

Inter-Agency Food & Nutrition Policy Advisory Council

2022 Report to the General Assembly

MARCH 2023



Acknowledgements

This report and the activities described within is a collaborative effort of the Interagency Food and Nutrition Policy Advisory Council (IFNPAC), the Hunger Elimination Task Force and many other community partners.

IFNPAC Member Agencies

Department of Health (RIDOH)

Department of Environmental Management (DEM)

Department of Administration (DOA)

Department of Human Services (DHS)

Office on Healthy Aging (OHA)

Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE)

Department of Corrections (DOC)

Special thanks to these community partners and others who are acknowledged within this report:

Rhode Island Commerce Corporation (RI Commerce)

Rhode Island Food Policy Council (RIFPC)

Rhode Island Community Food Bank (RICFB)

Rhode Island Public Health Institute (RIPHI)

University of Rhode Island's Business Engagement/Agricultural Center/SNAP-ED

Farm Fresh Rhode Island

City of Providence, Healthy Communities Office

Health Equity Zone Initiative (HEZ) at RIDOH

Hope & Main

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Executive Summary

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

The Interagency Food and Nutrition Policy Advisory Council (IFNPAC) was created to find ways to overcome regulatory and policy barriers toward developing a strong, sustainable food economy and healthful nutrition practices. Since the publication of the 2017 State Food Strategy *Relish Rhody*, IFNPAC has served as a coordinating agency to drive outcomes toward the Food Strategy in partnership with the Director of Food Strategy, staffed at Rhode Island Commerce.

Supporting the growth of the local food sector through meaningful regulatory and policy initiatives is critical to increasing the number of jobs, growing the local economy, and ensuring positive health outcomes. Under Rhode Island General Laws 21-36-3, IFNPAC membership is made up of the Directors, or their designee, from the Department of Health (RIDOH), Department of Environmental Management (DEM), Department of Administration (DOA), Department of Human Services (DHS), Office of Healthy Aging (OHA), Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) and Department of Corrections (DOC). Administrators and directors from other State agencies and community-based organizations often participate, including representation from the leadership of the Rhode Island Food Policy Council (RIFPC), the Rhode Island Community Food Bank (RICFB), Farm Fresh Rhode Island (FFRI) and many others.

The IFNPAC submits an annual activity report to the General Assembly. This report has been drafted in accordance with the requirements set forth in Chapter 36, Section 21-36-5 of the *Rhode Island Local Agriculture and Seafood Act*.



Relish Rhody, the State's first comprehensive food strategy, was launched in 2017 as a five-year action plan centered around three core themes – environmental sustainability, public health and equitable access to food, and opportunities for economic development.

There are five integrated focus areas that drive the strategy:

- 1. Preserve and grow agriculture and fisheries industries in Rhode Island**
- 2. Sustain and create markets for Rhode Island food and beverage products**
- 3. Enhance the climate for food and beverage businesses**
- 4. Minimize food waste and divert it from the waste stream**
- 5. Ensure food security for all Rhode Islanders**

The IFNPAC convened four times in 2022: March 1st, June 7th, September 14th and December 13th. Council members listened to, and discussed, topics presented by public and private partners with a stake in the Rhode Island food system. Each meeting included a "Deep Dive" to examine a specific food policy or regulatory issue related to the above focus areas as summarized below.

Summary of Meetings 2022 (for complete minutes see addendum A)

Q1 Meeting (3/1/22)

Focus: SNAP Healthy Incentives in Rhode Island

RI Commerce, Providence RI

Guest Presenters:

Thea Upham, Farm Fresh RI, Bonus Bucks Program

Dr. Amy Nunn, RI Public Health Institute, Nourish RI

Q2 Meeting (6/7/22)

Focus: Building Long-term Food System Resilience in RI

RI Commerce, Providence RI

Guest Presenters:

Cathy Feeney, Chief of Office of Food Protection, RIDOH

Scott Marshall, Deputy Chief of Agriculture, RIDEM

Emily Spiegel, Professor of Law at the Center for Agriculture & Food Systems at Vermont Law School

Q3 Meeting (9/14/22)

Focus: Economic Impacts of RI Food System

RI Commerce, Providence RI

Guest Presenters:

Ellen Kahler, VT Sustainable Jobs Fund & New England Food Systems Planners Partnership

Q4 Meeting (12/13/22)

Focus: Responding to the Hunger & Nutrition Crisis

RI Commerce, Providence RI

Guest Presenters:

Andrew Schiff, Executive Director at the RI Community Food Bank on "2022 Status of Hunger Report"

Margaret Read, No Kid Hungry on Healthy School Meals for All

Key Initiatives & Impacts in 2022

Based on the food strategy focus areas, IFNPAC and the Director of Food Strategy had several priorities in 2022. Inter-agency progress was made under each of these five focus areas of *Relish Rhody*.

Preserve & Grow Agriculture and Fisheries Industries

- Thanks to support from Governor McKee and the General Assembly, **The Local Agriculture & Seafood Act (LASA) grant program of DEM awarded \$700,000 to small and/or beginning Rhode Island farmers and food producers** which will help increase the amount of food locally grown, raised and harvested which contributes to goals of long-term food security and farmland viability.
- The Director of Food Strategy helped DEM and the Town of Narragansett secure a **\$400,000 federal EDA grant to resolve a longstanding gap in seafood wastewater processing for the seafood industry**. The grant will fund a feasibility study of the Scarborough wastewater treatment plant to determine capacity for receiving more seafood wastewater effluent.
- DEM's Division of Coastal Resources has three contracts out currently totaling \$17.7 million to improve capitol assets in the Port of Galilee. These include Docks, Bulkheads, electric systems, fire suppression systems, and water which will support continued growth and viability of the commercial fisheries and seafood industry.
- DEM's Division of Agriculture and Forestry utilized new or enhanced USDA funding to stand up or expand several programs, including those that help purchase locally produced food for the emergency and supplemental food system (Local Food Purchase Assistance Program), help local income Seniors access fresh fruits and vegetables (Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program), help farmers, fishers and foresters deal with sources of stress (Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Program) and support the specialty crop industry of RI (Specialty Crop Block Grant Program).

Sustain & Create Markets for Rhode Island Food & Beverage Products

- RIDEM, RIDE, the Director of Food Strategy and Farm Fresh RI secured a **\$300,000 federal USDA Farm to School grant to grow farm to school opportunities** in RI for farmers, students and schools. The grant will support a new position, a Farm & Sea to School Coordinator, to increase institutional market opportunities for Rhode Island food producers, farmers and fishers.
- RI Commerce's Supply RI initiative partnered with Hope & Main and Farm Fresh RI to host a Tabletop Food Show which brought together over 200 food buyers from institutions, wholesale, retail and corporations with 50 small Rhode Island food businesses.
- DEM launched a statewide RI Seafood Campaign with support from the Seafood Marketing Collaborative, RI Commerce and industry partners to increase local seafood consumption among Rhode Islanders.
- **RIDE supported the administration and disbursement of over \$7 million in Federal funding designed to help school meals operators overcome supply chain challenges** resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Of this funding, just over \$1 million will be used to directly support the purchase of locally grown/produced food items from RI and the surrounding region.
- RIDE continued to lead efforts around the growth and expansion of the RI Farm to School Network in partnership with RIDEM and RI Commerce, including the development of a RI Farm to

School brand and the launch of the rifarmtoschool.org website, which connects local schools, early care professionals, and farmers with resources to support local food system education and farm to cafeteria initiatives

Enhance the Climate for Food & Beverage Businesses

- With support from RI Commerce, **the passage of the 2022 Cottage Food legislation removed barriers for home-based food entrepreneurs.**
- **RI Commerce awarded 42 grants and loans totaling \$1.9 million to food, agriculture and/or seafood businesses** and manufacturers of which 54% was for women and minority-owned businesses.
- RI Commerce, Hope & Main and Johnson & Wales University hosted a delegation of 40 Belgian food businesses looking for opportunities in the Rhode Island as part of a national economic mission to the US.

Minimize Food Waste & Divert it from the Waste Stream

- DEM in partnership with RI Commerce, DOA and the RI Resource Recovery Center submitted a grant application through EPA for the "Solid Waste Infrastructure & Recycling" (SWIFR) program to update the state's Solid Waste Management Plan and support increased technical assistance to waste generators. This will bring more than \$300,000 to Rhode Island for more sustainable waste management and increase food waste diversion.
- DEM's Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, a federally funded program, continues to aid the advancement of specialty crops in Rhode Island through the use of Mini grants and traditional grants that allow for multi-farm/organization projects that include education, marketing, and new market access points. In 2022 alone RIDEM injected ~\$500,000 in federal grant funds for the program
- **DEM made progress with streamlining the existing rules for the permitting of organic waste processing facilities**, and new rules for innovative processing systems proposed by the business community.
- DEM assisted the RI Recycling Club with efforts at local schools to implement organics diversion programs alongside food recovery efforts.
- RIDE strengthened the partnership with the RI Recycling Club to support compliance with the Food Waste Ban and other food recovery and diversion efforts within schools, which aim to reduce food waste in RI schools up to 50% by 2030. In the 8 schools currently participating in a targeted food waste reduction program, **the RI Recycling Club has diverted and estimated 55 tons of food waste away from the state landfill and has redistributed over 10,000 pounds of food that would otherwise have been wasted** to food insecure children and families throughout the state.
- The Director of Food Strategy presented to staff at RIDEM and the Office of Energy Resources (OER) on opportunities in renewable natural gas production through anaerobic digestion of food and organic waste following an opportunity to participate in a Fact-Finding Mission to Denmark, hosted by the Danish Trade Council.
- RI Food Policy Council's Wasted Food work group has been very active this legislative session on two areas in particular, a food donation tax credit and compost support.
 - Food donation tax credit:

- Researched extensively on legislation and best practices regarding food donation incentives.
- Met with Harvard Food Law & Policy Clinic (FLPC) to discuss their recent research and forthcoming report.
- Connected legislators with Harvard FLPC about model policy language.
- Liaised with various experts and stakeholders - including RI Hospitality Association and RI Food Dealers Association - to understand their perspectives on the issue.
- Held a legislative roundtable with 12 senators and representatives and experts and stakeholders.
- Compost supports:
 - Researched extensively on legislation and best practices regarding composting.
 - Contributed significantly to the planning of the Compost Conference
 - Held several workshop sessions at the Compost Conference on food recovery, community composting, and advancing policy.

Ensure Food Security for All Rhode Islanders

In 2017, IFNPAC created the Hunger Elimination Task Force (HETF), a statewide network of food access, nutrition, and public health leaders that work to reduce hunger and increase access to healthy, culturally appropriate food for all RI residents. Since 2021 the Taskforce has been facilitated by the RI Food Policy Council and RIDOH. Over the course of 2022, the Task Force formed communities of practice to tackle specific key priorities identified by HETF, such as getting more local food into the emergency and supplemental food system and serving aging Rhode Islanders. An update on their work is below:

- Thanks to an allocation of ARPA funds from the General Assembly, **DHS is partnering closely with the RI Public Health Institute to develop the RI SNAP Incentive Pilot Program, “Eat Well, Be Well Rewards”** which, when launched, will significantly increase consumption of fruit and vegetables through a SNAP reimbursement system at participating retailers.
- DHS is engaging with four retailers that are interested in the Online Purchasing Program, which will give customers more options to buy groceries with their SNAP- EBT card online and is in the process of engaging and recruiting additional retailers.
- DHS contracted with a new SNAP outreach provider, mRelief, which uses texting and online technology resources to help DHS screen individuals and families for potential SNAP eligibility and offer assistance with the application process.
- Working with federal partners, **DHS issued more than \$144 million in Covid-19 SNAP emergency allotments in 2022.**
- **RIDOH successfully completed and launched the Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL) Strategic Plan - 2023-28** which was created with a broad group of partners, including IFNPAC members, to chart the course for healthy eating and physical activity for all Rhode Islanders. The last plan concluded in 2018, after a funding lapse through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The newly branded HEAL Plan includes four priority areas:
 - 1) Access to Affordable Nourishing Food
 - 2) Access to Safe Spaces for Play and Physical Activity
 - 3) Infant, Children and Youth Nutrition and Physical Activity

- 4) Expansion of Statewide System Coordination. Cross-cutting principles across the four priority areas include health equity and the social determinants of health;
- RIDOH secured National Association of Chronic Disease (NACDD) funding to develop a five-year Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) Accelerator Plan to advance health equity, reduce disparities and improve health outcomes in Pawtucket and Central Falls. This work is a partnership between RIDOH and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC). LISC is the backbone agency of the Pawtucket Central Falls Health Equity Zone (HEZ). Focus areas for the Accelerator Plan were chosen based on demographic characteristics including health status, community profile, chronic disease burden, and available healthcare systems as well as a high prevalence of behavioral-related factors such as tobacco use, physical inactivity, and access to healthy foods. Intervention areas of focus will include public spaces, food and nutrition and community-clinical linkages.
- OHA contracted with Meals on Wheels of R.I. (MOWRI) to implement the Culturally Relevant Responsive Home Delivered Meal Program. MOWRI provides culturally appropriate meals to Rhode Island residents 60+, homebound, unable to drive or cook, and have no one to assist them with food preparation. The meals are tailored to the populations which includes Latin, Asian, and Kosher options, as well as therapeutic meals designed for individuals with a chronic medical diagnosis that require a more specialized diet. **Utilizing ARPA funding, MOWRI served 5,474 meals in the Culturally Responsive Meal Program providing a healthy diet that is culturally familiar to the client's needs.**
- OHA collaborated with RIDEM in the annual produce Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program. Unlike previous years, where low-income seniors received vouchers to purchase fresh food at farmers markets, in 2022, 9,578 produce boxes were distributed through local senior centers and senior housing sites. The produce box deliveries were distributed by Farm Fresh Rhode Island to eligible Rhode Island low-income seniors with fresh, local vegetables and fruits.
- **RIDOH and the RIFPC successfully hired the state's first Food Access & Equity Program manager to lead the Hunger Elimination Task Force and serve as a liaison between the state agencies and community-based organizations** involved in nutrition security programs. This builds critical capacity to support more coordinated programs and activities which improve food access and food assistance supports.
- **HETF deepened engagement and collaboration with emergency and food assistance providers.**
 - HETF increased participation to over 500 active members who engage quarterly to address food access and nutrition security issues.
 - Targeted outreach saw participation in HETF grow among representatives in the healthcare industries and Health Equity Zones.
 - In 2022, the HETF launched a monthly newsletter, called the RI Food Access Bulletin (RIFAB) to keep the network members informed of each other's work and provide timely updates about important policy changes and funding opportunities. The RI Food Access Bulletin is sent to over 450 HETF members each month and has an average open rate of 30% which is an above average rate for email marketing.
 - The HETF network was crucial in helping the RI Foundation conduct outreach to all eligible nonprofit organizations. Ten million dollars in funding was available for nonprofit organizations providing food access, housing, and behavioral health services. The first round of grant awards provided \$5,706,500 in grant funds to those involved in food access work.

Overarching Food Strategy Impacts

- **IFNPAC members collaborated on leveraging an aggregate of \$2.2 million of federal grant funding for RI food system organizations** and businesses in the last year to support the increase production and procurement of Rhode Island grown foods alone.
- **RI Commerce, through the Director of Food Strategy and in partnership with RIDOH, EOHHS, RIDEM began the process to update the State's Food Strategy – “Relish Rhody 2.0” - which will serve as a shared roadmap for how to tackle ongoing challenges and set shared goals for 2030. The new strategy will be launched in late 2023/early 2024.**
- The RIFPC and Director of Food Strategy represented Rhode Island on the “New England Feeding New England” initiative, a project of the New England State Food System Partnership to improve the reliability of our regional food system by strengthening supply chains towards our goal of 30% regionally consumed food by 2030. The project will lead towards better data across production and consumption as well as coordinated investments and implementation.

Challenges & Opportunities for IFNPAC in 2023

CHALLENGES

- **Limited staffing capacity** to support initiatives and more effective agency programs and to secure more federal grant funding available.
 - RIDE: Farm to School initiatives and waste diversion in schools. In some cases, temporary funding exists but the ability to attract qualified candidates and navigate allowable state hiring channels limits the ability to leverage funding. State investment into these efforts to allow for continuity, expertise and additional capacity building/sustainability would be instrumental in ensuring the growth and success of these programs
 - RIDEM: Materials Management with a focus on organics diversion is an area of increasing interest across the Ocean State and Country with benefits ranging from the immediate goals of reducing the volumes entering the landfill, preventing harmful methane emission, creating local jobs for collections and processing, and utilizing the finished compost for a wide range of benefits. DEM staff has the opportunity and responsibility to assist with these efforts, however a dedicated staffing effort spanning multiple years may be required if this work effort is deemed to have a higher priority. Collaboration with other state agencies, quasi-state agencies, non-governmental organizations and the private sector will continue to be important for making progress on the goals for wasted food solutions.

Staffing for DEM programs which support local agriculture procurement programs stood up by federal and state funding (e.g. Local Food Purchase Agreement Program, Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program and Local Agriculture & Seafood Act Grant Program) as well as food waste diversion and permitting are very limited and will inevitably be a roadblock to bringing more funding for RI programs. For instance, just 1 FTE with 50% time is dedicated to working with food waste generators on food waste diversion and enforcement of the 2017 Food Waste Ban.
 - OHA: Congregate meal sites struggle with Insufficient staffing and volunteers to support the Older Americans Act Nutrition Program (Title III-C). Providers are experiencing challenges with hiring and retaining staff/volunteers for the programs.

- **Continued supply chain disruptions** are impacting availability of food and are contributing to food price inflation, which has exacerbated already high food insecurity across the state. According to experts and regional estimates in the 2014 New England Food Vision, Rhode Island is reliant on an estimated 90% of its food supply coming from outside the region. More needs to be done to support long-term food security by bolstering local food production on farms and fisheries and increasing local food consumption.

OPPORTUNITIES

- **Leverage state procurement contracts to encourage more local food purchasing.** The DOC, IFNPAC and Farm Fresh RI could identify ways for local farmers to bid on the DOC's weekly Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. An analysis could help determine if Farm Fresh RI or other local farmers in general have the ability to bid on the DOC's weekly Fresh Fruit and Vegetable program. The DOC utilizing the RI Division of Purchases bidding process buys various fruits and vegetables for the DOC's inmate population on a weekly basis. There is an opportunity to identify the market opportunity for the local farmers to bid and how to get them through the process of being state vendors.
- **Coordinate and connect with workstreams and programs across agencies** working on food systems issues. IFNPAC is a successful model for interagency collaboration, but there are opportunities to better leverage federal funding and streamline efforts on shared programs to better support goals around food access, nutrition security, food literacy, food waste diversion and agricultural/environmental education.
- **Utilize federal funding to build and support the local food system.** The flow and diversity of federal funding is unprecedented and state agencies have been opportunistic and forward thinking. Staff capacity to help capture and utilize federal funding remains a limiting factor but all should be done to take advantage of the current opportunities to make a lasting impact on the local food system.
- **Leverage the capacity of aligned nonprofit and for profit entities with IFNPAC agencies** to ensure broad engagement with the Relish Rhody update and implementation of the high priority strategies to be included in it.
- **Strengthen and grow the market for local food insecure communities** via expanded LFPA funding, continued coordination with the RIFPC LFPP implementation grant project, and coordination, expansion, and alignment of existing and planned new produce incentive program and produce prescription programs.

2023 Priority Actions for IFNPAC

Governor McKee's "Rhode Island 2030" State Plan Working Document, the Administration's vision for Rhode Island's economic recovery post-pandemic calls out several food system priorities below. These will continue to serve as strategic focus areas for the IFNPAC in 2023.

- Ensure that families experiencing poverty have access to the resources they need to support themselves and their children to lead healthy lives, including food, housing, education, and job training. (pg 8)
- Decrease child poverty by implementing enhanced RI Works supports and coordinating state policies and programs for job training, adult education, housing, food access, and more to support families to achieve economic self-sufficiency. (pg 12)
- Focus upstream on root causes and investing in affordable housing, food security, and transportation to address underlying inequities and influencers of health disparities. (pg 40)

To better leverage interagency partnerships to overcome regulatory and policy barriers, per the IFNPAC's mandate, [the Council member agencies have committed to advancing the following priorities in 2023 and will provide updates during quarterly Council meetings.](#)

Department of Health (RIDOH)

1. Continued implementation of the Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL) Strategic Plan with the potential for CDC funding and other braided funding streams through RIDOH's Division of Community, Health and Equity
2. Responding to the five-year CDC SPAN funding opportunity
3. Continued implementation of the Pawtucket-Central Falls Accelerator Plan and the statewide *Creative and Safe Streets Mini-Grant Program*

Department of Human Services (DHS)

- Continue to generate awareness of SNAP through outreach and community partners, especially among hard to reach and underserved populations
- Simplify the application process for elderly and disabled households
- Improve information available through the DHS call center IVR, the online customer portal and the mobile application
- Seek out cross promotional opportunities between SNAP, WIC and Head Start
- Expand training opportunities through the SNAP Employment and Training Program
- Encourage more households to opt into text message reminders to receive up-to-date information on the status of their SNAP case
- Seek out opportunities to expand the Restaurant Meals Program

Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM)

1. Reduce the amount of food waste/organics entering the landfill through development of a comprehensive strategy and multi-year implementation plan for sustainable materials management grounded in EPA's food recovery hierarchy and circular economy initiatives. This effort will align with Relish Rhody 2.0 and focus on statewide collections, processing, and reuse efforts.
2. Continue investing in infrastructure at the Port of Galilee, the state's largest commercial fishing port, utilizing \$46 million in available capital funds. Investments will include both marine and landside infrastructure projects such as a port wide security system and various paving projects around the port.
3. Strengthen our local food system and agricultural production with continued and sustained funding through state and/or federal sources (i.e. Farm Bill).
4. Continue to support our state's fishing industry as they face challenges resulting from climate change and other ocean uses through relief assistance and other available grant programs.
5. RI Seafood Marketing Collaborative, the state's local seafood branding initiative, is renewing its Strategic Goals for 2023 through 2028. RI Seafood remains committed to expanding access and awareness of available local seafood options throughout the state. In 2023, RI Seafood will continue celebrating Quahog Week which is slated for April 23-29, featuring over 60 partnerships through local events, social media channels, and expanded e-newsletter circulation.

Department of Education (RIDE)

1. Continue to support expansion of the Federally funded child nutrition programs by reducing barriers to participation, which may include: increasing access points for meals under these programs, implementing innovative service delivery models, and/or reducing the cost burden on families associated with participating in these programs
2. Emphasize participation in the Federally funded child nutrition programs as a key strategy in supporting goals around chronic disease prevention, achieving educational outcomes, and supporting the social emotional well-being of children and youth throughout the state while finding ways to best support inter and intra agency work related to these goals
3. Focus on initiatives that holistically incorporate food literacy into the overall educational experience for children and youth by connecting facilities improvements, outdoor learning programs, and high-quality curriculum standards to Farm to School and other agricultural education initiatives
4. Build resources and capacity to further support food waste prevention, recovery and diversion to support both environmental and food access goals within the school food environment
5. Support further opportunities for the production, supply, and integration of locally sourced food items into school meals with a focus on building awareness and capacity within the Farm to School market and integration of culturally relevant food choices for the communities served by these programs

Department of Corrections (DOC)

1. Work in conjunction with the farmers and other agencies such as RI Commerce, DEM and State Purchasing to determine opportunities to increase number of RI farmers and food producers on state procurement contracts. The initial focus would be to approach Farm Fresh RI or other local farmers to discuss the overall plan, again to see if there is a want/need for the local farmers to be state vendors.

Office of Healthy Aging (OHA)

1. Expand efforts through the Older Americans Act (OAA), funding and other resources to continue to support and improve the Title III C Congregate and Home Delivered nutrition meal services for adults aged 60 and older i.e., expand the offerings of Culturally Responsive Meal Program.
2. Strengthen partnerships to address food insecurity and malnutrition of older adults. Older adults are at higher risk for food insecurity and malnutrition.
3. Collaborate with other state agencies to leverage efforts in existing programs to better meet the needs of the populations i.e., DHS SNAP, RIDOH Healthy Eating and Active Living, HEAL, CACFP).
4. Partner with other agencies to increase efforts to include local foods distribution to alleviate supply chain challenges.

Executive Office of Commerce/RI Commerce*

1. Lead process to update state food strategy - "Relish Rhody 2.0" - with collective impact goals towards 2030.
2. Improve understanding of needs of second stage food businesses and strategic investment opportunities to support growth for this cluster.
3. Establish consistent and reliable state level metrics on the food system (e.g. local food counts study, emergency food/resilience planning, economic impact of second-stage food manufacturing)
4. Address regulatory barriers for food businesses, specifically food waste haulers/composters and commercial fishers/shell fishers.

*Note that the EOC is technically not an official member of the IFNPAC, however practically the Director of Food Strategy is staffed at RI Commerce and plays a lead role in facilitating, planning and implementation Council activities. The Governor's FY24 budget includes a proposal to make EOC a full member (see Article 3, Section 2: Relating to Government Reform and Reorganization). EOC and RI Commerce are committed to supporting these above activities in 2023.

Policy Considerations for the Rhode Island General Assembly

This report suggests policy and regulatory changes which the General Assembly may consider in current and future legislative sessions. IFNPAC is proud of its accomplishments in 2022; however, challenges/barriers still exist and require all levels of leadership to consider so that we can meet our vision for continued growth between the nexus of environment, economic development, and public health. The IFNPAC would welcome continued discussion on any of these topics and looks forward to additional guidance from the General Assembly.

For further questions please contact Ryan Mulcahey, Director of Legislative Affairs at RIDEM.

Food Waste Diversion and Composting
<p>Consider passing a food donation tax credit to incentivize food producers and food businesses to donate safe-to-eat foods to food insecure communities. Often food produced on farms or in commercial kitchens is overproduced or cannot be sold due to superficial imperfection but is perfectly safe to consume.</p> <p><i>Governor's Budget Article 6 – Relating to Small Business “Food products donation tax credit.”</i></p>
<p>Consider additional supports for technical assistance, expanded composting infrastructure and enforcement of the 2017 Food Waste Ban to increase food waste diversion from the landfill and support food recovery of wasted food.</p>
Farmland Protection
<p>Consider supporting annual funding to farmland preservation programs such as the Farmland Development Rights Acquisition and the State Farmland Access Program.</p>
Supports for Small and Underserved Food Businesses
<p>Consider increased funding to critical agricultural and fishery preservation programs such as DEM's Local Agriculture and Seafood Program (LASA) and the Farmland Preservation Program. Both programs are critical supports for local agriculture. LASA receives almost \$1 million in grant requests each year and serves a funding gap for new farmers and early-stage agriculture and seafood businesses often excluded from traditional funding streams. The LASA program supports continued innovation, adaptation, and development in local agriculture and food (including seafood) industries.</p>
<p>Support increased funding for innovation and R&D programs which help small to mid-size food, farm and seafood businesses remain viable in a competitive global food system.</p>

<p>Consider legislation for a state definition of “local food” to build more value for Rhode Island-grown food products, raw agricultural products, and seafood in increasingly competitive markets.</p>
<p>Healthy & Local School Meals</p>
<p>Consider opportunities to improve the quality of school meals by disentangling the State's funding formula for federal school nutrition programs from meal benefit applications and to fund a healthy school meals for all program which is proven to improve food security, health outcomes and support local food producers.</p>
<p>Organizational Changes</p>
<p>Consider supporting an expansion of IFNPAC members to the Executive Office of Commerce and the Department of Children Youth and Families.</p>
<p><i>Governor's Budget Article 3, Section 2 – Relating to Government Reform and Reorganization</i></p>

Appendix A: Meeting Minutes

Q1 Meeting Minutes

Date: March 1, 2022

Location: RI Commerce Corporation

COUNCIL MEMBERS (present): Terry Gray (RIDEM), Randi Belhumeur (RIDOH – on behalf of Dr. Jim McDonald), Ken Ayars (RIDEM), Julianne Stelmaszyk (RICC), Aleatha Dickerson (RIOHA), Maria Cimini (RIDHS) Jessica Patroliia (RIDE) Jade Borgeson (DOA)

GUEST PRESENTERS: Nessa Richman, RI Food Policy Council (RIFPC)

Thea Upham, Farm Fresh RI

Dr. Amy Nunn, Rhode Island Public Health Institute

Other ATTENDEES: Laurie Cote (RIDHS), Ananda Fraser Ramirez (RIDEM), Fred Mattera (RIDEM), Erin Bertoldi (RIDOH), Amanda Cantrell, Lisa Raioli, Alyssa Gleason, Andrew Schiff, Alison Tovar, Patrick Baur, Sharon Pavignano, Karin Wetherill, Sam Sleres, Kate Balestracci, Cara Mitchell, Rachel Newman-Greene, Kate Masury, Alison Montagnon, Jason McNamara, Leo Pollock, Stephanie Bush, Margaret Read, Kate Masury, Coryanne Mansell, Caitlin Mandel, S. Griffin, Kerri Connolly

Pre-reading materials sent to council members:

- IFNPAC 2021 Q4 meeting minutes
- IFNPAC 2021 Legislative Report (draft)

Welcome and Introductions

- Randi Belhumeur called the meeting to order at 9:33am. She introduced herself as the RIDOH designee and provided an overview and background on the structure and purpose of the council.
- RIDOH has led IFNPAC coordination under the leadership of former Director Alexander-Scott who served as Chair of the Council for several years. Dr. Jim McDonald, RIDOH's Interim Director has offered his support as we continue with this critically important work. With Dr. Alexander-Scott's departure, it was announced that the new Chair would be Acting Director Terry Gray of the Department of Environmental Management. RIDOH is truly appreciative of Director Gray's support.
- Director Gray asked for a motion to approve the IFNPAC meeting minutes of the November 2021 meeting.
 - Minutes were approved by Randi Belhumeur and Julianne Stelmaszyk
- Julianne Stelmaszyk reviewed the meeting's agenda and introduced the Hunger Elimination Taskforce
 - The Hunger Elimination Taskforce has a key initiative of the Food Strategy, born out of the IFNPAC leadership in 2017. Since 2020, the RI Food Policy Council, has facilitated the HETF meetings on behalf of RIDOH and has made strong progress in catalyzing efforts to reduce hunger in Rhode Island.

Hunger Elimination Taskforce (HETF) Update:

- Nessa Richman provided an overview of the Q1 2022 HETF meeting
 - Goal: To reduce hunger and increase access to healthy, culturally appropriate food for all RI residents. (Note: original mission statement was 'Ensuring equitable food access and food security for all Rhode Islanders')
 - Brief background: Initiated by Gov Raimondo in 2017. Convened working group to develop recommendations and action steps to reduce food insecurity levels to below 10% (Relish Rhody target). Group developed a strong list of recommendations that were presented to IFNPAC in 2018, then communicated to wider audience of stakeholders in 2018/2019. We are fortunate to be able to BUILD on this foundation. We started building in 2021, and welcomed over 150 people to our meetings - representatives of CBOs, HEZs, non-profits, emergency food providers, food justice and sovereignty advocates, state agency staff, healthcare professionals, students, and many others.
 - 75 members attended meeting in February 2022
 - Hosted 6 breakout room conversations

Breakout Rooms:

- Improving emergency and supplemental food delivery for homebound people
- Getting more local food into the emergency feeding system
- Improving SNAP and WIC utilization and operations
- Connecting with municipal governments
- Serving aging populations (in partnership with Age-Friendly RI)
- Food access and insecurity among students

- Held a panel on the municipal role in hunger elimination
- 2022 Objectives
- Broaden the network of actively engaged stakeholders and lift up effective community-based solutions to specific food justice and food access problems
- Deepen the collaborative environment for medium/longer term problem solving across state agencies, NGOs, CBOs, industry and other stakeholders
- Reduce food insecurity by generating and providing information that helps member organizations connect food insecure people with emergency/supplemental food delivery services
- Solve systemic emergency and supplemental food delivery/distribution problems by identifying and educating decision makers about policy/investment/regulatory solutions that increase the effectiveness and resilience of the emergency and supplemental system in responding to shocks
 - Meeting Schedule
 - Tuesday, May 3, 2:00 pm - 3:30 pm
 - Tuesday, July 26, 2:00 pm - 3:30 pm
 - Tuesday, October 18, 2:00 pm - 3:30 pm
 - Contact:
 - Nessa Richman, Network Director
nessa@rifoodcouncil.org
 - Allison Montagnon, Communications Manager
allison@rifoodcouncil.org
 - Caitlin Mandel, Food Access & Equity Manager
caitlin@rifoodcouncil.org

IFNPAC Annual Report Review – Key Progress in 2021:

- This report was sent out to council members in advance. It is due to the General Assembly the end of March 2022.
- Julianne Stelmaszyk thanked agencies for their contributions and acknowledged that the partnerships amongst state agencies have been strengthened to have a greater impact on RI. Julianne highlighted the following key initiatives and impacts:
 - In 2021 the pandemic continued to disrupt the food system through supply chain disruptions, labor shortages, and food price inflation. This led to an increase in the number of Rhode Islanders experiencing hunger coupled with widespread labor shortages which further exacerbated supply chain disruptions and negatively impacted food businesses. As a result, IFNPAC focused our efforts on several initiatives in 2021 to address these issues.
 - Our agencies worked together to properly staff the state. The Director of Food Strategy position was filled after a 15month vacancy led by RI Commerce, RIDOH and DEM.
 - RIDOH was able to secure funding through a CDC grant to hire a Food Access & Equity Manager to help us better address immediate and mid-term issues contributing to food insecurity and barriers to healthy and culturally appropriate foods for vulnerable communities. Deepen the collaborative environment for medium/longer-term problem solving
 - Randi Belhumeur introduced Caitlin Mandel, who started her position of Food Access and Equity Manger. She provided a background on Caitlin’s work experience and welcomed her to the team. Caitlin expressed gratitude and excitement in this new role.
 - IFNPAC led several efforts to address emergency food response through bi-weekly communications with other agencies and community-based organizations. OHA, RIDE and

- DHS worked to improve food access for the populations they directly serve by expanding nutrition assistance programs and emergency food distribution and communications.
- DEM, RIDE and Commerce collaborated on several initiatives to increase the demand for RI-grown or produced foods in institutions through the launch of the local food brand “RI Grown” and the expansion of the RI Farm to School Network
- IFNPAC worked together to leverage federal stimulus, state and philanthropic funding for the food sector
- DEM alone helped leverage over \$1.75million in funds to support local agriculture and fisheries recover and rebuild from the pandemic.
- Several efforts were made to reduce regulatory burdens for food businesses including the permanent extension of the Direct Sale Dealer license for commercial fisherman to sell direct to consumer and retail as well as a new website through Commerce and Dept. Of Biz regulation which streamlines the process for opening a restaurant
- IFNPAC extended our food strategy work beyond IFNPAC partners to other mission-aligned agencies and more regional and national efforts.
- Julianne Stelmaszyk asked the group if there were any changes to be made to the report
- Director Gray asked IFNPAC members for a motion to approve with discussed changes
 - Julianne Stelmaszyk and Randi Belhumeur motioned to approve the report
 - No members opposed
 - Maria Cimini (RIDHS) abstained from motioning as the DHS leadership was in transition
- The Report will be reviewed by RIDOH communications and then sent to General Assembly

Food Strategy Priorities for 2022

IFNPAC agencies reviewed their Food Strategy priorities:

Department of Health (RIDOH)

- Focus on health equity and the social determinants of health as they relate to the food strategy.
- Coordinate quarterly report outs from agencies on IFNPAC progress.
- Engage with government, education, stakeholders, community organizations and residents to produce a Physical Activity and Nutrition Strategic Plan for RI.
- Collaborate with the RI Food Policy Council to integrate newly hired Food Access and Equity Manager into the work of the food strategy and oversee the efforts.
- Help define metrics for food access as they relate to *Relish Rhody* goals.

Department of Environmental Management (DEM)

- Continue to support and expand programs which preserve RI agriculture and fisheries, working with partner IFNPAC agencies to grow the local food, farm and seafood economy.
- Develop and support federally funded programs which sustain, promote and enhance agricultural viability and resilience
- Continue to develop resilience and sustainability in the local food system, embracing diversity and equity.

RI Commerce Corporation (RICC)

- Ensure Commerce’s business development tools, such as SupplyRI and other business assistance supports are effectively utilized to support growth in the food sector.
- Identify high-growth, high-impact food sector opportunities for job creation which contribute to Food Strategy goals towards resilience, sustainability and equity, where possible.
- Identify more opportunities to connect small food, farm and fish businesses with access to capital and technical assistance.

Department of Education (RIDE)

- Development of a local procurement tracking system and formalized definition of “local” for use in the school meals programs
- Expand Farm to School activities into the Early Childhood Community
- Mitigate the impact of expiring USDA waivers that allow for the service of universal free meals. Supporting the continuation of alternate service models in school meals (such as breakfast in the classroom) to ensure continued widespread food access even the event of a return to “normal” operations for the 2022-2023 school year
- Expand use of “out of school time” meals programs for communities that have qualifying sites as overall food access in the state decreases with the expiration of COVID-related initiatives

Office of Healthy Aging (OHA)

- Strengthen elders and adults with disabilities’ access to healthful foods.
- Continue to promote a robust mix of meal programs; explore RI Department of Education (RIDE) partnership to offer intergenerational café program.
- Collaborate with DHS to promote SNAP participation among older adults.

Department of Human Services (DHS)

- Increase food security among older adults and individuals with disabilities by increasing SNAP accessing the following ways
- Seek a waiver from FNS and implementing the Elderly Simplified Application Project.
- Increase SNAP access through technological improvements and mobile device access.
- Investigate opportunities for interagency, cross-program outreach and enrollment between WIC, SNAP and free and reduced-price school lunch program.

Department of Corrections (DOC)

- Work to address barrier to more local procurement tied to lowest responsible bidder.
- Explore opportunities to increase food procurement from RI food producers and fisheries.

Department of Administration (DOA)

TBD

Overarching Food Strategy Priorities

- Strengthen partnership between neighboring New England states towards achieving the New England Food Vision of 50% local food consumption by 2060
- Lead process to update State Food Strategy for 2030 with a focus on leveraging food systems to address equity and climate change.
- Identify opportunities to more sustainably fund critical programs which incentivize local food consumption, protect and expand agriculture and fisheries and improve food access and health outcomes for Rhode Islanders.

Food Policy Considerations

- Julianne Stelmaszyk suggested including policy considerations for the General Assembly in the annual IFNPAC report moving forward. As such she shared the following for considerations from the group:

1. **Consider cottage food legislation which allows for early-stage food entrepreneurs** to start catered and packaged food businesses out of their home.
2. **Consider increased funding to critical agricultural and fishery preservation programs** such as DEM’s Local Agriculture & Seafood Program and the Farmland Preservation Program. Both programs are critical supports for local agriculture. LASA received almost \$1 million in grant requests each year for only \$100,000 to provide access to capital for new farmers and early-stage agriculture and seafood businesses often excluded from traditional funding streams. The LASA program supports continued innovation, adaptation, and

development in local agriculture and food (including seafood) industries. On average, projects have shown an 80% success rate in sustaining

3. **Consider incentive program to support institutional purchasing of local food.** This program could be developed and managed by RI Commerce, possibly alongside the Supply RI initiative. This program could take a phased approach to implementation and set a sliding scale of per-meal subsidies that are awarded to institutional buyers who meet state-set targets for percent of total food purchases that come from local producers and processors. Targets could vary for different cohorts of institutions (public schools, universities, hospitals, correctional institutions, etc.). Both New York and Michigan have had good success with using these types of incentives, and their results can be used to guide program implementation.
4. **Consider incentive program to support institutional purchasing of local food.** This program could be developed and managed by RI Commerce, possibly alongside the Supply RI initiative. This program could take a phased approach to implementation and set a sliding scale of per-meal subsidies that are awarded to institutional buyers who meet state-set targets for percent of total food purchases that come from local producers and processors. Targets could vary for different cohorts of institutions (public schools, universities, hospitals, correctional institutions, etc.). Both New York and Michigan have had good success with using these types of incentives, and their results can be used to guide program implementation.
5. **Evaluate, and where possible, maximize opportunities for DEM-owned farmland** to meet food security needs of Rhode Island.
6. **Consider legislation for a state local food definition** to build more value for Rhode Island grown food products, raw agricultural products and seafood
7. **Consider opportunities to improve and expand school meals** by disentangling the State's funding formula for federal school nutrition programs from meal benefit applications and to fund a universal free meals program.

The group had a discussion on whether to include these recommendations in the report that was just reviewed and will be submitted this month. Director Gray expressed support to include in the 2021 report as did RIDOH, OHA, RICC and other members.

Director Gray asked for a motion to approve these recommendations and include in 2021 report:

- Julianne Stelmaszyk and Randi Belhumeur motioned to approve
- No members opposed
- Maria Cimini (RIDHS) abstained from motioning as the DHS leadership was in transition

Deep Dive on SNAP Healthy Incentives in RI

The meeting included guest presentation from two organizations who lead healthy incentives programs which connect local food economy to food access solutions.

Thea Upham, Farm Fresh RI, Bonus Bucks Program

- Thea provided an overview of the Bonus Bucks program, SNAP at Farmer's Markets
- Economic Impact: Direct farmer and vendor sales keeps money in the state and supports job creation

- Health Impact: Increased fruit and vegetable consumption is correlated with positive health outcomes and doubling SNAP dollars increases food security
- Environmental Impact: Direct sales to local farmers helps support the protection of greenspace and natural resources in the State of Rhode Island
- Community Building Impact: Direct sales opportunities create community spaces. Plus, increasing numbers of first generation immigrant farmers are growing culturally specific food
 - 2021 Impact
 - 32 weekly seasonal Farmers Markets
 - 2 Community Supported Ag (CSA)
 - 1 farm stand
 - 2 Home Delivery Companies
 - 108 Farmers
 - 117 Local Food Businesses
 - \$307, 000 SNAP + \$307,000 F&V match = \$614,000 impact

Dr. Amy Nunn, RI Public Health Institute, Nourish RI

- Dr. Nunn provided an overview of the Nourish RI, proposed Retail SNAP incentive program. <https://riphi.org/nourish-rhode-island/>
- **Nourish RI** is a coalition advocating for a Retail SNAP Incentive Program (RSIP) to alleviate hunger across the state of Rhode Island
- The Retail SNAP Incentive Program (RSIP) would provide a SNAP Incentive in the form of an automatic 50% discount on fresh fruit and vegetable purchases for all SNAP recipients throughout the state when paying with their benefits at a retail grocery store.
- By adding financial incentives to encourage SNAP participants to purchase more fruits and vegetables in retail settings like grocery stores and bodegas, Rhode Island's most vulnerable and hungriest populations will be able to improve their diets while also maximizing their buying power.
- **House Bill: H7490** **Senate Bill: S2310**
- ARPA funds = \$1.19 Billion
- Cost of the RSIP = \$25 million / year
- Impact: Approximately 140,000 SNAP Recipients including 40,000 children and 30,000 older adults
- Dr. Nunn encouraged those who are interested in supporting to visit the website provided. She encouraged IFNPAC to include this in policy considerations to the General Assembly.

Open Comment/Discussion

Kate Balestracci, URI Snap-Ed, would like to assist in the RIDOH Physical and Activity and Nutrition Strategic Planning process. RIDOH to follow up.

Director Gray announced the meeting adjourned at 10:53am

Q2 Meeting Minutes

Date: June 7, 2022

Location: RI Commerce Corporation

Food & Nutrition Policy Advisory Council (IFNPAC)

2022, Q2 Meeting Minutes

Tuesday June 7, 2022

9:30 - 11:00am

Location: RI Commerce Corporation
315 Iron Horse Way, Suite 101 (1st floor)
Providence, RI 02908

Council Members (present): Terry Gray (RIDEM), Randi Belhumeur (RIDOH), Ken Ayars (RIDEM), Julianne Stelmaszyk (RICC), Ava Schully (RICC Intern), Kayleigh Hill (RICC Intern), Dana McCants Derisier (RIOHA), Aleatha Dickerson (RIOHA), Jenna Maloney (DHS), Paul Gonsalves (DOA), Libby Kimzey (DOA), Maria Cimini (RIOHA), Jessica Patroliia (RIDE), Jade Borgeson (DOA), Chris Abhulime (Gov. Office)

Guest (present): Caitlin Mandell, Food Access and Equity Manager at the RI Food Policy Council

Guest Presenters: Nessa Richman, (RI Food Policy Council), Catherine Feeney (RIDOH), Emily Spiegel, Vermont Law School

Pre-reading materials sent to council members:
IFNPAC 2022 Q1 meeting minutes

Welcome and Introductions

Director Terry Gray from RIDEM called the meeting to order at 9:35 AM. Director Gray welcomed new IFNPAC member attendees and restated the goals of the statute;
Director Gray welcomed all members to introduce themselves. Due to staffing transitions, new Council members introduced themselves;
All member state agencies that are noted in statute were present at today's meeting;
Director Gray asked for a motion to approve the IFNPAC meeting minutes of March 2022:
Minutes were approved by Randi Belhumeur and Julianne Stelmaszyk;
Director Gray introduced the Hunger Elimination Task Force (HETF) and their presentation around the SNAP food delivery pilot:
Nessa Richman provided an overview of the SNAP food delivery pilot;
The pilot was conducted in partnership with Cartwheel RI, a nonprofit grocery delivery service.
Challenges continue to exist around SNAP delivery on online grocery orders; including unaffordable delivery fees for people with limited incomes, and trouble ordering online due to technology and language limitations.
In response to the challenges, the RI Food Policy Council spearheaded a SNAP delivery pilot for residents of Providence who wanted to place a grocery order online or over the phone. Delivery fees were covered by the pilot.
This pilot saw positive outcomes and some key takeaways as noted below:

- Urgent need for the service. Led to overarching feeling that there is a need for a statewide network for food ordering and delivery. For seniors, need to speak to a live person;

- Coverage of delivery fees is an essential piece for those with ltd income;
- SNAP at small stores and bodegas – increasing those stores capacity;
- Doesn't tackle the undocumented populations; those who are not eligible for SNAP

Next steps with the pilot/Policy Recommendations

1. On the demand side, publicly sustained help phone line in multiple languages to assist clientele with ordering;
 - a. Perhaps United Way/211 can help take grocery orders over the phone
2. Public funding for small retailers in multiple locations to take on SNAP
3. A roundtable was held in March with the RI General Assembly and also met with the RI Congressional Delegation
4. The Governor's 2023 Budget included \$20 million for nonprofit organizations providing food access, perhaps part of this funding can be used to expand Cartwheel's services

Discussion: Farm bill and SB 313 (Illinois): Revise SNAP to make online ordering more accessible with grants and cooperative agreements with state agencies for information and technical assistance to accept SNAP through on line transactions. One contract for implementation. Continued engagement with RI Delegation. SB 313 not likely to pass but farm bill conversation will continue. Pilots are happening in other states, and we are keeping an eye on how they go. CSPI and FRAC are also working together to find common ground on SNAP and changes to the Farm Bill.

Hunger Elimination Task Force (HETF) Updates

May 7, 2022 quarterly meeting had 55 attendees;

Panel discussion on food insecurity in the older adult population;

PACE, Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Program and the Bristol HEZ provided an overview of their work;

Key themes that emerged after the presentations are that transportation continues to be an issue; Other issues: workforce shortages, socialization at congregate dining sites is an important theme;

Solutions that were posed: mobile farmers markets, online SNAP purchasing without it impacting the SNAP budget, Meals on Wheels, technology needs in this population around using the internet for searching and ordering, I-pads, culturally and medically appropriate food, including appropriate food for the Meals on Wheels clientele;

HETF is launching a monthly news bulletin in June;

July meeting focus is on innovations in health care;

Fall meeting focus is on the state of the state of hunger in RI;

Working groups are tackling some of the key themes that were raised;

Federal grants update: RI food system

- Director Gray introduced IFNPAC members to discuss recently awarded or pending federal grant applications which have significantly increased due to pandemic-related stimulus and relief funding. In the last two years, the IFNPAC partner agencies have been awarded \$5.4 million and have applied for an additional \$2.2 million in federal grants;
- RIDE (Jessica): Several grants at federal level in process. Farm to School (F2S), which started in 2020 is closing out in June. Was used to support development of F2S branding and a local school ambassadors program. USDA supply chain assistance funding to support the purchase of domestic ag products. Some

money carved out for purchase of local food. Diverting money to schools for purpose of purchasing local food. Money to be released in July.

- DEM (Jack/Ken): *Refer to meeting slide deck for comprehensive overview of DEM funding.* Some funding awarded every year that has been bumped up because of the pandemic. SFMNP-direct purchasing program versus redemption program. TEFAP funding slated to be at 10 million. Stress assistance program allows help to famers, foresters and fishers to help out in what it takes to run a business and constructs such as child support issues, mental health issues. Working with center for mediation. A hotline is being set up.
- Commerce (Juli) – Two applications over the past year: EDA build back better program. Worked with DEM, URI, and RIFPC – 400K proposal for seafood waste water processing. Will hear in the fall. USDA regional food systems partnership grant with focus on collaboration within the food system.
 - Pastor Chris from the Governor’s Office asked, How will these grants impact food insecurity? Ken from DEM response: LFPA award has a focus where we create a program of buying food from underserved farmers and delivering food to underserved communities. FFRI and Hope’s Harvest are identifying farmers who we want to purchase food from. Juli from Commerce talks about the fact that the food system continues to be chronically underfunded. And, these are all federally funded funding streams. And handling the bandwidth to apply for grants continues to be a struggle.
- RIDOH (Randi)-Caitlin Mandel’s role as Food Access and Equity Manager has been funded by COVID funding, which ends on June 30, 2023. Talked about concern around sustainability for Caitlin’s position past July of 2023 and has raised this concern to RIDOH leadership; PAN Strategic Planning process is underway which will set the stage for the next release of CDC funding, with application slated to be released in early, 2023.

Deep Dive Discussion: Building long-term food system resilience in RI:

Presented by IFNPAC members Ken and Juli: Themes for our quarterly meetings and focus of this quarter is long term food security. Some funding is ending, but the need is increasing particularly during this time of inflation. How can we better prepare for these supply chain disruptions? We recognize where needs and gaps are, and we are trying to address through all of the funding opportunities. We do have a robust food ecosystem. Want to emphasize the interconnectivity of the food system to the entire world. RI – 5/10% or less produced in RI. It is a NE phenomenon. Supply chain disruptions seen during the pandemic, during the war. Many farmers ramped up local production. The value of supporting that local system is what this is all about. The war in Ukraine has caused the highest food costs we have ever seen. Levers that we can pull are strengthening our local food system. With regards to food insecurity, we rely on federal data and the RICFB for the data, which are lagging indicators. It increased three -fold during the pandemic with many disparities seen. It has dropped but is still twice was it was before the pandemic. As pandemic relief programs end and inflation increases, we need to think about investing in the local food system. Relish Rhody: 2.0. wants to set a baseline on where we are in local food consumption and funding to understand what that baseline is. We have the highest cost of farm land in the country with limited access to capital for new farmers.

After this overview, Juli introduced two guest speakers to provide some context on emergency food preparedness planning in RI and from a regional perspective offer insight into how communities, cities and states might consider measuring the resilience of their local value chain. Cathy Feeney is the Chief of the Center of Food Protection for RIDOH and will be discussing emergency food preparedness and planning led by RIEMA for critical infrastructure in the food & agriculture sector.

Cathy Feeney, Chief, Office of Food Protection and Scott Marshall, DEM were charged by RIEMA to create the [critical infrastructure sector specific plan](#). Plan outline noted in today's slide deck for the Food and Ag sectors. Distribution system is key. We are a densely populated state with not as much available land as in other states. When plan created, it was before the pandemic, so the lens at that time was natural disasters.

- Emily Spiegel, Professor of Law, Center for Agriculture and Food Systems at Vermont Law School who has been working on a tool which measures food value chain resilience in partnership with a regional project part of the New England Food Vision called NEFNE. Nessa Richman, ED at RIFPC first briefly introduced NEFNE to give context to the assessment tool. States within NE region working together on NEFNE which grew out of a community of practice. Goal of the group is noted on the slide in today's slide deck. Backbones within each state support the implementation of the plan. Funded by UDSA, Kendall and Merck. NEfoodsystemspanners.org to sign up for quarterly meeting.
- Emily presented on this tool to assess food system resilience. It builds off of a [food systems resilience report](#), 2019. Came from the angle of climate change and natural disasters. Talk about the report and importance of the assessment. See slide deck with the two boxes. Criteria for a resilient food system also noted on slide with two boxes. Identified a number of policies at the intersection of the criteria. Why an assessment tool coming out of the research? To aid local governments/food councils to find their vulnerabilities and ways to increase resilience. See slide for the three modules.

DISCUSSION:

How might we better prepare for food supply chain disruptions and create a more secure and equitable food supply in RI?

In what ways should we be thinking about strengthening our food supply? What actions towards planning, coordinating or preparation can we take now? How is it used for emergency food response and planning?

- *Can we better leverage or communicate the plan to key stakeholders to be better prepared for the future?*

Sarah Amin, URI: discussed the work that she is doing around 30 by 30.

Diane Lynch: any next steps with the RIEMA plan? Cathy Feeney: was activated during COVID and so need to get back together on plan implementation.

Juli: Melissa Cardin from RIEMA on today's call. Interest in emergency food plan. Brainstorming exercise where we talk about scenarios and make those actionable.

Diane Lynch: collaboration is key.

Director Gray: modeling drill noted.

Ken: Governor's budget: has a lot around food system resiliency. 10 million to RIF to support CBOs around the food system and LASA grant program.

Director Gray closed the meeting at 11:00 AM.

Q3 Meeting Minutes

Date: September 14, 2022

Location: RI Commerce Corporation

Interagency Food & Nutrition Policy Advisory Council (IFNPAC) Q3 Meeting

2022, Q3 Meeting Minutes
Wednesday September 14th 2022 | 10:00 - 11:30am
RI Commerce Corporation, 315 Iron Horse Way, Suite 101
Providence (Narragansett Room, 1st floor)

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Molly Ogrin (DEM), Julianne Stelmaszyk (COMM), Terry McNamara (DOC), Ken Ayars (DEM), Jessica Petrolia (RIDE) Jenna Malloy (DHS), Jack Sission (DEM), Terry Gray (DEM) Aleatha Dickerson (OHA), Erin Bertoldi (representing designee from RIDOH), Libby Kimzey (DOA), Hillary Fagan (COMM), Maria Cimini, (OHA)

GUEST PRESENTERS: Ellen Kahler, Executive Director - Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund
"Measuring the Economic Impact of New England's Food System" New England Feeding New England" A project of the New England State Food System Planners Partnership.

Other ATTENDEES: Caitlin Mandel (RIFPC/RIDOH), Angel Mendez, Nessa Richman (RIFPC), Rachel Stancil, Stephanie Silva, mRelief, Tommy Lemoine, Rubem Morawicki, Andrew Schiff (RICFB), David Dakekian (Eat Drink RI), Ryan Mulcahey (DEM), Alyssa Gleason (EP HEZ), Eva Agudelo (FFRI), Coryanne Mansell (Center for EcoTechnology), Cara Karter, Katharine Flynn, Adam Issacs-Fallbel, Kate Balestracci (URI SNAP-Ed), Melissa Carden (RIEMA), Rubem Morawicki, Sharon Pavignano (URI), Tommy Lemoine, Sarah Amin (URI), Karen Bradbury (Office of Sen. Whitehouse), Karin Wetherill (RIHSC) Siu-Li Khoe, Margaret Read (SOS), Tara Levine, Amanda Cantrell (RICFB)

Pre-reading materials sent to council members:
IFNPAC 2022 Q2 meeting minutes

Welcome and Introductions

Director Gray called the meeting to order at 10:00am and provided an overview and background on the structure and purpose of the council.

Council members introduced themselves in person and guests participating on zoom entered their information in the chat.

- Director Gray asked for a motion to approve the IFNPAC meeting minutes of the June 2022 meeting.
 - Minutes were approved by Julianne Stelmaszyk and Libby Kimzey.
- Director Gray reviewed the agenda and introduced individuals providing progress updates from groups/agencies who shared positive developments in our collective work on new tools and funding to support the local food system.

Good Food News

- Caitlin Mandel from the RI Food Policy Council provided an update on the Hunger Elimination Task Force (HETF) and shared the Food delivery resource guide.
 - HETF Meeting July 26th, 2022. 57 Task Force members attended.

Panel discussion featured innovative healthcare programs that provide food assistance, such as vegetable prescriptions and clinics that offer onsite food pantries for patients
 - Last HETF Meeting of 2022 - Tuesday, October 18, 2:00 pm - 3:30 pm

Focus: State of the State of Hunger in RI and Planning for 2023.

Email caitlin@rifoodcouncil.org to be added to the HETF email List

- [Rhode Island Supplemental Food Delivery Resource Guide Now Available](#)
 - Provides a statewide Map and Town by Town List of supplemental food programs that offer free or low-cost home delivery
 - Will be provided with meeting minutes (linked above!), please help share widely within your state agency or network.
- Jessica Patroli from the RI Dept. Of Education shared important updates on a new Farm to School (F2S) grant for the State.
 - The RI Farm to School Network has been working to further the state's F2S efforts, focusing on 3 primary components – local procurement, education, and school garden initiatives.
 - Since 2019, we've been working to:
 - Develop a standard, statewide definition of local food
 - Create a platform to gather data related to local purchasing efforts
 - Establish a network map of stakeholders engaged in Farm to School efforts around the state
 - Develop a RI F2S brand and marketing campaign
 - Curate a library of school gardening resources
 - Streamline and strengthen existing F2S programs such as Harvest of the Month and Local Food Ambassador
 - Coordinate and promote F2S events around the state
 - Looking Forward – NEW funding (\$259K) towards RI farm to school initiatives

The RI Farm to School Network, led by State Agency partners including RIDE, RI DEM, RIDOH and RI Commerce, will continue to support F2S efforts with a focus on procurement and value chain support. This work is supported by RI DEM's recently awarded USDA Farm to School grant and will include:

- Hiring the State's first-ever Farm & Sea to School Coordinator
- Developing a strategic plan to guide the state's F2S efforts for the next 3-5 years
- Continuing the development and expansion of the RI F2S Network
- Convening stakeholders to mobilize advocates & partners to further F2S work around the state
- Juli asked a question about the procurement policies regarding local purchasing. They are held to the federal purchasing regulations. Use “geographic preference” may be a system. Recommends standardizing a local food definition policy may be something this council should consider identifying. Juli proposed this be discussed in a future meeting
- Ken Ayars, RI Department of Environmental Management, Div. of Agriculture & Forestry provided an overview of federal grants supporting local food producers & improving food security in 2022:
 - USDA Farm to School Grant \$347k
 - USDA Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program \$297k
 - USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant \$375k
 - USDA Local Food Purchasing Cooperative Agreement \$720k
 - USDA Local Food for Schools Coop Agreement \$560k (in process)
 - LASA Grants – Local Agriculture & Seafood Act Grants
 - LASA Program grants were increased to \$700,000 for FY23!
 - These grants help to:

- provide "start-up" capital to beginning, young and immigrant food producers,
 - Fills a gap in funding for businesses and organizations deemed "not credit-worthy",
 - Helps established food businesses and non-profits innovate by developing new products and accessing new markets
- Grant awards are capped at \$20,000.
- Caitlin Mandel stated that RI Food Policy Council can provide technical assistance on the LASA applications
- Jack Sission described the importance of the USDA Ranch Stress Assistance Network. Grants are available; please share <https://landandseatogether.org>
- Director Gray shared that if anyone sees a federal grant available and is unable to apply due to resources, Partnership for RI has offered grant writing assistance. They may need assistance from the subject matter experts within the departments, but can help walk through the application and writing process.
- Format of Green Bond –GA approved that, will be on ballot. Open Space element; DEM has submitted a capital for Farmland. Hopefully will be successful.
- Juli asked with all these funds. How are we thinking about the sustainability? These funds are a necessity; not just nice to have. State budget considerations? Federal, Philanthropic? Will need to continue to talk to congressional delegation. Speak with GA, IFNPAC, to ensure a plan is in place.

Deep Dive: Economic Impacts of RI Food System

- Juli explained, in an effort to focus our quarterly meetings around a relevant food system issue, the next part of the meeting will center around the economic impact of our food system.
- The group virtually welcomed Ellen Kahler from the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund and New England Systems Planners Partnerships. She described how RI can begin to measure the economic impact of our local food system. It's important for Rhode Island to have a baseline count of how much food is produced and purchased locally for our state to be able to set goals and measure the progress of the work we all do.
 - Key Take aways:
 1. New England's Food System is important in and of itself in terms of size (jobs, sales).
 2. It has not historically had high growth activity viewed as a whole, but certain industries, most recently brewing, local farm product and supply wholesaling, have seen very high growth rates.
 3. Policy needs to be concerned with size, growth, and interconnections in the regional food system. Emphasis on one dimension is likely to be ineffective for the long-run.

Implications for Rhode Island

- Juli contextualized findings for the Council as we work to develop a new Food Strategy 2.0 for the State.
 - First - These data show that overall the food economy represents a much larger portion of the total state GDP that we had previously estimated at \$11 billion. This means that in aggregate the various food, agriculture, seafood and beverage sectors represent almost one-fifth of state's economic output. This helps us understand the economic output overall, however it does not tell us about our LOCAL food sales, that is how many of those dollars were spent on food produced, harvested or grown in RI because it includes food that might be sold in the state but

- not necessarily produced here such as coca cola or California lettuce sold at Trader Joe's. These local production or consumption data are not captured in federal data and is something we are currently trying to measure. VT has developed a methodology which we are working with the other New England states to conduct what is called a "Local Food Counts" study. This would tell us not only the portion of that \$11 billion that goes to our local food producers, but also the sales channels such as institutional buyers like schools, retail and grocery, wholesale, etc. Why does this matter? Because it tells us about our own food sovereignty as a State and as a region, which in turn tells us how resilient we are to ever-more uncertain food supply chains and can help us set goals to increase our local food consumption. We are working to find about \$20K in funding to conduct this study every 5 yrs and would welcome any suggestions. Additionally, There are some discrepancies in federal data that are not telling a clear picture of the true size of our local food economy. We know that USDA Ag census is not accurately capturing RI's agricultural economy, citing a loss of 200 farms between 2012 and 2017, which we know is not true in fact DEM's Div. of Agriculture and URI study of RI's agricultural economy shows an increase the number of small, new and beginning farms.
- Second - While the food economy is growing, we know that the benefits of the food system's economic growth is not being felt equally. Food insecurity is still 2X pre-pandemic levels around 18% and many food jobs in RI, such as food production and manufacturing wages are still below the median State wage. As we consider other economic indicators to include in our food strategy, wages across food sector jobs among other labor and socioeconomic considerations should be taken into account in order to address equitable economic growth.
 - In conclusion – I would like to propose that the Council continues to monitor these metrics on an annual basis and an ask would be to consider recommendations on other metrics that the State should be tracking related to the food system.
- Director Gray asked regarding green house gas targets – anything that can contribute to meeting our goals. Ellen shared this will be referenced in the executive summary. Farmlands and fisheries are experiencing strains from climate control. The need to continue to accelerate the conservation of farmland is critical.
 - Juli- what should we be thinking about?
 - Data show that food economy is 11.9billion, nearly 3x the estimate we have been using. Missing data point is how much of this is local?
 - RI's food economy is larger than we thought at 18% of total State GDP
 - The food economy overall is growing, but not equally.
 - We are still missing key economic indicators such as: local food consumption and accurate agricultural economy data
 - Hillary – we have to protect agriculture, where are the state and federal programs that can help support. Ex. Gotham Greens in Providence?
 - Juli wants the council to continue to use this data as we move forward

Policy Recommendations for RI's Food System

- Nessa Richman, Executive Director Rhode Island Food Policy Council presented a summary of the policy recommendations from the 2022 Network Survey, which collected 512 responses.
- High-Priority Activities for Improving RI's Food System by 2030:
 - Preserve and protect agricultural land
 - Reduce inequity in the food system
 - Support small food businesses (providing capital & technical assistance)

- Ensure access to affordable, culturally appropriate food for all people
- Promote climate-smart practices
- Policy Priorities for the 2023 Legislative Session
 - Preserve our farms
 - Ensure food access
 - Protect our environment
 - Support our businesses
- Director Gray asked about the food waste tax incentive
 - Coryanne of Center for Eco Technology provided an overview of their work and resources in RI to reduce food waste.

Open Discussion and Comment

Alyssa Gleason -EP HEZ requested a printed version of the guide that Caitlin reviewed. This will be sent out with the minutes.

Maria Cimini – it is hunger action month and senior center awareness month, next week OHA will be visiting the Edward King House with Meals on Wheels to thank them for their work and Pilgrim Senior Center with RICFB.

Amanda Cantrell RICFB Open House at the food bank tomorrow 9/15 4-7pm 200 Niantic Avenue

In Zoom chat:

Happy hunger action month! Also a good time to remind individuals likely eligible for SNAP that cost of living adjustments are made on Oct 1st so it's a good time to re-apply if they were on the cusp of eligibility previously.

URI Honors Colloquium going on <https://web.uri.edu/hc/2022-just-good-food/>

Meeting Closing

Meeting adjourned at 11.23am: Maria Cimini and Julianne Stelmaszyk motioned.

Next Meeting: Q4 IFNPAC will take place on Tuesday December 13th at 9:30am

For questions, please contact Julianne Stelmaszyk (RI Commerce) Julianne.Stelmaszyk@CommerceRI.com

Q4 Meeting Minutes

Date: December 13, 2022

Location: RI Commerce Corporation

RI Interagency Food & Nutrition Policy Advisory Council (IFNPAC)

Q4 Meeting

Tuesday December 13th 2022 9:30 – 11am

RI Commerce Corporation, 315 Iron Horse Way, Suite 101

Providence (Narragansett Room, 1st floor)

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.

Pre-reading:

- Q3 meeting minutes
- Proposed changes to IFNPAC meeting structure and responsibilities

Council Members in attendance:

In person: Aleatha Dickerson, Dana McCants Derisier, Juli Stelmaszyk, Randi Belhumeur, Caitlin Mandel, Silvana Mercardo, Terry Macnamara, Maria Cimini, Ken Ayars, Terry Gray, Jessica Patroliia, Andrew Schiff, Amanda Cantrell, Libby Kimzey

Virtual: Nessa Richman, Allison Montagnon, Margaret Read, Dana Siles, David Dadekian, Diane Lynch, Jenna Simeone, Kate Balestracci, Nonie Drexel, Rebecca Kislak, Sharon Pavignano, Jenna Simeone

Agenda:

1. Welcome & Introductions (Chair)

Director Gray:

- Welcome to the last Inter-agency Food & Nutrition Policy Advisory Council meeting of the year. For any new attendees, a bit of background on the Council. The IFNPAC was established by the general assembly in 2012 to operate 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.*

Minutes approved: Libby Kimzey, motions to approve, Council members approve

2. New Council structure for 2023, needs approval

Juli:

- The Council's mandate is to examine issues and identify solutions to regulatory and policy barriers towards developing a strong sustainable and healthy food system. We are also meant to collaborate with and serve as a resource to food policy councils. In order to maximize our effectiveness towards this goal, we would like to propose a way of organizing ourselves going forward which focuses on a few food system issues each year which we agree upon in Q4. See draft proposal. (Caitlin to link)

Discussion:

Jessica:

- Makes a lot of sense to outline action steps but I worry about duplicative efforts

- Seems backwards, to have RI Food Policy Council (RIFPC) at the bottom. We may want to start with their recommendations. Then notice gaps and go from there
- Caitlin: RIFPC working groups are more flexible
- Nessa – RIFPC: Workgroups work together over the course of time, legislative priorities are identified in the Fall. One thing that could be strengthened is the connection between the legislative liaisons and the working groups
- Randi: From RIDOH’s standpoint, the program subject matter experts would attend the relevant workgroup meetings and bring items back to the legislative liaison
- Juli: How do you propose we modify this?
- Jessica: starting with the RIFPC Priorities, perhaps they can brief us on the activities of their work groups. We can determine then what the state agencies can adopt based on gaps, then decide to form additional working groups if necessary
- Randi: We can update this draft proposed structure and send it back out to IFNPAC Council members for approval
- Director Gray
 - The way it’s proposed is like a cycle. At what point do we jump on? Right now, we’d be between #4 and #1. RIFPC is ready to issue the state of the state of food systems, We can next pick up any state agency priorities and go from there
 - So is it a question of the order, or wordsmithing?
- Jessica – in my eyes is the presentation of it. #1 happens only to the extent that it’s not already happening in existing work groups
- Juli – do you agree we set priority areas first, THEN see what other working groups are doing?
- Libby – I like that. I’m hearing a split between 1A and 1B. 1A stands alone and 1B would reflect that other groups are already working on items
- Next Steps
 - Share updated draft via email, reach consensus on draft, but vote in person at next meeting
 - Ken: Was there also discussion about adding membership?
 - Juli – yes Commerce isn’t an official member. Executive Office of Commerce is putting together a legislative proposal to add Commerce RI and Department of Children Youth and Families so we can vote on items if it comes to that. We have to move this through the ranks

3. Release of new RI food system data dashboard (Nessa/RIFPC)

- Nessa:
 - This [dashboard](#) will form the basis of an annual state of the state food systems report. This dashboard will be regularly updated and is always open to suggestion and improvements. Nessa is available for 1:1 conversations about the dashboard and how to use it
 - A webinar will be held on January 12th, 12:30 – 1:30 to learn more about the dashboard and how to use it for your work. [Click here to register](#)
- Randi: Thanks to the RIFPC for this dashboard. I have used it, and it is extremely helpful
- Director Gray
 - DEM may reach out, we need to build a climate dashboard, and we’d like to see the demo and the webinar.

4. Vision for future Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL) Program at RIDOH (Randi, RIDOH)

- Randi:
 - Under the leadership of our new Division Director, Kristine Campagna (Community, Health and Equity) and our Center for Chronic Care and Disease Management within the Division; Nancy

Sutton leads that Center: the decision has been made to rebuild what was formerly known as the Physical Activity and Nutrition (PAN) program. That rebuild began with a strategic planning process over the spring and summer that many of you participated in. Juli can share with you the strategic plan with materials that go out after today's meeting. We decided to rebrand the program back to Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL), as we continue to look at terminology that is culturally sensitive and invokes a positive feeling. Another change that has been made is that the HEAL Program has moved over to the Center for Chronic Care and Disease Management, since that Center houses all of the chronic conditions that are closely tied to healthy eating and physical activity. Kristine and Nancy asked me to work on the rebuild of the program, and we are expecting the release of the next five-year round of funding by CDC, due out in January. This funding was lost five years ago when staff wrote for the grant back in 2018. I think we all recognize the importance of bringing this program back into the state. And there are actually six NOFO's due out between now and early January within the chronic disease space. Once the writing and submittal process is complete, I will turn my attention to looking at additional funding streams for the program, and funding streams that complement the work that you all do. As I've been reorienting myself to the work, I see the strategic plan as very high level, and what I am doing now is drilling down to create a work plan so that we can "actualize" the HEAL Strategic Plan. I plan to really create a landscape map of all of the good work happening across the state, while thinking deeply about our role as a state health department in this work. My belief is that we don't want to be duplicative. We want to support and leverage the good work that is happening. In addition, I plan to ask many of you for 1-1 meetings since not everyone was involved in that strategic planning process. Wanted to also share with you, at a very high level, what the former PAN program looked like in the past.

- The program put forth evidence-based nutrition guidelines (similar to what has been done in schools) for use in work sites, ECE settings, within state gov't and within health care settings and we worked with partners towards the implementation of such guidelines by providing technical assistance and capacity building support
- There is also a breastfeeding component to the work. Adopting breastfeeding friendly policies in hospitals and worksites
- Working with health equity zones and cities and towns to revise their comprehensive plans that support safe and accessible physical activity, such as complete streets
- With regards to complete streets, Nancy was successful in securing some Prevention Block Grant dollars to begin working on complete streets capacity building with some of our health equity zones. We do have three complete streets already, that can be used as a model for other communities
- The HEAL program's work definitely shifted to more of a policy framework over the past few years, and I would anticipate that the next funding opportunity will look similar and with an emphasis on social determinants
- Food systems will also be a part of the NOFO, and, as you know, staff such as myself, Juli and the FPC have continued to support the work within the food systems space
- So be sure to send positive vibes in early 2023 as we all roll up our sleeves to bring this Cooperative Agreement back to RI. I'll be in touch with many of you over the coming weeks. Thanks so much.

- Any Questions?
 - Juli – when would the funding come through?
 - Randi – probably with a start date of Sept 30th (according to the forecast, could change)
 - Terry – if there's anything we can do to align with the active living component (bike paths, parks, etc.) please let DEM know

- Randi – thank you, we will be in touch
- Ken – is there an allocation for RI?
 - Randi – it's competitive. But there is talk for formula funding for all the states coming from the White House Conference on Hunger Nutrition.
- Dana – I wanted to comment too on the Office of Healthy Aging and making sure our population is included
 - Randi – yes I want to leverage what is already being done and not duplicate, and consider other community programs like SNAP Ed. Seeing the NOFO will give us a direction – more guidance on what needs to be included, and also determine what other funding sources are out there.
- Juli – we created a Teams channel so we can all more easily communicate. We keep a federal grant funding spreadsheet to keep track of what is available, what has been leveraged
 - Dana – agrees it's helpful
 - Randi – I agree, it's helpful to have this crosswalk for the food systems
 - Juli – this spreadsheet has been helpful, for example, some federal funding has gone to farmers but it will also help with food access

5. (10:00am) Deep Dive: Responding to the Hunger & Nutrition Crisis (Juli/Caitlin)

- Juli:
 - In an effort to focus our quarterly meetings around a relevant food system issue, the next part of the meeting will center around the urgent issue of heightened food insecurity across the state. Caitlin Mandel, the Food Access & Equity Manager, a shared role between RIDOH and the RIFPC will be facilitating our discussion and guest presentations.
- Caitlin:
 - As Juli said, I work as the Food Access and Equity Program Manager and part of my role is to facilitate the Hunger Elimination Task Force, in partnership with the RI Department of the Health and the RI Department of Commerce. The Hunger Elimination Task Force was created in 2017 by IFNPAC and the Director of Food Strategy, as a component of the State's Food Strategy of ensuring food security for all Rhode Islanders. The Task Force has worked with so many incredible partners who help keep us updated on food access challenges experienced by our state's residents, as well as potential programmatic and policy solutions to these issues. We are joined today by Andrew Schiff, Chief Executive Officer of the Rhode Island Community Food Bank and Margaret Read Senior Manager, Policy and Research at Share Our Strength/No Kid Hungry tell us about some of these challenges and potential solutions.

2022 Status of Hunger Report (Andrew Schiff, RI Community Food Bank)

- Andrew Schiff: In the [RI Community Food Bank 2022 Status Report](#) we provide numbers on the prevalence of food insecurity in the state, based on surveys from the RI life index (an initiative of Brown School of Public Health). They survey 2,000 households in RI. We found this year that 31% of households surveyed could not afford adequate food. You can see the current rate of food insecurity is 3 times higher than before COVID. The rate of food insecurity is highest among households with children at 41.1% and for low-income households. Each month we are serving 10,000 more people than last year.

The reason for increase is inflation, the rising cost of rent, utilities and the high cost of food. Additionally, federal support programs, the expanded child tax credit and school meals for all children have ended, which is driving up food insecurity. With the emergency allotment for SNAP, Congress made an additional benefit for SNAP recipients of about \$150 per month. This emergency allotment will end when the public health emergency ends, likely in Spring. But this will be a crisis for families.

- Director Gray
 - Does the rate of inflation track with food price inflation?
 - Andrew Schiff: Yes it's 13%
- Caitlin Mandel
 - Report shows that people are working but they still need food assistance. Can you comment on the best way to understand food insecurity?
- Andrew Schiff
 - In terms of SNAP enrollment in the state. Two issues – are eligible households enrolled? This is difficult to know. And are we ensuring that people get the benefit that people need? During COVID when extra benefits were available, we were actually meeting needs where people's SNAP benefits lasted through the month, and they were less reliant on food pantries. The cost of basic food items like bread and milk have increased so much that households have to cut back.
- Juli
 - I was curious about certain items being higher cost than others. Are you seeing a demand for certain products, for example fresh produce?
 - Andrew: we just completed a community needs assessment. We hear over and over that communities want fresh food and that's what they are having difficulty affording. They hope fresh produce is available at pantries.
- Randi – it's difficult to know how many eligible households are enrolled?
 - Maria Cimini – USDA does a report biannually called “Reaching the Hard to Reach.” It's on a two-year delay, they are able to look at data related to people in the community and their income thresholds and the percentage of people in a community likely eligible for SNAP. It's incredibly difficult, particularly due to the sample size of RI. SNAP isn't an eligibility criteria based on income alone. SNAP eligibility is based on point in time income. Even if you need a gross income test, households have to meet a SNAP income test. It's a complex calculation, with federal immigration rules. FNS does make a valiant attempt – RI is at 80-90% of SNAP participation. Tomorrow I am joining a national Governor's meeting because we have 64% of eligible seniors enrolled in SNAP.
- Ken:
 - We will talk about one solution. Beside maximizing benefit participation. What else Andrew should we be aiming for to create the best environment for those who are food insecure?
 - Andrew
 - I just keep coming back to the issue of income. The expanded child tax credit has been proven to help families afford all of their expenses not just food. We are arguing that these programs should permanent. RI did put into place an expanded child tax credit in the state.
 - Maria
 - Food insecurity among families with children did decrease because of P-EBT and the child tax credit. But food insecurity for older adults and people with

disabilities never changed, they are kept living in poverty by federal regulations because these programs did not cover this population. We need to address this as a state and through advocacy with federal partners

- Libby
 - How are you preparing for the end of the public emergency?
 - Andrew – Everyone is trying to prepare for the end of the public health emergency. The most important thing is informing SNAP recipients, making sure communications are clean and common sense, thank goodness for 211. Preparing for this in the spring.

Policy Issue: Healthy School Meals for All (Margaret Read, No Kid Hungry)

- Margaret
 - Share our Strength/No Kids Hungry focuses mainly on school meals but also other nutrition programs. We also provide grants to partners throughout the country. We have a lot advocacy work that we do. We need to see policy at the federal and state level to impact children.
 - Share our Strength has been working with the RI Food Bank and RI Healthy Schools Coalition to provide support for the great work they do. We are also newly working with mRelief they are a strong partner in RI.
 - Healthy School Meals for All, this is a name we use to discuss universal school meals. This name has been message tested and is more popular. This map shows the first year of implementation for healthy school meals for all, some that need to be extended. Yellow states have active funded campaigns to join the other states. Something that I am excited about is in NE we are leading the way compared to other parts of the country. VT, ME, MA, CT NY you can see they are already under operating and implementing this policy. RI is missing.
 - When we talk about school meals it's a three-tiered system. It's a struggle for people to understand.
 - The cafeteria is the only place we treat students differently, e.g. we don't do this for textbooks.
 - There is research-based evidence that when you are offering universal school meals, academic benefits, diet quality, food security, and attendance increases. The finances of the program don't increase, and it doesn't increase body mass indexes for the students. This is something we want for ALL of RI families.
 - Survey respondents: we are doing an evaluation in California and Maine to look at universal school meals in California and Maine.
 - Universal school meals mean decreased stigma and a reduction in unpaid meal debt which is a hot issue in RI.
 - The biggest concern for food service directors was operational. While we are working and want this policy in the state, the policy alone will not solve the issue. Besides finding the funds to pay for this, we also need to support food service directors with implementation.
 - Throughout COVID, meal reimbursement has increased, but it was temporary. Was this increase enough to support all of school meals? We learned it was not enough. What is the cost it would take to cover everything?
 - Average reimbursement issues we commonly hear about
 - Other supports are needed, more equipment, communications, marketing, awareness of the program. We can have great programs serving great meals.
 - Universal school meals can reduce administrative burden, but not immediately. School meal application will not go away, because it used to collect other information.

- Discussion:
 - Jessica
 - Since we have gone back to meal applications. 2022 vs. 2021, there has been a reduction in participation of 8 thousand breakfasts PER DAY, and 9 thousand lunches per day. 8 million and 9 million less meals per day because universal school meal program has ended.
 - MA is seeing 65% participation and Maine is seeing 82% of participation. There are other issues and items that need to be address.
 - Margaret
 - When you have healthy school meals for all, families can stretch their other dollars more (e.g. SNAP)
 - Ken – the states that have passed the program – how are they funding them?
 - Margaret – they are funding them in all different way through state funds, ARPA dollars, etc. The slides link to legislation and includes how these programs are paid for. Keep in mind this has happened with bipartisan support in both republican and democratic controlled congress
 - Juli – question about the costs. How does this work? Where does the state come in?
 - Jessica: The states fill the gap between the three reimbursement rates and gap. State is making up the difference. It's important to consider legislation like this, write it in a way that maximizes federal investment. EG: Community Eligibility Provision or Provision 2 first, then fill in the gap, - helps with flexibility.
 - Juli – do we have a ballpark idea of what that would be?
 - Jessica – we do – it's very rough estimate. Worst case scenario no family SNAP data –the cost would be \$37.6 million a year. Will be high, we are seeing rate is lower than they anticipated. MA had to go back to ask for more money. There is the potential that the Child Nutrition reauthorization has been under consideration, and there are other small bills to maximize CEP
 - Libby – sounds like the \$37.6 was high end of range, if reimbursements hold steady
- Caitlin:
 - This year, the HETF has been following a \$20 million-dollar American Rescue Plan fund allocation in the state budget that was to be distributed as grants through the RI Foundation for nonprofit organizations focused on food and housing access, and behavioral health. The first round of these grants has been distributed and organizations providing food access received \$5,706,500 of the \$8.3 million dollars provided in this first round, over 68%. The RI Foundation advocated strongly that these funds would be allowed to be used for general operating expenses, items like staff salary, delivery trucks, freezers, food. This means that these organizations will be able to continue the critical services and partnerships they developed during the pandemic. This network will be creating a draft food security plan to capture these helpful programs and hopefully be able to help with finding longer term funds to support these programs. We are working with the RI Foundation to make sure all eligible food access organizations are aware of this grant and we can use this opportunity to capture these important elements in a food security plan.

6. 10:30 AM: Establish Priorities for 2023 (Juli)

- Juli:

- We will move forward with choosing our priority issues for 2023. We can all put forth recommended ideas and should arrive at consensus on no more than three for the next year. This does not mean there is no room for examining other issues, but it will focus on energy as a council to leverage our collective resources towards addressing issues we feel are most pressing. I would like to propose two issues for us to focus on in 2023 for discussion. And invite members to suggest other policy issues for us to consider.
 - Healthy and local school meals for all – There are 145,342 kids enrolled in RI public schools. As Andrew shared, 41% of all households with children experiences food insecurity. There are 77,000 lunches served every day in schools across RI, the federal meal reimbursement rate is \$3.93 per lunch meal and \$2.52 per breakfast meal. We know kids can't learn if they're hungry. Additionally, there is an opportunity to leverage school food budgets to support our local economy while bringing more fresh fruit and vegetables to school menus. At least \$12 million a year in federal funding is spent on food for school meals in Rhode Island. I propose that in the next year the Council better understands this issue and determine regulatory or policy interventions that would improve child nutrition and direct more school food budgets towards our local producers.
 - Food waste diversion & recovery – According to the latest RI Resource Recovery waste characterization study, food waste is the top material by volume in Rhode island's waste stream. While at the same time there are tons of safe edible food that could be redirected to feed people in need. It is also contributing to GHG emissions. Many opportunities to explore this issue.
- Discussion:
 - Director Gray – Food Waste Recovery and Diversion is timely. We are working with RIRC and hopefully funding a program with the EPA. We also would like a food security plan.
 - Juli - Yes we've been discussing a food plan as part of reactivating Relish Rhody 2.0. And we've seen other states release food security plans. This will be a priority.
 - Libby – What is the process for deciding these priorities? – how are we looking to reach consensus on this?
 - Juli – I think we decide. So far, we are within our limit
 - Randi – the emergency food plan will happen no matter what. We are on the path to get it done. I don't know if it's an issue we want to get behind, because we are doing it
 - Maria – How do we prioritize our work? Want to reflect the unique role we play as state agencies convening as state agencies. Considering the seats most of us fill at the table. Need to be aware of this when we sign onto this - what unique role do we play in these issues?
 - Libby – I agree, this is what's going on my head. I can't sit here and say DOA is in support of Healthy School Meals for All. If we had a vote I could abstain from, that could work. DOA is often more in the implementation role.
 - Juli – supporting healthy school meals for all is not necessarily signing a bill.
 - Maria – as state agencies we can go back to our team with proposals. Considering a regulatory role, what information can we share to support RIDE and their implementation? If it ends up as a legislative priority. Keeping in mind that we all have roles to play and sometimes the role to play is carefully defined.

- Terry Gray – DEM has an advocacy role to support local agriculture and fisheries.
- Juli – do we want to move forward with more discussion?
 - Libby – I would ask for drafted descriptions of these priorities so we can clarify our role – you can send out in notes and reflect on powers and duties by statute as well
 - Randi notes IFNPAC can be more action orientated.

Motion to adjourn

7. Public Comment

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