a varied geography that offers soils for production of food, fiber and biomass fuels as well as for a multitude of recreational and tourism activities. Waters surrounding Alaska's shoreline and riparian habitats contain large stocks of salmon, cod, pollock, halibut, herring, crab and shrimp that support thriving commercial, sport and subsistence fisheries. Alaska's natural resources have historically been the foundation of the state's economy, though resource industries have been mostly extractive in nature. Alaska's economy has become dependent upon revenues related to petroleum development. To diversify its economy, the state is expanding and examining potential in moving toward non petroleum natural resources for economic opportunities that are cost-effective and sustainable. The use and management of these resources is a predominant force in the planning and delivery of any teaching, research, and engagement programs. The University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) in general and Cooperative Extension Service (CES) and Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station (AFES), in particular, meet the challenges of increasing demands for research, education, outreach and community engagement that are relevant to sustainable management of Alaska's resources. As a result of a university reorganization, in July 2019, UAF's Mining and Petroleum Training Service (MAPTS), along with CES and AFES, became an entity now known as the Institute of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Extension (IANRE). The realignment allows for greater coordination in meeting the tripartite mission of teaching, research and service. Citizens are provided opportunities for engagement to influence future research and education priorities. CES delivers the latest research findings, education and outreach opportunities to the public. While Alaska imports a high percentage of foods and other agricultural products, growers in the agricultural sector produce fresh market potatoes, vegetables and herbs; forages, grains and manufactured livestock feeds; controlled environment products, which include bedding plants, florals, landscape ornamentals and short season vegetables; and more. Livestock enterprises in Alaska are varied in size and species of animal in production. Producers need information specific to northern latitudes that will protect the environment and ensure an abundant and safe food supply. As the population grows, more locally and regionally produced food will be needed to provide greater food security. Many Alaskans live a subsistence lifestyle or supplement their diets with fish and game meat. Alaska also has a large military population, and most have not

previously preserved game meat or fish. Alaska has one of the nation's highest rates of botulism, with the most recent death in 2019, so it is imperative to provide information on safe preservation of dietary staples. Food safety is also a concern for food industry workers who need state-required training. Alaska has one of the fastest growing senior populations. Alaska's senior citizens face the challenge of remaining active and healthy in a demanding environment. Other concerns that define health and nutrition programming are the high rates of child and adult obesity, chronic conditions like diabetes, and indoor air quality. High energy costs remain a concern, particularly in rural Alaska, where fuel oil can cost double and gasoline can cost triple the average price per gallon compared to urban areas. Research and outreach will continue to focus on new and alternative sources of energy, wood and biomass and energy conservation. AFES will work to provide new information to manage renewable resources and to improve technology for enhancing the economic well-being and quality of life at high latitudes. Research and outreach will also focus on the health of our largest forest biome, including understanding the impacts of a changing climate, insect infestation, and land use. Ecological drought is impacting forest fire threat and bark beetle infestation, which is damaging forest natural resources that are critical for tourism, firewood availability, and increased fire risk. While foresters, farmers and land managers use research results, all Alaskans benefit from the wise use of land resources. Research projects will be in response to requests from producers, industries, and state and federal agencies for information on plant, animal and soil sciences, forest sciences and resources management. AFES priorities, like national priorities, are to enhance sustainability of food, forest, and agricultural systems; adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change; support energy security through the development of renewable natural resources; ensure a safe, secure and abundant food supply; improve human health, nutrition and wellness; strengthen environmental stewardship through the development of sustainable management practices; and support individual, family and community development and resilience. Experiment station researchers will continue to publish research in scientific journals, conference proceedings, books, and in experiment station bulletins, circulars, newsletters, research progress reports and miscellaneous publications. Scientists will also disseminate their findings through conferences, public presentations, workshops and other public information programs like websites and blogs. The mission of CES is to use research-based knowledge to educate, engage and support the people and communities of Alaska, connecting them with their university. CES is committed to promoting the sustainability and economic security of individuals, families and communities by providing practical, non formal education, including conferences, workshops and cooperative work with community, regional and tribal partners. Outreach is also provided through numbered publications, faculty consultations, newsletters, blogs and social media platforms. Programming respects cultural and ethnic diversity and is responsive to emerging stakeholder needs and interests. Programs result from client requests, various regional and subject matter advisory groups, surveys and needs assessments. Collaborations with other universities and with other units within UAF, the University of Alaska statewide system, federal and state agencies, nongovernmental organizations and private industry are planned to continue. Stakeholders include K-12 students, higher education students, researchers, individuals, businesses, industry, government, nongovernmental organizations, and families and communities throughout Alaska, the circumpolar North and the nation. The combined efforts of CES and AFES bring the university to Alaskans while bringing community concerns and issues back to the university. IANRE is sensitive to internet issues in rural areas. Inclement weather, small customer bases, and lack of local power grids are significant challenges. While Alaska remains one of the lower ranked states for connectivity, significant progress has been made in the last decade in moving from more expensive options like satellite to cable. IANRE works with community

locations like libraries and schools to take advantage of their more reliable Wi-Fi connectivity when offering distance classes. The U.S. Department of Agriculture recently awarded \$116 million in infrastructure funds to Alaska, which will be directed at providing high-speed rural internet access. In summer of 2022, Alaska Governor Mike Dunleavy signed a bill establishing an Office of Broadband for Alaska, which will prioritize connections for unserved and underserved areas. State-defined critical issues link specific public needs with our broad mission in order to allow the concentration of resources (money and people) that will promote high-quality work. Critical issues will be used to provide guidance for faculty, staff and administrators to direct current and new programs and find or retain faculty expertise. Due to COVID-19 limitations on face-to-face gatherings, IANRE pivoted in 2020-2021 to expanded use of online platforms and pick-up or mail-home kits to continue providing educational services. IANRE will continue to communicate with rural leaders to identify the best remote locations for hosting distance learning successfully. The university continues to monitor community outbreak levels and Centers for Disease Control guidance. State-defined critical issues link specific public needs with our broad mission in order to allow the concentration of resources (money and people) that will promote high-quality work. The next section of this summary explains the rationale driving a five-year focus on four critical issues: Agriculture & Food Security; Natural Resources, Ecosystems & Sustainable Energy; Healthy Individuals, Families & Communities; and 4-H & Youth Development. Climate change is not listed separately, as it affects all the program areas.

## Merit and Scientific Peer Review Processes

The Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station uses scientific peer review to evaluate proposals and publications. Extension uses the merit review process and the general review process for the joint annual report and Plan of Work (POW). The Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station (AFES) complies with sections 3(c)(1) and (2) of the Hatch Act and section 1445 of NARETPA (Hatch Regular Capacity Funds) and the amendment to the Hatch Act of 1887 to Section 104 by AREERA for programs funded under section 3(c)(3) of the Hatch Act (Hatch Multistate Research Funds) by using its established scientific review process for all proposals and publications. All new and revised Hatch (and McIntire-Stennis) project proposals undergo peer review. The blind peer review panel is composed of a minimum of three members and consists of competent authorities from the discipline of the proposal/publication or related disciplines, generally at other land-grant universities. Each reviewer completes a Peer Review Form that includes specific criteria, provides for other comments and suggestions, and makes a recommendation to the director. Reviews are returned to the author(s) for revision if needed. The director reviews all comments and recommendations from the reviewers along with the revised proposal/publication before it is sent to USDA. For Hatch projects, the director confirms that proposals are sent out to three related content experts. Principal investigators (PIs) are asked to submit names of reviewers who are experts in the applicable field, preferably from another land grant. The director reserves the right to select reviewers that are not on the list. Either the director or a reviewer may request a rereview after modification. Then the PI is cleared to work with the site administrator to submit the proposal to NIFA for approval. For Hatch Multistate, the PI identifies a project that they wish to participate in, and submits the request for director approval. The director signs the appendix E in NIMSS and the PI works with the site administrator to enter project participation in the relevant databases. Each PI also submits projected budgets that include expected costs for research, outreach, and travel to the multistate meetings. Review of the Extension components of the POW consist of internal reviews by a panel of faculty and administrators, including program leads. The group assesses

how well the activities and resources proposed in the plan contribute to achieving the proposed goals and establish emphases on food security, food safety, climate adaptability, health, positive youth development and sustainable energy as priorities for the future. Collective feedback is incorporated into each iteration of the POW. IANRE has an evaluation specialist who will assist faculty and staff with planning needs assessments, formative and summative evaluations of individual programs, and the documentation of outcomes. Participant feedback is collected in a variety of formats following workshops and conferences.

## Stakeholder input: Action Taken to Seek Stakeholder Input

Methods of soliciting stakeholder input include using television, radio, newspaper, newsletter and social media ads to announce public meetings and listening sessions; sending targeted invitations to stakeholder groups and key community members; engaging stakeholders at culturally relevant community meetings; conducting surveys and collecting feedback on public priorities during open houses and local and state fairs; and providing online platforms for engagement including blogs, Facebook pages, Twitter feeds and YouTube channels. As required by the AREERA of 1998, these points of contact for public input will be advertised as broadly as possible. CES also sponsors agricultural and horticultural conferences and outreach activities with AFES participation where the units gather formal and informal stakeholder input. Outreach faculty and staff will also identify ways to overcome barriers like income, transportation, literacy, etc. when reaching out to underserved populations. CES utilizes advisory groups as an important part of the stakeholder needs assessment process. In addition to traditional feedback options including email, surveys, open houses and discussions, IANRE will utilize citizen science activities to engage stakeholders in local agriculture topics. Such activities make use of faculty-designed phone applications to enhance the experience, such as Grow & Tell and Alaska Weeds ID. Smartphone apps are a contemporary way to attract stakeholders to participate in pest mapping and variety testing while IANRE gains insight into lay understanding of Alaska's critical issues. CES and AFES will meet with audiences on demand throughout the state in both formal and informal settings each year. Examples of these audiences include agriculture associations, livestock associations and reindeer herders, Alaska Native villages, tribal organizations and regional corporations, borough and city governments and municipalities, grower groups meeting at regional and statewide conferences, industry stakeholders involved in food, fiber and fuel/energy production, soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs), and state and federal partners including but not limited to USDA, NRCS and the Forest Service.

## Stakeholder input: Methods to Identify Individuals and Groups

CES and AFES plan to engage with advisory committees, focus groups and participants in listening sessions as well as continue to conduct needs assessments and stakeholder surveys as methods to identify groups and individuals from whom to collect input. Faculty and staff will utilize U.S. Census Bureau data to determine potential audiences and parity goals. AFES relies on stakeholder input from agricultural advisory groups, collaborators, federal and state agencies, colleagues, faculty and students for assistance in establishing priorities and developing project directions. Members from the public who have participated in or who have an interest in CES program offerings represent an important segment of the organization's stakeholders who can be contacted after their experience to offer feedback on program improvement and interest in future programming. Stakeholders often identify themselves by emailing or calling Extension faculty or staff. Other significant stakeholder groups are public and private agencies and organizations that have professional and programmatic relationships with Extension or

direct interest in CES programming. A primary goal of the University of Alaska Fairbanks 2019-2025 strategic plan is to “solidify our global leadership in Alaska Native and Indigenous programs.” IANRE has built strong relationships with Native groups across the state, from Fort Yukon to Dutch Harbor, and has two FRTEP agents that advise the unit on tribal community needs. IANRE has been proactive over the past several decades providing culturally relevant and responsive programming, including but not limited to: advising on cold climate housing and indoor air quality; providing research-based publications on traditional foods like walrus and bullwhip kelp; offering culturally relevant youth activities like dog mushing and trapping; gathering survey data on Native use of public lands; and teaching hands-on skills for community gardening, reindeer processing, and more.

## Stakeholder input: Methods for Collecting Stakeholder Input

IANRE plans to continue using the following methods to collect stakeholder input, including but not limited to: Meetings with traditional stakeholder groups; surveys of traditional stakeholder groups; meetings with nontraditional stakeholder individuals; surveys of nontraditional stakeholder individuals; surveys of the general public; and meetings with key community members from the general public. CES and AFES will continue generating a feedback loop that provides information to research and outreach programs and from research and outreach programs to stakeholders and individuals. Conferences, meetings and workshops are scheduled around themes relevant to stakeholder concerns. Post-activity surveys and debriefing opportunities will establish how well information needs are addressed. Meeting minutes, videoconference archives and other records of stakeholder engagement and input will be used in planning of research and Extension programs. Extension collects stakeholder input through in-person surveys following conferences and workshops, by email surveys and through public presentations with discussion opportunities made available to a variety of groups and agencies. The evaluation specialist will work with district agents and program assistants to determine culturally relevant methods for documenting behavior changes implemented by stakeholder groups. Input is also collected individually by agents who work with stakeholders, and through meetings with advisory groups. Blogs and more than 20 social media pages also provide venues for stakeholder input.

## Stakeholder input: A Statement of How the Input Will Be Considered

Stakeholder input will be considered in program planning to: identify emerging issues; redirect Extension and research programs; guide staff hiring and action plans; set district and unit-wide priorities; and identify underserved populations. AFES and CES will continue to serve the needs of the people of the state of Alaska. Input will reflect ideas and advice given by client user groups, students, expert advisors, state and national peers and collaborators and UAF administration. The four critical issue areas identified reflect the concerns of all major stakeholder groups, and will continue to be the highest priorities in workload planning and resource allocation. Requests for specific speakers and topics at conferences guide conference agendas. Requests for programming help shape what is offered. Needs assessments will continue to help CES and AFES faculty and staff identify emerging issues. Community needs are an important consideration when assessing how to create or fill staff and faculty positions. Stakeholder needs will continue to be a driving factor in determining CES priorities for programming and AFES priorities for research.

## Critical Issues

### **4-H & Youth Development**

Initiated on: Nov 26, 2019

State: Alaska

Term Length: Long-term (>5 years)

Research shows that to increase resilience and reduce risky behaviors, youth need connections to caring adults. Faculty and staff will continue to provide mentorship and life skills programming to youth, including nutrition lessons. CES seeks to increase participation in STEAM activities as well as provide youth with local and statewide opportunities for community involvement. 4-H educators will continue to offer culturally relevant activities for the many diverse groups in Alaska while providing learning experiences within the national mission mandates of science, healthy living and civic engagement.

Science Emphasis Area

Education and Multicultural Alliances, Youth Development

### **Agriculture & Food Security**

Initiated on: Nov 26, 2019

State: Alaska

Term Length: Long-term (>5 years)

Alaska's agricultural opportunities and their relationship to food security are a critical issue because Alaska imports over 90 percent of its food. To become adaptable to economic, climate and other changes, it is critical to provide support to growers in the state. CES and AFES are well positioned to provide information about high-latitude agriculture and horticulture. Areas emphasized in the close collaboration of CES and AFES include agronomic crop and livestock production, commercial and home horticulture best practices, new technology applications, IPM and control of invasive pests, youth involvement in agriculture, best practices for controlled environments small-scale agribusiness, and cultivar testing for climate-adapted crops.

Science Emphasis Area

Agroclimate Science, Sustainable Agricultural Production Systems

### **Healthy Individuals, Families & Communities**

Initiated on: Nov 26, 2019

State: Alaska

Term Length: Long-term (>5 years)

Alaska faces challenges such as high rates of botulism, obesity, food insecurity and other risks to public health. Cold climate housing also presents challenges in balancing fresh air flow with energy conservation. To address such concerns, CES faculty and staff will offer educational opportunities regarding nutrition and physical activity, chronic disease prevention and management, home modifications, air quality and energy efficiencies, food safety practices and food preservation techniques.

Science Emphasis Area

Family & Consumer Sciences, Food Safety, Human Nutrition

## **Natural Resources, Ecosystems & Sustainable Energy**

Initiated on: Nov 26, 2019

State: Alaska

Term Length: Long-term (>5 years)

Collaborative efforts are key to ensuring proper stewardship of Alaska's complex ecosystems. CES and AFES faculty and staff will maintain partnerships and participate in multistate and integrated activities with stakeholder groups, government agencies and other institutions that enhance outreach regarding natural resource management and renewable energy sources. Faculty and staff will work to expand capacity for public involvement in natural resource, ecosystem and sustainable energy issues, including maintaining online platforms for education and engagement. Public workshops, presentations and consultations will offer opportunities for stakeholders to increase their awareness of biomass and other sustainable energies.

Science Emphasis Area

Bioeconomy, Bioenergy, and Bioproducts, Environmental Systems