

MEETING NOTES

RI Interagency Food & Nutrition Policy Advisory Council (IFNPAC) Q1 Meeting

Chair, Terry Gray

Friday, June 16th, 2023 | 10:00 - 11:30am

RI Commerce Corporation

315 Iron Horse Way, Suite 101 (Narragansett Room)

Council members are required to attend in person per RI's Open Meeting Act requirements.

Members of the general public are welcome to attend in person or via the zoom link below:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87679267559?pwd=N0phQ0p1SFJjNnM4Y0NLKzBtdGhXZz09>
[\[us02web.zoom.us\]](https://us02web.zoom.us)

Meeting ID: 876 7926 7559 Passcode: 380694

One tap mobile +13052241968,,87679267559#,,,,*380694# US

IFNPAC was established by the general assembly in 2012 to serve as a coordinating body between 7 state agencies to examine regulatory and policy barriers to developing a strong sustainable food economy and healthful nutrition practices. Since the launch of the 2017 State Food Strategy, [Relish Rhody](#), the Council has served as a coordinating council to drive outcomes toward the Strategy which include: preserving and growing agriculture and fisheries; enhancing the climate for food and beverage businesses; ensuring food security for all Rhode Islanders and minimizing food waste in the waste stream.

Council Members

Q2 Meeting Minutes Date:

June 16, 2023

Location: RI Commerce Corporation

COUNCIL MEMBERS (present): Terry Gray (RIDEM), Andre, Jesse EDU , Alyssa, Ken Ayars (RIDEM), Julianne Stelmaszyk (RICC), Jessica Patroliia (RIDE), Aleatha Dickerson (OHA), Jenna Simeone (DHS), Randi Belhumeur (RIDOH), Terry McNamara (DOC)

Other attendees: Silvana Mercado, Amy Voigt

Guest Speakers:

1. Andrew Morley, Sweet & Salty Farm & Member of RI Farmers for Climate Action
2. Melissa Adams, Farm Viability and Agricultural Business Training Programs
3. Gerry Palano, Energy Programs

1. Introductions, New Members

Terry: Welcome everyone. This is our second meeting for calendar year 2023. Introductions.

2. Approve Q1 Meeting Minutes

Terry motions to approve minutes. March 21st meeting minutes approved unanimously by the council.

3. Key Legislative Updates For Food Issues

FY 24 Legislative Updates

- We are nearing the end of the session. A few things that we are confident that will pass in this year's budget.
 - **Rhode Island Community Food Bank: \$3.55M**
 - EOHHS received \$550,000 for food collection and distribution through the Rhode Island Community Food Bank
 - Rhode Island Community Food Bank line item is \$3M (from ARPA State Fiscal Recovery Funds) for enhanced support to households in need, including those that received enhanced nutrition benefits during the public health emergency
 - **Interagency Food & Nutrition Policy Advisory Council**
 - The council's membership increased from 7 members to 9 members to include participation from Commerce and the department of children, youth & families (DCYF)
 - **Litter Control Permit (Article 4, Section 6)**
 - Elimination of the requirement for businesses that sell to-go food or beverages to obtain and annually renew a litter control participation permit.
 - The budget also includes \$100,000 from general revenues to support litter removal efforts.
 - **Local Agriculture and Seafood Program: \$700K**
 - LASA grants administered through RIDEM
 - The FY 2023 enacted budget includes \$700,000 for the local agriculture and seafood program grants for small businesses in the food sector. This reflects a commitment of \$200,000 of annual ongoing support and an additional \$500,000 in one-time funding for FY 2023. The GA approved \$700,000 for FY 2024 to continue the extra \$500,000 for another year.
 - **Meals on Wheels/Elderly Nutrition Services: \$680K**
 - The GA approved \$680,000 from general revenues for elderly nutrition services, which is \$100,000 more than enacted and includes \$630,000 for Meals on Wheels.
 - These funds are administered through EOHHS
 - **Farmland Preservation: \$2.5M**
 - The Farmland Preservation funds are administered through RIDEM
 - The goal is to eliminate economic pressures on farmers to sell land for residential or commercial development. Prior bonds funds are nearly exhausted and the Department reports there is a wait list for funds.

Not included in FY24 budget:

- Healthy School Meals for All
 - [HB 6007](#) - AN ACT RELATING TO EDUCATION -- FEDERAL AID (Requires all public schools to make reimbursable breakfasts and lunches available to all students under the rules and regulations of the USDA and the RI department of education.) -held for further study
- Food Donation Tax Credit
 - [Article 6, Section 5](#) - The GA did not include the Governor's proposal for a new non-refundable tax credit of 15%, capped at \$5,000 of the value of donated food products to a food bank from local farmers and food producers.
 - [HB 5803](#) - AN ACT RELATING TO TAXATION -- TAX CREDIT FOR FOOD DONATION (Provides a tax credit for food donations by qualified taxpayers to nonprofit organizations.) -held for further study
 - [SB 517](#) - AN ACT RELATING TO TAXATION -- TAX CREDIT FOR FOOD DONATION (Provides a tax credit for food donations by qualified taxpayers to nonprofit organizations.) -referred to Senate Finance

Terry: The budget has passed. The Governor is signing today at 12pm.

Jessica: We hope to get Healthy School Meals in the budget for next year.

4. Deep Dive: Farm Viability and Climate Smart Agriculture Policies

Ken: This is tied with a new report that came out called New England Feeding New England <https://nefoodsystemplanners.org/> There is an incredible amount of background that has gone into this report. RI has long been involved in supporting this. A lot has gone into achieving this goal. We are in the long end of the supply chain. Most food moves west to east and goes cross country to feed us. Getting to what we all think is more sustainable to get there locally is important. We have seen over the past several years challenges in the food system, challenges in supply chain, etc. There are challenges to our food system and security moving forward. It is not a steady state, especially with ongoing climate change. Key Findings include:

- 1 million more acres of land will need to come under production
- Diets will need to shift to - more fruit/veg, seafood, less processed foods.
- Food system employs 1 million people (10% of all jobs) and generates \$190 billion in sales (11% of all sales)...however not enough people are choosing to work in the agriculture and fisheries industry to meet demand.
- Grocery stores, fast food and restaurants account for 84% of food sales, however, accessing these markets has been a barrier for local small businesses and producers.

Juli: This is just the executive summary. If you want to look at one page, look at page 4. The most important thing to think about is a regional food system What role can RI play and what role can RI not play? I would love to do a deeper dive into NEFNE. One of the focuses is to discuss agriculture and the climate. I think we can all use a reminder of what these issues are. We have 3 guest speakers for today:

5. Farming in Rhode Island Amidst a Changing Climate

Andrew Morley: I am farmer and cheese maker in Little Compton, RI with my wife Lori. We are the owners of Sweet & Salty Farms. I want to thank Director Terry on your leadership on climate. I want to thank Ken because he helped me land in RI 12 years ago. Thanks for making this all possible. I have been a proud member of RI Food Policy Council and RI Farmers Require Action. Today I am only speaking in my personal capacity.

I am a farmer, and everyone likes farm tours. Here's an overview:

- We are unconventional dairy farm in RI. We let the cows roam freely and feed themselves in a managed way. We often joke that we are a solar powered farm as the pastured grass is energy used to feed the cows and ultimately we turn that energy into milk and cheese.
- A typical day starts early in AM, we bring them in to get milk, we bring them out 2x a day for fresh pasture, the milk gets handed off to employees, we have 8, the cheese and milk employees, and tasters. We sell at farmers markets so that the product can land in our customers hands at peak point. This all takes a tremendous amount of work but that's what it takes to be a farmer in RI.

Climate change and Agriculture in RI:

1. Climate change will inevitably cause a disruption to the global food system leaving Rhode Island more dependent on local food sources in a crisis
 2. Climate change will make growing and producing food in Rhode Island more difficult
- RI Farmers produce 5% of the food in RI
 - A great benefit are prices.
 - Drought and flooding will push our coastal farms to the limit.
 - Soil Regenerative Agriculture:
 - "One that, at increasing levels of productivity, increases our land and soil biological production base. It has a high level of built-in economic and biological stability." Robert Rodale, 1983
 - The Way Forward: Build Local Capacity
- These are the 5 recommendations to build resilience.
1. Support Farm Viability in Rhode Island Today

2. Improve Farmland Access and Develop Next Gen Farmers
 3. Support Climate Resilience on Farms
 4. Develop Markets for Rhode Island Products
 5. Exercise Local Food Supply Chains Early and Often
- Ken: can you talk a bit about your optimism?
 - Andrew: I went to college, got an office job and quit after 5 years. I became an apprentice at other people's farms. My wife has an MBA and background in food markets. We were way under skilled when we decided to start a business and moved to Little Compton. There's a big generation of farmers that did not grow up on a farm. The optimism comes from a big group of people interested. A lot of the solutions are here, we just have to deploy them. There is work ahead of us and we need to collectively tackle manageable challenges.
 - Juli: I have a question around your farm operation and your neighbors. How are you responding now to the challenges you are seeing and preparing for the next 3 years?
 - Andrew: Since we started, we've had 4 droughts. The cows don't stay in the same place for too long. The cows have a self-perpetuating system. Managing the numbers of acres and numbers of cows. The soil matter is continuously growing and since our soil system is done correctly, it improves the soil and is continuously improving. During a drought, we give the cows hay. It's a big learning curve. I was fortunate enough to train under a mentor that raised cows this way. Knowing that flooding and a drought can happen again, our personal plan is to keep climbing that educational curve.
 - Ken: I would also make the point of the importance of farmland protection.
 - Andrew: The list of farm viability projects that Ken provided in the handout is a very good one. We can double and triple investment and get tremendous return. These are important efforts.

Melissa Adams (MA Dept of Agricultural Resources)

- Farm Viability Programs Overview (see slides)
- The overall purpose is to provide planning, TA and grants to increase the viability of farm businesses.
 1. Farm Viability Enhancement Program (FVEP) – established commercial farms with 5+ owned acres in production; land ownership required for short-term covenants to keep land in agricultural use
 2. APR Improvement Program (AIP) - for farms that own land permanently protected through state APR program. Grant funds for infrastructure improvements.
 3. Matching Enterprise Grants for Agriculture (MEGA) Program – for beginning farmers in business 1 to 10 years; secure land access required – may be leased or owned.
- What programs exist to help farmers adapt to a changing climate, adopt “climate-smart” practices and address climate-related risks?
 - Climate Smart Agricultural Program (CSAP)
 - 3 fiscal years going on 4th
 - \$1.25 – \$1.50 million + funding per year
 - 75 - 100+ applicants/year
 - 50-60 +/- awards/year

Gerry Palano (Environmental and Energy Grant Program)

Agricultural Energy Program (ENER)

- Goals: to help farms improve their sustainability through implementing energy efficiency and renewable energy projects; also contributes towards state: food plan, energy efficiency/clean energy and greenhouse gas reduction goals.
- General Eligibility Requirements:
 - MGL 128.1A – Commercial Ag
 - Minimum of 3 years
 - No acreage requirement
 - Leased property is ok

- Primary Technical Requirements:
 - Energy Audits
 - Technical Assessments
- FY2024 CSAP AgEnergy Grant Funding Amounts:
 - Maximum of \$50,000 with a demonstrated 20% match
- Eligible Projects:
 - Energy Efficiency
 - Renewables

Q&A

- Ken: Between the 2 programs, what is required to support them annually?
 - Melissa: CCAP is \$1M but could use more. My 3 programs combined are \$1.5M
 - Gerry: \$3M plus between the two of us
- Terry: have your investments resulted in any net zero farms yet?
 - Gerry: yes, and we have some that are close to zero. This is something that we try to promote. One maple farm in western Mass became net zero about 3 years ago
- Juli: Melissa, regarding some of the TA providers that you work with. How do you structure that? Do you have a separate bucket of funding?
 - Melissa: yes, we have a separate TA funding pit that's about \$2K a year and a separate request for response for TA providers so that if someone is interested they respond online. This is a procurement system with the opportunity to renew contracts. Everyone that is qualified has the opportunity to put in for a bid. I am happy to share our RFP as a model.
 - Juli: Yes, that would be helpful. Commerce has lots of incentive plans and DEM has a lot of farm viability programs, but the Commerce ones are not targeted. Do fisheries have a separate program?
 - Gerry: yes, but fisheries are a different state agency.
 - Melissa: I am not aware of anything similar, but we fund a lot of oyster farms from our MEGA program
 - What is the cost if electric equipment? Are they competitive with what farmers are using now?
 - Gerry: It depends on size of tractor you are trying to purchase. There are retrofit. Most farms are interested in something new and with more horsepower so the cost can range between \$25-75K.
 - Terry: have you talked with DEP to use diesel emissions reduction funds?
 - Gerry: No, we haven't. Thank you for that.

6. Brief update on Relish Rhody 2.0 Food System Planning Process

- Juli: I know we have been trying to figure out the role of IFNPAC. What can the council do with the information that we have from guest speakers and the programs we have in RI? How should we tackle these priorities as a council?
 - Terry: on climate change, it intersects with EC4. For the first time, they have funding. It's important that this topic stays on that agenda. That's more of my role.
 - Juli: I can try to bring info to the STAC group. Do you work with OER?
 - Ken: yes, we do. I am struck by how comprehensive their programs are and for \$3M they are doing a lot. I am interested to see what we can do in RI.
 - Terry: Timing wise, think about schedule. Right now, we are starting our capital requests. For us, it's a big deal. Some other agencies may want food and agriculture on their budgets. All this progresses through September/ October. Now is the time to start thinking about this. By January, it is too late.
- Juli: we are updating the food strategy. Here are some updates:
 - Funding awarded to Commerce from Henry P. Kendall Foundation to support the planning process

- 5 Year Impact Report will be published early July
- 28 Advisory Board members gathered to “kick-off” the planning process on June 8th
- New RFP will be published soon and consultant selected by early August

7. Public Comment

Terry: any public comment?

Jack Sisson: MA is doing a lot of great work. It always goes back to me for additional staffing to administer these programs and to offer the TA that is needed to make these successful.

Terry motion to adjourned. Juli seconds. Meeting adjourned.