



Fairbanks North Star Borough Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

FEDCo Agriculture Roundtable

June 22, 2021

Roundtable Participants

FNSB/Interior AK Agricultural Leaders **Others**

- Melissa Sikes, Natural Resources Education Specialist, Fairbanks Soil and Water Conservation District
 - Brad St. Pierre, Goosefoot Farm, President Alaska Farmer's Market Association, Tanana Valley Farmer's Market
 - Tessa Holmes, Fairbanks Soil and Water Conservation District
 - Jon Oestreich, US Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service
 - John Anderson, 907 Livestock
- Evan Wilken, Fairbanks Economic Development Corporation
 - Shelly Wade, Consultant Project Manager/Facilitator

Introduction & Purpose

The Project Team



FNSB Project Manager:
Brittany Smart



Contracting Team:
Shelly Wade, AICP

Dena'inaq ełnen'aq' gheshtnu ch'q'u yeshdu.

We live and work on the land of the Dena'ina.

Translation by J. Isaak and S. Shaginoff-Stuart

Supporting team
members:

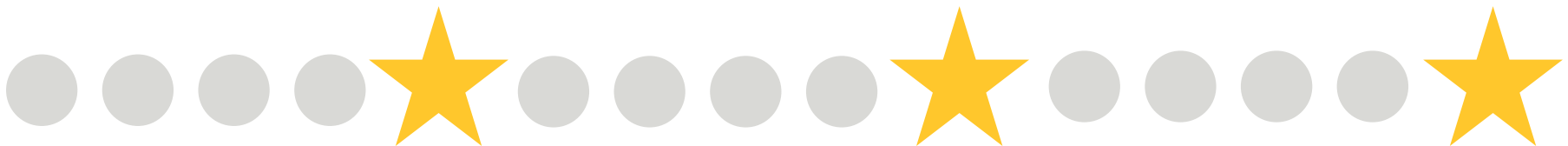


Project Purpose

To develop an updated Five-Year FNSB Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

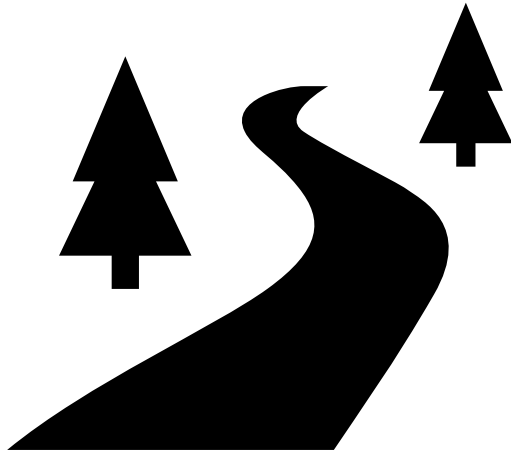


CEDS must go through a robust update every five years, with shorter, less intensive updates annually.



CEDS Purpose

A CEDS is a locally-based, regionally-driven economic development planning document that guides local government and community action.



It serves as a road map to economy resilience and prosperity.

What does a CEDS do?

- Brings the private and public sector together to develop a regional strategy and action plan.
- Serves as a road map to economic resilience and prosperity.
- Identifies projects and makes recommendations to:

Secure and support businesses

Create more and better paying jobs

Improve quality of life

Increase resilience to changes, threats

What does a CEDS include?

Numbers that tell the FNSB story – people, economy

An economic vision

SWOT analysis and situational assessment

Economic development goals, objectives and strategies for next 5 years, developed and supported by regional partners

Implementation plan – how we're going to work on our priorities; ways to measure our progress

Proposed FNSB CEDS Topics/Sectors

Industry Clusters

key sectors that drive the FNSB economy

Education + Research

Energy

Healthcare

Military

Natural Resources (*Agriculture, Forestry, Mining*)

Visitation

Community Influencers

supportive foundations that clusters rely on to grow and flourish

Communications

Government

Housing and Land Use

Quality of Life

Transportation

Utilities

Workforce Development

How does the CEDS benefit industry?

The CEDS will:

- Include a **dedicated “1-Pager” for each industry cluster** – tailored snapshot, SWOT, goals, strategies and implementation actions.
- Articulate a **shared economic development vision and goals** for industry, consumers, government.
- Position the community/industry for **funding and investment opportunities**.
- Hold everyone accountable with **measurable short and longer-term targets** and **ways to track and communicate progress**.

Agriculture Context

Agriculture: Highlights from 2016 CEDS

- Since 2002, Fairbanks has been increasing its share of statewide crop production.
- Farms in Fairbanks tend to be larger than elsewhere in Alaska but average farm size is decreasing as the number of farms increases.
- In the last decade, farmers in the FNSB produced \$9.14 million in agricultural products, or 15.5% of the statewide total.

Discussion Notes (input shared during the meeting)

- **Question:** Our share of statewide crop production has been increasing. Is this in comparison to Palmer?
 - **Comment:** Yes, this need some context for this. There are potential gaps in the 2016 CEDS.
- **Question:** Isn't the CEDS supposed to be the plan to increase economic stability for farmers? Where did these figures come from?
 - **Comment:** This question is illustrative of why certain sources will best show us industry trends in the state and where the agriculture sector has been in the Interior.
 - **Comment:** The state Division of Agriculture does its own census of Alaska farmers.
 - **Comment:** There was a 2017 Ag census that came out right after this 2016 CEDS, so there could be a lot of updated figures to consider.

What are the agricultural trends in FNSB/ Interior and how can we measure success?

What/Data	Source
Market Value of Agricultural Products	<i>US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Census of Agriculture*</i>
Number of Farms	<i>USDA Census of Agriculture*</i>
Median Size of Farms	<i>USDA Census of Agriculture*</i>
Farm Employment	<i>Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages</i>

**released every five years; most recent is 2017*

What other data, sources should we consider?

Agriculture: Strengths and Weaknesses of the Region

1. What **factors contribute** to a successful agriculture industry in the FNSB/Interior AK?
2. What **factors are a barrier** to a successful agriculture industry in the FNSB/Interior AK?

Discussion Notes (input shared during the meeting)

- **Question:** What is one factor that contributes to the success of the ag industry in the Borough?
 - **Comment:** Customer and consumer education. It's as much on the consumer as it is the producer to increase ag production in the state. If farmers sold out by noon everyday at the farmer's market, they would grow more.
 - **Comment:** It's all about the markets and knowing what people are going to be buying. Also encouraging businesses to buy from local farmers when buying food for events. Getting local foods in the school system.
 - **Comment:** It's about understanding the market. Look at historic prices and what things are selling. Do an analysis for setting prices.
 - **Comment:** For the FNSB, an action item is supporting functioning farms in Alaska. Alaska leads the nation in new farms. It's important to support farmers markets and farm stands. Those are the viable sales venues, rather than getting products in grocery stores.

Discussion Notes (input shared during the meeting)

- **Question:** What are some of the barriers (policy or otherwise) that make it tough to be an agricultural producer in Alaska?
 - **Comment:** Lack of access to land. The disparity between the agricultural value and retail value of land has never been as great as it is now.
 - **Comment:** Access to labor is also a huge issue.
 - **Comment:** The Borough could support ag programs through trainings or certifications that are recognized statewide.
 - Question:** What certification?
 - Comment:** There is a need to establish a certification process that is recognized in different parts of the state. Then a farmer can be assured the person they are hiring has been trained. The Borough could support that program.
 - **Comment:** A lot of states allow volunteer work on farms, but in Alaska, volunteers aren't covered by worker's compensation.

Discussion Notes (input shared during the meeting)

- **Question (Cont.):** What are some of the barriers (policy or otherwise) that make it tough to be an agricultural producer in Alaska?
 - **Comment:** Some ag-related policy hinders food producers and should be reviewed for changes.
 - **Comment:** Farmers need more access to training and start-up funds for basic infrastructure like fences and watering.
 - **Comment:** In 2014 there was a survey looking at the demand for local produce. That led to more production, but there wasn't the follow-through in the markets so farmers were unable to sell the extra produce.

2016 CEDS Goal #1: Enhance the economic viability of agriculture.

Objectives:

- Support new product research to find agricultural niches for the Borough.
- Explore the feasibility of community systems for greenhouse heating, fertilizer production and value added processing to increase economic feasibility of agriculture.
- Conduct local and external marketing to encourage local consumption of Borough food products as well as promoting external markets for export commodities.

Discussion Notes (input shared during the meeting)

- **Comment:** There is nothing in here about supporting existing farmers (change laws on volunteer farmers).
- **Comment:** One goal should be to increase food storage capacity in case of an emergency.
- **Comment:** Focus on integrating local produce into Alaskans' lives and local businesses before looking at exporting.
- **Comment:** The state is gaining farmers but the Interior is losing them. It's important to cultivate the next generation of farmers.
- **Comment:** The state's new ideas are often failures or unproven (Contained Grow Unit, Rhodeola). A better approach is to listen to farmers about what crops are successful.
- **Comment:** There is a lack of ag education in the schools.

Proposed Tasks (from 2016)

1. Install and operate a Contained Grow Unit.
2. Assist peony industry to secure a reliable workforce of 300 for harvest season.
3. Develop a Rhodeola industry in FNSB.
4. Support new product research to find agricultural niches for the Borough.
5. Explore the feasibility of community systems for heating, fertilizer production, and value added processing to increase economic feasibility of agriculture.
6. Conduct local and external marketing to encourage local consumption of Borough food products as well as promoting external markets for export commodities.

➤ **Are these the right tasks? What's missing?**

➤ **Which is the most important?**

➤ **What measurable progress do we want to make over the next five years?**

Next Steps and Wrap-Up

Upcoming Activities

- July 13th: Chamber's General Membership Luncheon
- July 24th: Booth at Golden Days
- July 30th – August 8th: State Fair

- Additional roundtable and sector-specific conversations

Thank you!

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Want to learn more? Visit our website: FNSBCEDS.com