**THE ICELANDIC DIET: THE NUTRITIONAL BENEFITS OF SEAFOOD IN ICELAND**

Jessie Brown, BA School of Film and Television

Loyola Marymount University

Mentorship: Hawley C. Almstedt

Department of Health and Human Sciences

**Abstract**

My research project investigates the Icelandic diet, examining procedures and nutritional criterion that Icelandic seafood restaurants and fisheries follow to produce high quality cuisine. Looking at cultural differences between the United States and Iceland, my project will culminate in a documentary that displays a visual representation of the complete cycle from catch/farm to dishes in the Icelandic diet, highlighting industry professionals who have shaped and revolutionized the Icelandic food industry. Traveling to Iceland for ten days with a partner under a $5,000 budget per each individual, I propose to investigate Icelandic fisheries and sustainability laws, collecting data on harvesting strategies that lead to a healthier fish and thus healthier lifestyle for Icelanders as well as lower mortality rates. Studying the differences between family farms and industrial farms as well as the organization and techniques of renowned restaurants, I will ultimately look at Iceland’s emphasis on low processed and free-range products, exploring the importance of unsaturated omega-3 fatty acids in the Icelandic diet and dietary practices that lead Iceland to be labeled as one of the healthiest countries in the world.

**Introduction**

Most research on nutrition has primarily consisted of studies that focus on the physical and physiological effects of particular foods (Fagt). However, the particular processes and procedures by which food is prepared is just as important to research, and document looking at their effects on a healthy lifestyle. When researching the process of food preparation from the start to the finish of a dish, including governmental food regulations and restrictions, as well as cultural beliefs that lead to different nutritional choices, I discovered that the information on the complete cycle from catch/farm to dish was not as widely available as I previously believed. In the United States, our own culture is largely dominated by interest groups that heavily influence nutritional governmental guidelines and industry practices, so I am interested in exploring the Icelandic food culture and how different societal forces have led Icelanders to a develop a healthier process whose end result is a healthier lifestyle. Some information exists about food based dietary guidelines in Iceland from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; however, the majority of the material is concentrated primarily on food-based health risk assessments (looking for toxics) and general dieting suggestions, not the impact that processing and preparation have on a healthier lifestyle.

**Background/Related Work and Motivation**

Fascinated by nutritional trends and the country of Iceland, I have become interested in the Icelandic diet, specifically desiring to examine why Iceland has become recognized as one of the healthiest countries in the world. In 2014, the U.K Channel 4 labeled Iceland as the world’s healthiest diet in their *World Best Diets* documentary, however, not much attention besides this documentary has been placed on highlighting the benefits of Icelandic food, and none on the processes by which the Icelandic diet is produced (Channel Four Television Corporation 2018).

The quality of Icelandic food has been supported by evidence from many governmental sources such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations as well as many scientific studies, for example, the European Journal of Clinical Nutrition, both of which demonstrate that the Nordic diet, which is high in omega-3 fatty acids, lowers blood pressure, risk for cardiovascular disease and levels of LDL cholesterol (Adamsson). Although many scholars have examined the Nordic diet and the effect that it has on ambulatory blood pressure and circulatory risk factors, not much research has focused solely in the country of Iceland. Research regarding the cultural differences between American and Icelandic cuisine traditions are also scarce, illustrating the untapped nature of Icelandic methods. There is also a dearth of information surrounding Icelandic restaurants processing strategies, although they are renowned for their use of free-range and lightly processed ingredients (Hahnemann).

Because Iceland is surrounded by water, fish, and specifically Icelandic fisheries, play a vital role in the Icelandic diet. Their avid pursuit of responsible and sustainable harvesting strategies has led to a health stock and responsible use of living marine resources (Matís). Information from the Government Office of Iceland outlines the management and harvest control rules that Icelandic Fisheries follow, including the Statement on Responsible Fisheries in Iceland from 2007, and highlights the fact that stock assessments and fisheries are in conformity with international criteria and effective catch controls. The regular reinforcements of these laws have also led to long-term sustainability yields and perfected management schemes.

Through my research, I hope to continue to investigate the seafood industry, using these governmental materials to evaluate and further understand sustainability strategies and regulatory fishery practices. Exploring the consequences of these procedures and how they ultimately lead to healthier fish stock and thus to nutritional health benefits for Icelanders, I will then compare these practices to those in the United States to determine what makes the Icelandic approach so unique.

**Methods**

To answer these questions, I will hone-in specifically on the nutritional benefits of seafood in Iceland, examining the benefits of low processed and free-range products that Icelandic restaurants and stores produce. As a film production major, I plan to turn this project into a documentary, displaying a visual representation of the benefits of the Icelandic cuisine.

Using informational guidelines set by leading authorities in the food industry, such as from nutrition.gov, MyPlate and USDA, I will analyze how well Iceland incorporates these standards, to quantify the differences in American and Icelandic cuisine. I purpose to link statistics from Iceland’s Information Security Management of lower mortality rates and health improvements to the quality of Icelandic food, ultimately hoping to determine Icelandic dietary practices that effect nutritional outcomes. Visiting renowned restaurants such as Dill Restaurant, Grillmarkadurinn, Fiskfelagid, Skolabru, Snaps Bistro, The Laundromat Café, Mar Restaurant and the Gallery Restaurant, I will investigate their processes, procedures, ingredients and regulations, interviewing leading chef’s such as Gunnar Karl Gislason and other food industry professionals who openly promote innovate nutritional outcomes and the Icelandic diet (Iceland Magazine). Visiting family farms such as Bjarteyjarsandur, Efstidalur, Fridheimar Farm, and Holtsel, I will examine the benefits of family farms over industrial farms, gathering data on their harvesting techniques and environmentally friendly procedures.

In addition, I will research environmental regulations that affect the living conditions of fish and investigate the Icelandic seafood business that produce stock that ultimately leads to a longer life-expectancy in humans who consume them. I will travel to Port of Reykjavík and speak with ISI, Islandic Seafood International, to discuss the quality of seafood processing and leading Icelandic brands such as Islandia, Iceland Gold, Ocean Path, Banord, Havelok and Islandia armengol. I will also explore traditional hook-and-line methods for fishing one of Iceland’s largest seafood exports, the Arctic char, by speaking with local fisherman to investigate their techniques and philosophies. I will ultimately research how these methods provide a healthy alternative to the western and Mediterranean diets and examine the sustainable use of energy that Icelanders use to process seafood.

**Expected Results**

I ultimately plan to turn this research proposal into a documentary by traveling to Iceland to visually document the processes that create the Icelandic cuisine, focusing especially on the fish industry and speaking directly with professionals from different areas of the country to establish a diverse and wholistic picture of the Icelandic diet. I will gather information from sources that are both outspoken advocates for Icelandic methods as well as from individuals who are more skeptical on the subject and who provide contrasting opinions. I plan to examine renowned restaurants such as the ones described above in the methods section as well as Kaffivagninn, Fosshotel Glacier Lagoon, Hotel Glymur, Hotel Ranga, Lava Restaurant and Restaurant Fljott og Gott, for example, to ascertain knowledge about the processes in which food production and resources are regulated and how they are prepared to ensure maximum health benefits. I plan to obtain close-up camera angles of live fish in the farms, fresh fish on boats, fish being processed in seafood companies and fish being cooked up into dishes to provide a story of the complete process of fish preparation in the Icelandic cuisine. I also hope to capture wider shots of the surrounding environment of the restaurants, stores and fisheries in Iceland, revealing the unique atmosphere of the beautiful setting. Ultimately, through my many interviews with local fish farms, seafood processing companies, regulators, and restaurant owners and chefs in this documentary, I hope to capture the Icelandic culture and to highlight the cultural differences between Iceland and the United States that contribute to making Iceland a healthier country as a whole.

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**Budget and Timeline**

For this research project, I will require a camera and sound equipment to produce a quality film. The project would take ten days to complete in order to have ample time to interview enough industry professionals and travel to the separate restaurant and fishery locations.

Specific camera options include, but are not limited to: Sony FS700, Canon 5D Mk2, Canon c300, ARRI Amira and Sony A7S. I will also require specific camera lenses such as a Canon CN-E 18-80 Cine Zoom, Canon Cine Primes 35mm, Canon L Series, Vintage Arri and Zeiss superspeed primes, to clarify my visuals and allow for full range of composition and creative expression. This total camera equipment would be rented about for about $150 a day, concluding in a total of around $1500.

Minimal sound equipment might consist of a Sennheiser K6/ME64 cardioid microphone for on-camera or boom use, 1.5’ XLR cable, Foam and Furry Windscreens, Sony UWP-D11 Wireless Microphone System, Short Boom Pole, Shock Mount and Lightweight Stand. Sound equipment would be rented for around $50 a day, culminating in a total of $500.

For my crew, I will also require one additional person to act as a gaffer for my film. This individual would also play the role of associate director and producer to ensure the proper and timely completion of this production. Lighting and grip film equipment such as a 300w max. Rifa-44 collapsible softlight, 500w max. focusable Omni-light, 250w focusable Pro-light & a 750w, gels, a softbox, umbrella for light diffusion and a tripod will also be needed. A few basic grip clamps and items such as apple boxes and sandbags will also be necessary. The majority of this equipment I already own, however an additional $300 would need to be allocated for equipment purchases for sandbag and light diffusions.

Finally, I will require a hard drive to dump my footage onto at the end of each shooting day, which I own. Ultimately, I will also need funding for flight, housing, transportation and food expenses which would culminate in a request for the total $5,000 dollars for each individual.

I will need to contact professionals within the restaurant industry in Iceland to set up interviews and discuss their individual experiences with the health benefits of Icelandic cuisine. I would also like to contact a few government officials that work in the health department to ask them about specific policies that relate to the seafood industry and the betterment of a healthier lifestyle for the community within Iceland. In order to allow for ample time for these requests, I will need a pre-production period of about three months in the United States, to organize my crew and get into contact with Icelandic officials.