

# Schoolchildren Say "Yes" To Own Native Foods

By Jacqueline Glasgow

Nearly 2,000 Eskimo and Indian schoolchildren have responded to a questionnaire asking: Should native foods be served in Alaska's schools? Overwhelmingly the answer was an enthusiastic yes.

The survey is the brainchild of the Native Foods Advisory Committee, a group which came into being last year after the State Department of Health halted the sale of muktuk at the Tanana Valley State Fair. The resulting controversy opened the door on the entire spectrum of serving native foods at public events.

The Native Foods Advisory Committee is comprised of Laura Bergt, Sally Hudson, Emily Brown, Frank Vonder Haar, with Howard Rock as advisor.

Cooperating with the committee, the Bureau of Indian Affairs mailed out a native foods questionnaire to 48 BIA schools throughout Alaska. The form asked such questions as: How often should native foods be served, what are your favorite foods, and how do you like them prepared?

Of the 1,909 replies, 1,706 students favored the serving of native foods, a total of 89 per cent in the affirmative.

"I think that we have definitely proved with the results of this survey that the people want native foods in the schools,"

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# SCHOOL CHILDREN —

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said Frank Vonder Haar of Alaska's Department of Environmental Health which sponsored the survey.

"Furthermore," said Vonder Haar, "what they want are foods that are indigenous to their area."

In totaling the results, it became clear that while the favorite food of students in Gambell may be seal meat and walrus, in Akia-chuk it's moose and rabbit, and in Sheldon Point it's ducks and reindeer.

In the space provided to write how often they thought native food should be served, one small child wrote painstakingly: "Day after day."

The majority opted for twice a week. 347 said once a week. 436 twice a week, 235 chose three times, and only 25 said four times, 195 or ten per cent of all those surveyed said they would like native foods five times a week.

It must be taken into account in analyzing the results of the survey that at the present time, these same children get native foods at school zero times a week.

Present state laws normally prohibit the use of native foods in the schools. Many items cannot be sold under existing regulations. Even when game has been donated to state institutions, it is often rejected because there is no method of official sanction or inspection.

Officials have charged that there has been little research conducted on either the nutritional value or on bacterial standards for native foods.

"Actually," Vonder Haar admitted, "in many cases, there are no standards for beef or pork either, so how do you go about setting standards for native foods?"

"In schools which generally are supported by both state and federal monies," he added, "the government necessarily becomes involved in the nutritional and health needs of the children. There has to be some assurance that the kids are getting a certain nutritional standard."

The Native Foods Advisory Committee attempted to establish a sampling and testing program for native foods. They found it difficult to obtain adequate samples of sufficient variety. Working on more or less a volunteer basis, it was impossible to set into motion a full-scale

gathering and testing process. A meeting of the committee will be called sometime this month to determine what future action will be taken.

"There's no doubt the survey has shown an overwhelming desire for native foods," said Vonder Haar. "I'm reasonably sure that if we extended the survey to the other schools with native students, to the homes for the aged, convalescent homes, and all institutions where a large number of native people receive meals, we would find a similar response."

Rough data collected by NANA, Inc., one of the 12 native regional corporations, revealed that 4,500,000 lbs. of caribou, moose, seal, beluga whale, chum salmon, trout, whitefish, and other game foods were harvested in that region in a single year. The berry harvest was 99,000 lbs. Although a small portion of the meat was fed to sled dogs, the majority was destined for human consumption in seven villages — Kotzebue, Kiana, Noatak, Noorvik, Selawik, Ambler, Shungnak, Kobuk, Buckland, Deering, and Kivalina.

It is obvious that the Indian and Eskimo child is getting plenty of native foods at home. They are not a vanishing curiosity. They are an integral part of the native diet and as the schoolchildren of rural Alaska voice their demands for native language classes, native culture studies, and native curricula, a new request has been added: native foods for school lunches.