

The Sharing Project

Summary Report for Venetie Households

June 2014



"Sharing - According to tradition. We share everything no matter how much or how little we have."

"In our culture when we give something, we'll get something back."

— Quotes by two Venetie residents

Introduction

In October of 2009, a team of researchers from the UAF Sharing Project came to Venetie and interviewed the heads of households about their subsistence harvesting, sharing and cooperative relationships, and how people make a living combining subsistence, jobs, and other sources of cash. This document is a summary report of important results of this research for Venetie. The Sharing Project also worked in Kaktovik and Wainwright. A more detailed technical report on all project findings will be published in for all three communities.

Background on the project

There is a long history of documenting subsistence harvest in Alaska. But the social relationships around subsistence – the ways in which people distribute harvest, cooperate in harvesting, share, and give out shares among households – has not been well documented. Development, climate change, and economic changes may affect household livelihoods in the future. These possible futures create the need for good information now. The goal of the Sharing Project was to document harvest, sharing, and cooperation that are part of Venetie's mixed subsistence-cash economy.

Research for the Sharing Project was carried out by the University of Alaska Fairbanks in collaboration with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Arizona State University, and the village councils of Venetie, Kaktovik and Wainwright. Researchers worked with local advisory committees in each village to design and complete the study. Funding for the project came from the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), formerly the Mineral Management Service (MMS).

How did we do this research?

In October of 2009 your household may have been interviewed by members of the Sharing Project research team. The interview asked detailed questions about household economies, including how much subsistence food, equipment, cash, gas, and labor were received by your household from cooperative hunting, shares your household received because you helped others get out hunting or fishing, food shared with your household, and trading or purchase. Interviewers asked detailed questions about the following 7 species hunted, fished and gathered in Venetie:

- Moose
- Chum Salmon
- Geese
- Berries
- Caribou
- Grayling
- Ducks

We also documented sharing around the following 3 species received by Venetie households from other households living elsewhere: Bowhead, Beluga, Bearded Seal.

We asked other questions about household food security and perceptions of changes in sharing practices. At the end of 10 days of interviewing, we had interviewed 92% of all Venetie households (84 households in total). Interviews covered the period between September 2008 to October 2009.

Key Findings from Study:

The 7 key findings presented below are only part of the results from the Sharing Project. A more complete account of project findings will appear in the full project report.

Finding 1: Most Venetie households participated in some aspect of subsistence.

Venetie households hunted a total of 39 different species and used 47 different species (either eating, sewing, carving, trading, or giving them away).

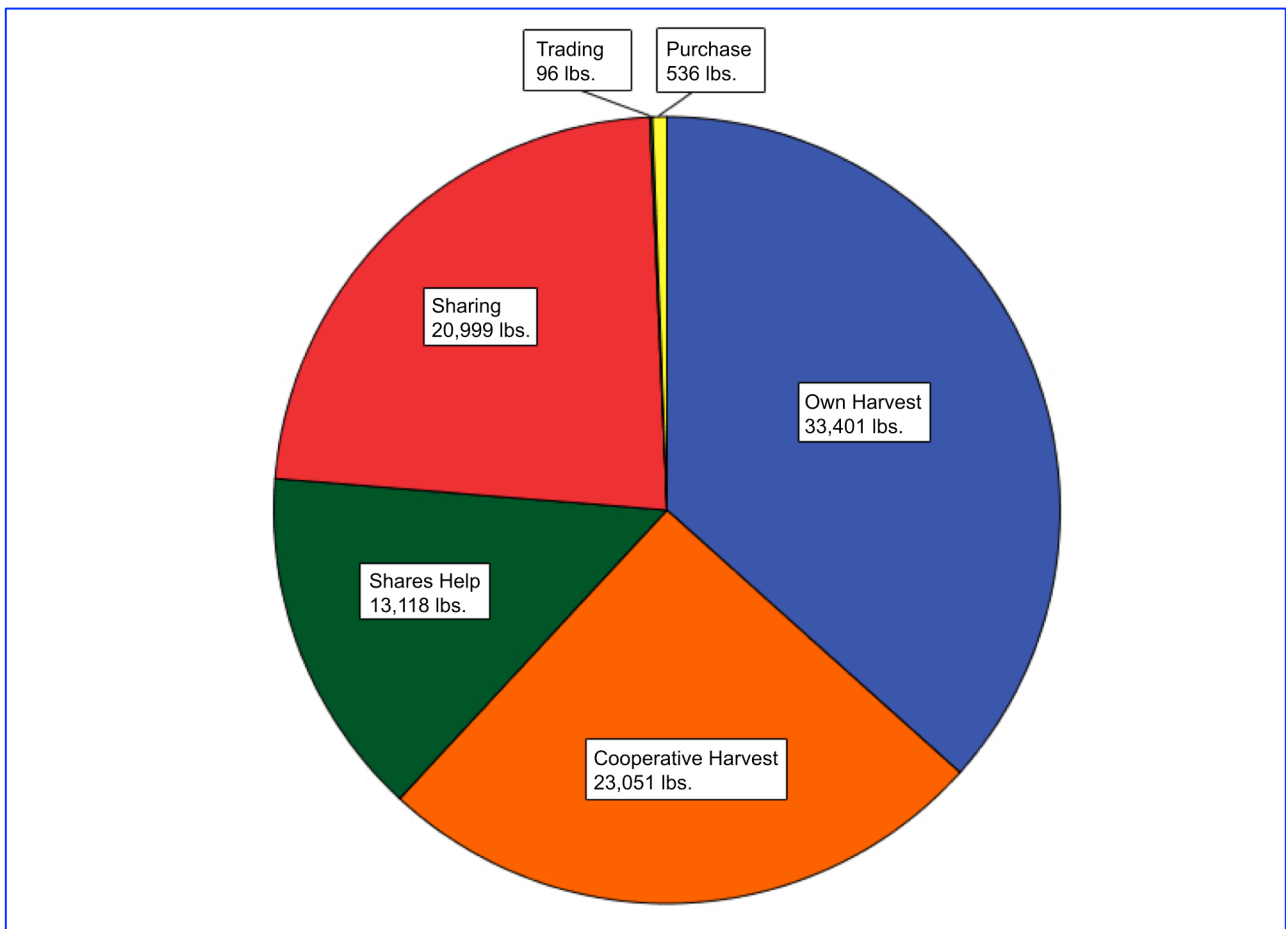
- 82.1% of HHs gave food to others, and 95.2% received some harvested food from other HHs.
- Average per capita (per person) harvest in Venetie was calculated as 274.3 lbs.

For the 7 core species:

- 75% of households (63 of 84) engaged in hunting or fishing for moose, caribou, salmon, geese or ducks or gathered berries.
- Of the 63 households who hunted, fished, or gathered:
 - 51 households (63%) also received food through sharing, shares or trade and either processed food or contributed to other people going out to hunt by providing money for gas or lending equipment, etc.
 - An additional 10 of these 63 hunting households received food through sharing or trading, although they did not contribute processing labor, gas, or other things.
- Of the 21 households who did not hunt or fish actively, 18 still received food through sharing, shares, or trading. 12 of these receiving households also engaged in subsistence through processing or lending of equipment, giving gasoline or other things.
 - only 3 Venetie households (3.6%) neither received food through sharing, helped others get out hunting nor took part in any subsistence harvesting.
- The average amount a Venetie household received through sharing was about 253 pounds.

Finding 2: Most of the total food flowing into Venetie households was based on social relationships among households

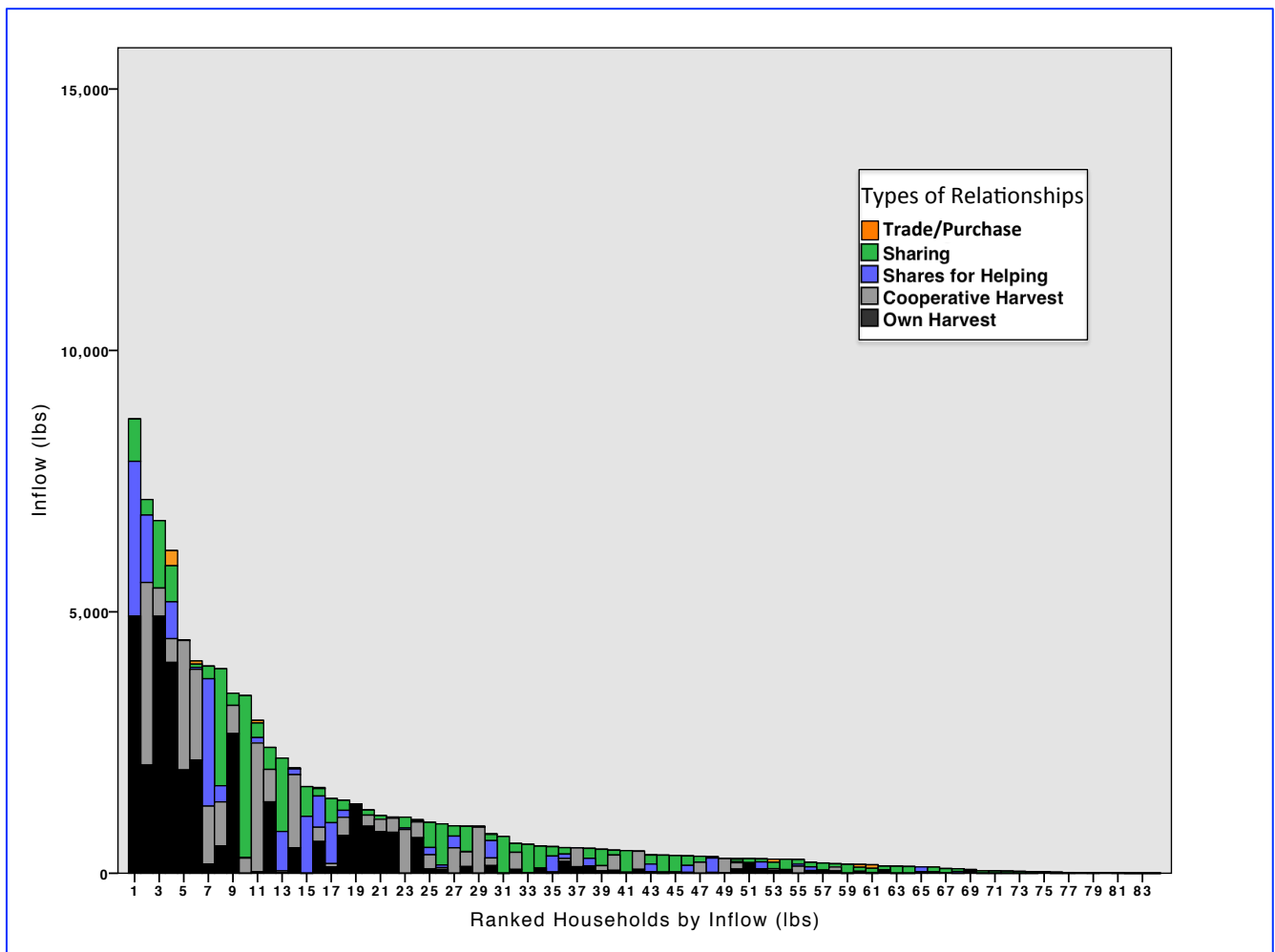
- Over 92,034 total pounds of subsistence food flowed into Venetie households during the one-year period from the 10 core species.
- 64% of the subsistence food flowing into households was based on social relationships between households.
- About 36% of the total (33,401 lbs) flowed into households from households hunting, fishing, or gathering alone (blue slice in the figure below).
- Orange represents shares to households from cooperative hunting with other households (25% of total or 23,051 lbs),
- Dark green is the flows of shares of meat or fish to households who didn't go hunting (14% or 13,118 lbs), but helped others get out hunting with contributions of gas, cash, or equipment, etc.
- The red slice shows the 20,999 lbs (22% of total) that came to households from sharing (gifting).
- Only 632 lbs (less than 1% of total) flowed into all households from trading (green) and purchase (yellow).



Finding 3: There was a wide range of amounts of food flowing into individual Venetie households.

Households differed in how much subsistence food came into households. Figure 2a shows how ALL subsistence food (in pounds) flowed into individual Venetie households, based on different kinds of relationships.

- Some households have high inflows (households on the left – the taller bars). Others have less (households on the right – the shorter bars). Each column in the figure below represents a Venetie household.
- Households on the left side brought in a lot of food based on their own hunting or hunting with other households (black and grey colors). Households on the right side of the figure below hunted less and some not at all. Still, subsistence food is coming into many of these households, mainly from sharing (green), and shares of meat and fish received for helping others to get out hunting (blue color).
- This finding shows that sharing was very important for those households not hunting actively.
- In Venetie 30% of households hunt or fish for 93% of all the food that is successfully hunted in the village.
- This pattern is very similar to other villages in Alaska. Some of what these very productive households bring in is then redistributed to other households.



This figure shows all the inflows of food to Venetie households. Each vertical bar in this figure is a household. The colors inside each bar show the kinds of relationships that accounted for how each household brought in their subsistence food. The height of each bar shows the total number of pounds flowing into households. The figure shows that food comes into households from many kinds of relationships.

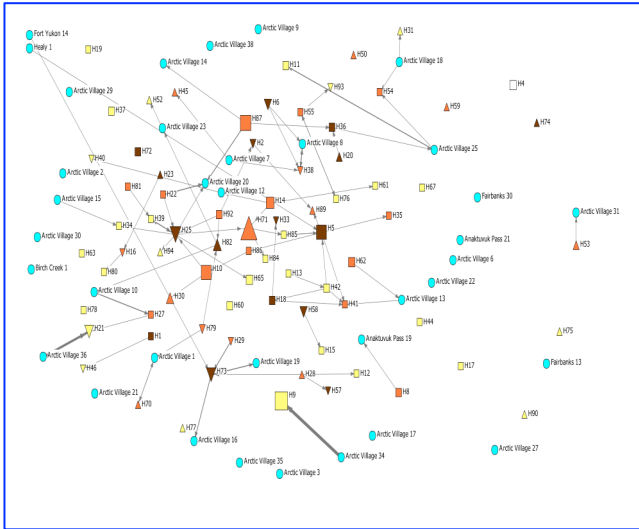
Finding 4: Subsistence was a community-level effort that distributed food widely to Venetie households.

This finding of the study is not a surprise — communities have made this point for years. Results from the Sharing Project show the importance of these sharing and distribution patterns. The results below focus specifically on moose and caribou hunting and sharing relationships, two important species for Venetie households.

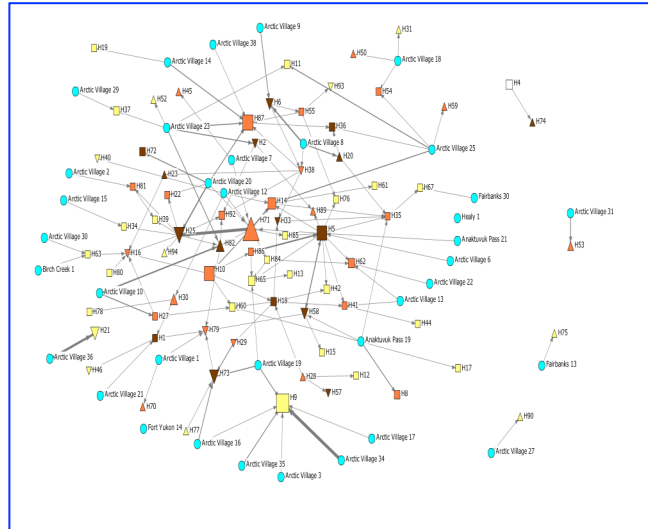
- 19,190 pounds of moose were taken by Venetie hunters in 2008-2009.
 - There were 81 different contributions made by Venetie households to the hunting of moose, including ammunition, cash, equipment, giving of fuel, helping with labor and giving other supplies (top left figure, next page).
 - There were 89 processing relationships between VEE households around moose hunting (top left figure, next page).
 - Almost 3,700 lbs were received by Venetie households as shares of moose for helping others go out to hunt (bottom left figure, next page).
 - **More than 5,115 lbs. of moose in total were received by Venetie households through sharing** (bottom left figure, next page).
- 12,716 pounds of caribou were harvested by Venetie hunters in 2008-2009.
 - There were 95 different contributions made by Venetie households to the hunting of caribou, including ammunition, cash, equipment, giving fuel, helping with labor and giving other supplies (top right figure, next page).
 - There were 55 processing relationships between harvesting and non-harvesting households (top right figure, next page).
 - 8,666 lbs were received by Venetie households through shares of caribou they received for helping others go out to hunt, such as giving gas or loaning equipment (bottom right figure, next page).
 - **More than 8500 lbs of caribou were received by Venetie households through sharing** (bottom right figure, next page).



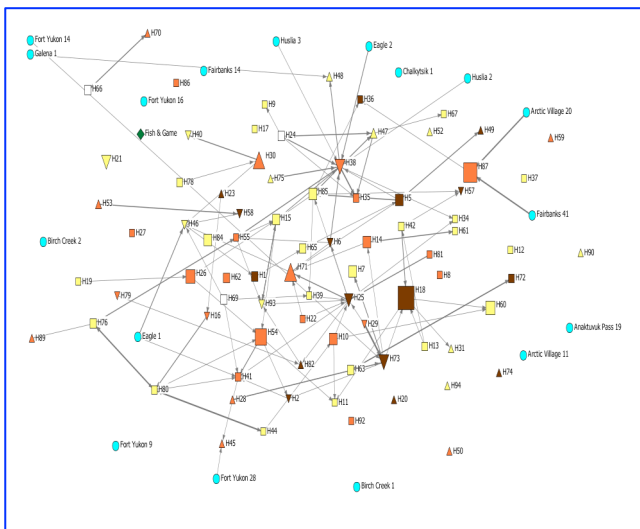
Contributions to moose hunting households



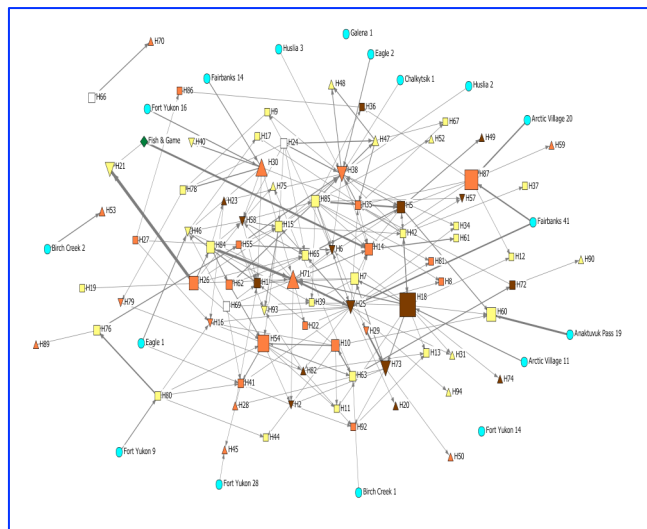
Contributions to caribou hunting households



Sharing and shares of moose



Sharing and shares of caribou



In all four of these network figures, orange/brown/yellow symbols are Venetie households and light blue circles are households from other villages. Lines show that something moved between households, either food or contributions. The top two figures show the contributions made by households to the hunting of moose (left) and caribou (right). In these two figures, arrows are going toward hunting households from those who gave contributions. In the bottom two figures arrows show the distribution of caribou from giving households to households receiving caribou through sharing and shares. The bottom left figure shows the distribution of moose, and the bottom right figure shows caribou sharing and shares. The strong connections between Arctic Village and Venetie households is clearly shown in all four diagrams.

Finding 5: Households in Venetie were part of a mixed economy where income was important for subsistence.

- Over 72% of households (58 of 80 non-teacher households) made a living combining harvesting with employment and some other source(s) of income (see Table below).

Combinations of household activities

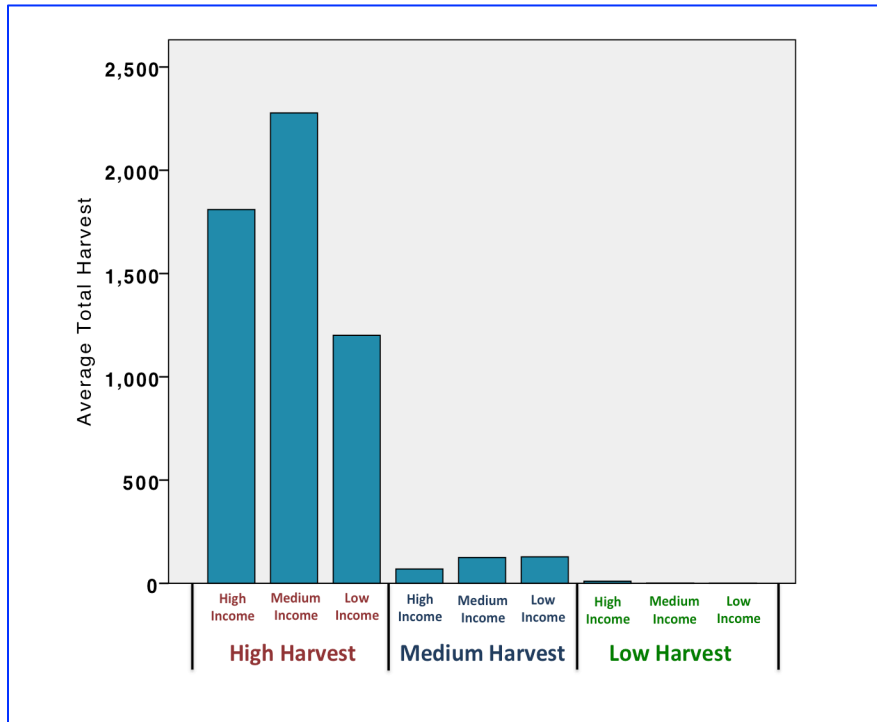
Venetie households in the mixed economy (2008 - 2009)	Combinations of Household Activities					
	JOB ONLY	Dividends/ Assistance ONLY	JOB/ Dividends/ Assistance	Harvest/ Retirement/ Dividends/ Assistance (NO JOBS)	Harvest/ JOB/ Retirement/ Dividends/ Assistance	Total
% and (No. of Households)	2.5% (2)	3.8% (3)	16.3% (13)	5.0% (4)	72.5% (58)	100.0% (80)

Note: This table does not include non-local teacher households (4). It shows results for 80 of 84 total households.

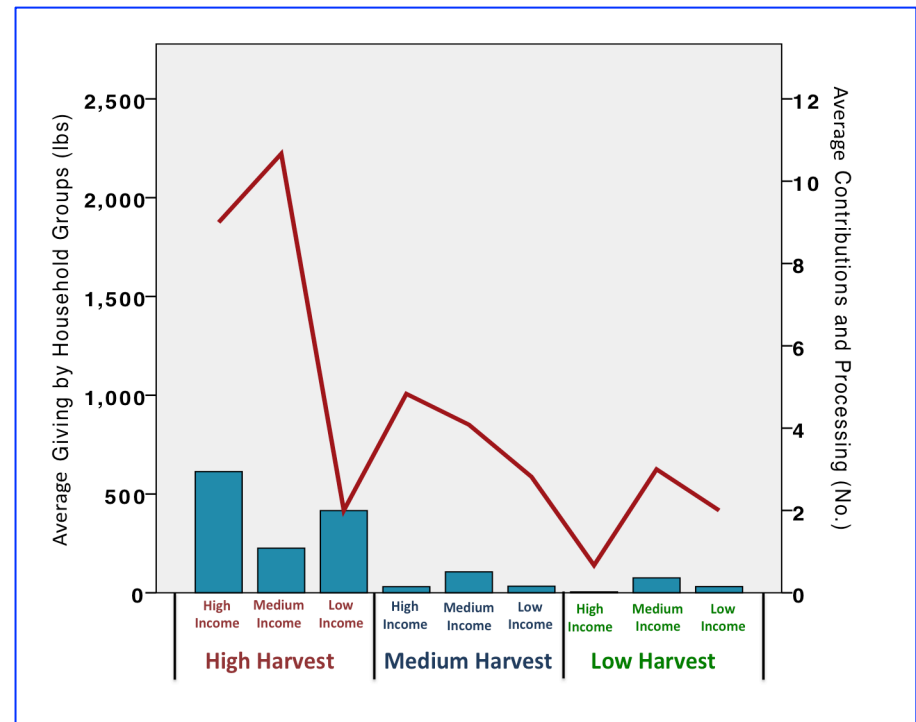
So how were the cash and subsistence economies combined in Venetie?

- Average HH wage income was \$21,673 and average household income was \$36,500.
- Looking only at the top 1/3 of households that harvested (26 of 80), all of them had people who were employed.
- 57% of high harvesting households (15 of 26) also had annual incomes that ranked in the top third of all household incomes. **In addition to having high incomes, larger and middle-aged households with active hunters and a lot of hunting equipment were more likely to be bigger harvesters.**
- Of the 27 households in the lower third of all incomes, 16 were also in the lower third of harvesting households.
- However, 9 high harvesting households had medium incomes and 2 high harvesting households had incomes in the lower 1/3 of all VEE household incomes (see left figure on next page). **So, while having access to cash was important for subsistence, it was not the only factor contributing to high harvests.**
- High harvesting households were the source of most of the sharing and shares flowing into other households (see right figure on next page). In general, those who harvested more, gave more. But as the right figure shows, medium and low harvest households also gave.
- High and medium harvest households were also the source of a lot of processing help and contributions that helped others get out hunting. But low harvest households also helped processing food and contributed to the hunting effort. This finding is shown by the jump up of the red line at the right end of the right figure. Contributions here are things like lending or repairing equipment, or giving gas, cash and groceries.

Left Figure: Harvesting pounds by Income groups



Right Figure: Giving of food and contributions by Harvest and Income groups



Left Figure: The height of the bars represents average non-whale harvest in pounds for different harvest and income groups.

Right Figure: The height of the bars represents average pounds shared or given out to other households as shares for helping by the same harvest and income groups. The red line is the average number of contribution and processing ties also provided (given) by these groups. It rises at the low end of the harvest showing that low harvest and medium- and low-income households also provide contributions to others.

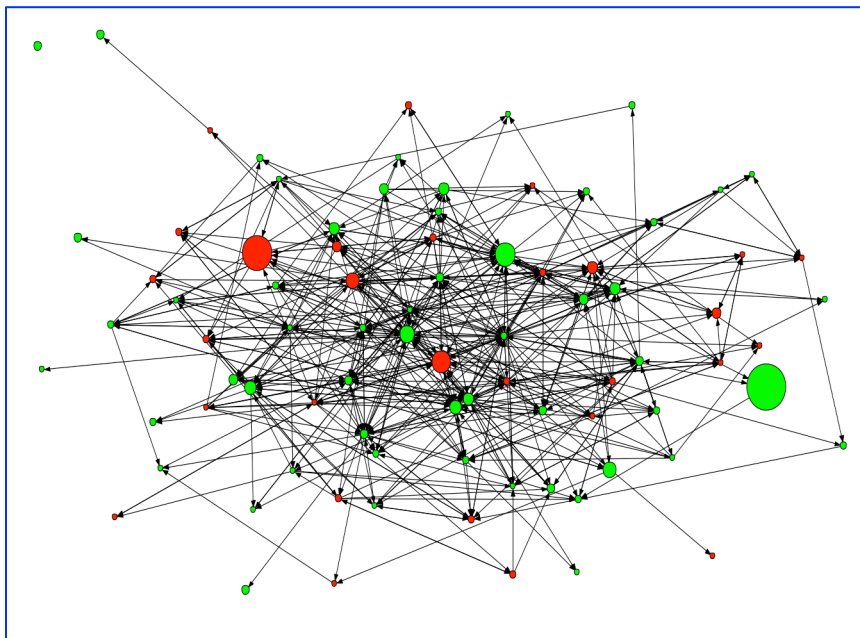
The following is a breakdown of the number of households in each Harvest by Income group in Venetie (not including non-local teachers):

- High Harvest - High Income = 15 households, High Harvest - Medium Income = 9, High Harvest - Low Income = 2
- Medium Harvest - High Income = 6, Medium Harvest - Medium Income = 12, Medium Harvest - Low Income = 9
- Low Harvest - High Income = 5, Low Harvest - Medium Income = 6, Low Harvest - Low Income = 16

Finding 6. Some Venetie households reported a high level of food insecurity.

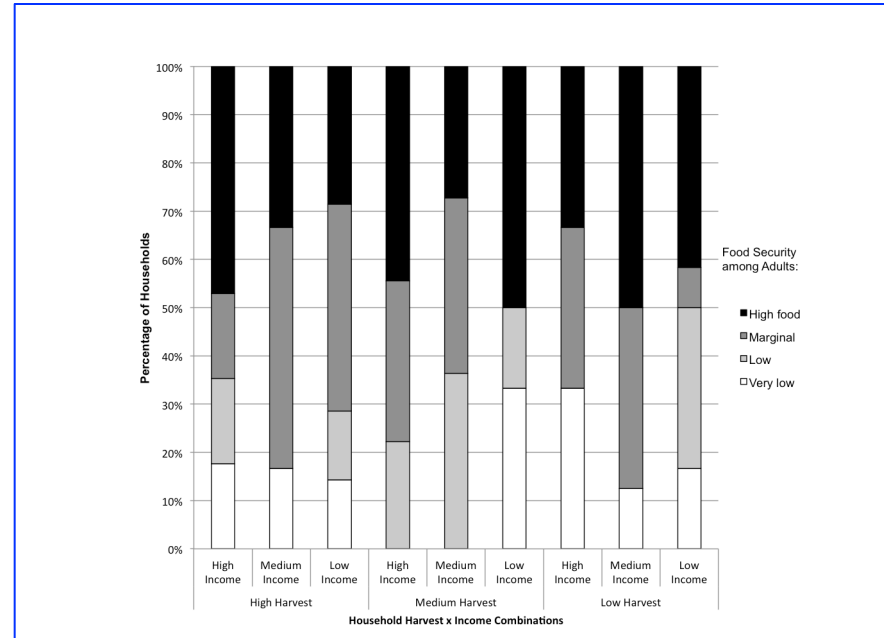
- We used a standardized set of questions from the US Department of Agriculture and Alaska Department of Fish and Game to ask about food security. For example, we asked, "Did people in your household have to skip meals because of not having enough food in their home?" or if they "ever ran out of either store bought or subsistence foods".
- 35% of Venetie households reported that they experienced "very low" or "low" food security during the one-year research period.
- Some of these households (the red circles in Figure 5a) are located on the margins of the food sharing network, but others are more central and received a lot of food through sharing (the larger circles received more food through sharing).
- Households across income and harvest levels expressed different levels of concern about food security (Figure 5b). For example, 18% of high harvest - high income households indicated they experienced "very low" food security (white color within first bar in Figure 5b).
- These findings raise questions about household well-being and people’s vulnerabilities in the event of possible social, economic or ecological changes.

Left Figure: Food Security network in Wainwright



Left Figure: The circles in this network are all Venetie households. The lines represent all the different ways that households are connected to each other through sharing, etc. Green circles are food secure households and red circles are food insecure households. The size of the symbols shows the number of pounds coming to the households through sharing. There are red circles that are both large (receiving a lot from sharing and small (receiving little from sharing).

Right Figure: Food security for harvest and income groups



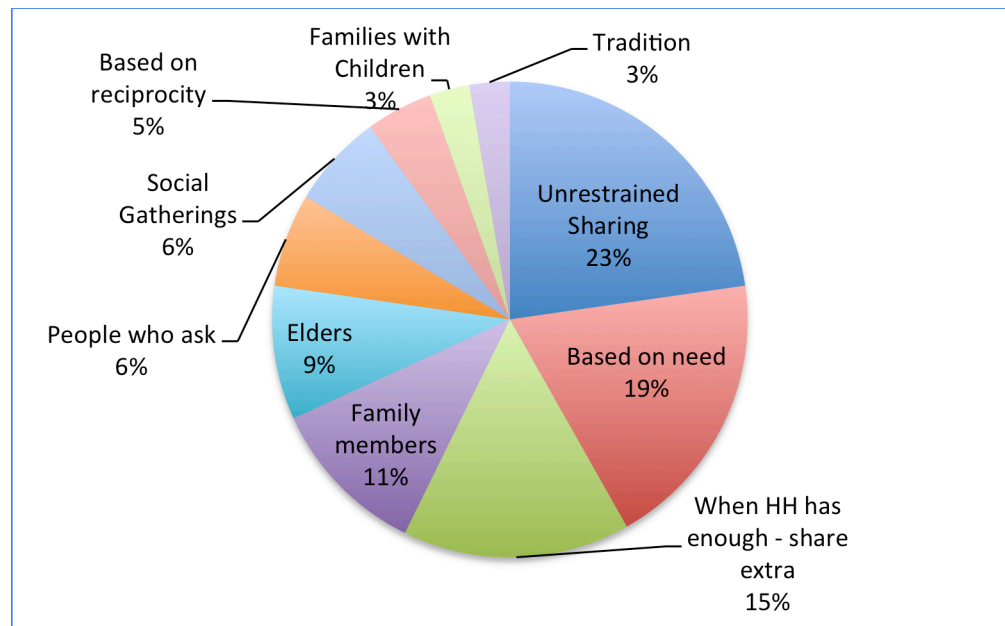
Right Figure. The bars in this graph show food security results for households grouped by harvest and income levels. Colors within bars shows percentage of households with high, marginal, low or very low food security for each group. High food security (black color) and low food security (white color) occurs across all harvest and income groups except Medium Harvest and High and Medium Incomes.

Finding 7. Sharing happens in many ways and for many different reasons.

We asked people to describe how sharing occurs and how sharing changes in different conditions. These results are summarized below.

We asked, "How do members of your household make decisions about when and how to share subsistence resources"? People gave multiple answers to this question for a total of 110 comments. Ten themes emerged from people's answers. People said i) sharing is unrestrained, ii) it occurs based on need, iii) it happens when households have enough or extra, iv) sharing occurs with family members, v) goes to elders, vi) goes to people who ask, vii) it occurs at social gatherings, viii) it happens because of reciprocity, ix) goes to families with children, and x) it happens because of tradition. Many people noted that they share "anytime" and to "anyone" (25/110 responses). One person described it this way: "If I get a bunch of meat, [I] just give it away to whomever I think wants them. I share all the time". But for some people the decision of how and when to share is based on the needs of other households (21/110 responses). As one person explained, "If somebody asks for something or I see they need something I share with them." Some noted that when it comes to sharing moose, hunters share with those who were not able to get a moose themselves. Whether or not someone has enough meat for their own household often determines if and when they share with others. Others explained how their decision to share was based on their meat supply (17/100 responses) in the following way: "It depends on [the] quantity of food harvested and time of year. If my freezer is full and it's not cold enough outside I'll share because [there is] no way to keep it." Several people noted that they primarily share with members of their family (12/110 responses). Others said they make sure to share with elders when they are able (10/110 responses). Some noted that meat is often redistributed more than once: "We give it to our parents and they give it to others, like elders." Some people mentioned that social gatherings are opportunities to share wild foods (7/110 responses). People specifically mentioned potlatches associated with funerals and holidays as important times for sharing foods. A few people noted the importance of the reciprocity of sharing (5/110 responses): "We just remember who give us some fish, and when we get fish later, we return it." So sharing meat with those who lent a helping hand, shared meat at an earlier time, or loaned equipment is a common occurrence. A small number of people noted that they share especially with households that have children (3/110 responses). Finally, those who talked about 'tradition' discussed how sharing is a very natural process, one that dates back generations, and how and when to share is rarely discussed explicitly (3/110 responses).

Question: "How do members of your household make decisions about when and how to share subsistence resources?"

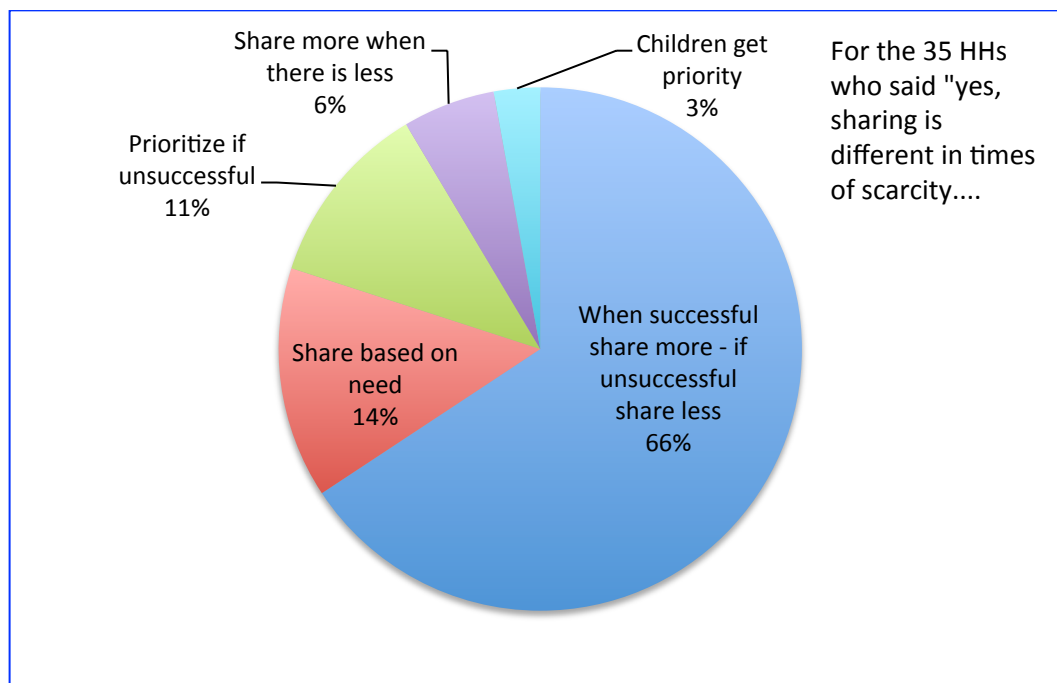


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Another goal of the Sharing Project was to understand how people cope with change. We asked respondents "If members of your household share wild foods differently when they have been successful in hunting, compared to when they have been unsuccessful?"

64% of respondents said "No," sharing is not different when a hunter is successful compared to when they are unsuccessful. We asked the 34% of respondents (35 HHs) who said, "Yes, sharing is different," to describe "How sharing is different at those times?" Five themes emerged from that question. People said: i) when we are successful, we share more, and if unsuccessful we share less, ii) we share based on need, iii) we give a priority to certain households and people, iv) we share more when there is less, and v) children receive priority. Most people reported that they share more when they have been successful compared to when they have been unsuccessful if game is scarce (23 of 35). One respondent put it very simply, "I can't share if I have none." Some people noted that in times of scarcity, they make sure to share with those who are most in need (5/35 HHs). A few discussed how they prioritize when they are less successful — they limit their sharing to a select group of people (4/35 HHs), as the following person states: "If we have a lot, then I'd give it away to everybody. If I have very little, [I give] just to family and elders." Two people reported that *more* sharing occurs in times of scarcity. One said "Give it away more in a bad season to make sure people are getting some." Finally, one person noted that during unsuccessful periods of hunting, they try to make sure that households with children are receiving meat.

Question: Do people in your household share wild foods differently when they have been successful in hunting, compared to when they have been unsuccessful?



Conclusion

The Sharing Project documented a mixed subsistence-cash economy of Venetie (and Kaktovik and Wainwright) during 2008-2009, and generated detailed information on the importance of subsistence relationships to village households. Only a small part of the project's findings are presented in this summary document. The project's findings clearly show that subsistence is not just about harvesting. Subsistence includes the social relationships of cooperation, sharing, and helping that binds people together in villages in Alaska. In short, the findings of the project demonstrate how the Gwitch'in value of sharing is realized by the people of Venetie.

The success of the Sharing Project was made possible because of great support from the people of Venetie, including village leadership, the Venetie Village Council, the project's steering committee, our local interviewers, and all those who agreed to be interviewed. Thank you for your time and effort. The project was funded by the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) / US Department of the Interior (M0712496) through a cooperative agreement with the University of Alaska Fairbanks. The project also benefited from support from the North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management.

The project advisory committee was Edward Frank, Mary Rose Gamboa, Ernest Erick, Gareth Frank, and Patrick Simple. Their advice was invaluable as we planned how this research should take place. Thank you!

The Sharing Project Venetie advisory committee suggested that a short version of the final report should be distributed to all HHs in the community. We very much welcome your comments on this summary document. We are interested to know: do our findings match your perceptions of the subsistence-cash economy in Venetie? We value your feedback.

To give comments, or for more information about the UAF Sharing Project contact:
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Many thanks to our interviewing team in Venetie: Larry and Maggie, Dennis Erik, Earl Erick Jr., Jessie Charlie, Julian Roberts and Roy Henry.