

Rhode Island Hunger Elimination Task Force

Quarter Two Meeting • Tuesday, May 2, 2023 @ 2 - 3:30pm





HETF Goal:

**To reduce hunger and
increase access to healthy,
culturally-appropriate food
for all Rhode Island residents**

“What is food recovery, and how can it support food access?”

Today's Agenda



- Welcome & announcements
- *Relish Rhody* update
- Policy landscape review & update
- Food donation panel
- Breakout session



Rhode Island's 1st Statewide Food Strategy 2017



AN ACTIONABLE VISION FOR FOOD IN RHODE ISLAND

INTEGRATED FOCUS AREAS

1. PRESERVE & GROW AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES INDUSTRIES
2. ENHANCE THE CLIMATE FOR FOOD & BEVERAGE BUSINESSES
3. SUSTAIN & CREATE MARKETS FOR RI FOOD PRODUCTS
4. ENSURE FOOD SECURITY FOR ALL
5. MINIMIZE & DIVERT WASTED FOOD



Led by the Director of Food
Strategy through an inter-
agency partnership



**RHODE
ISLAND**
COMMERCE



Who will lead the planning process?

Steering Committee

Oversees process including fundraising, communication and accountability

- Dir. of Food Strategy, RI Commerce - Julianne Stelmaszyk
- RI Commerce – Daniela Fairchild
- RI Executive Office of Health & Human Services - Chris Ausura
- RI Department of Health - Randi Belhumeur
- RI Department of Environmental Management - Ken Ayars
- RI Food Policy Council - Diane Lynch

Advisory Board

- 15-20 RI food system stakeholders, leaders and representatives will contribute to develop priority food system briefs, strategies, metrics and outcomes

IFNPAC

- Provides subject matter expertise, ongoing input and review final draft
- New strategy will set priorities for the Council in 2024 and beyond

Director of Food
Strategy

Interagency Food Nutrition
& Policy Advisory Council



Advisory Board

Process Development

We looked at other state and municipal food system planning models for inspiration



VERMONT FOOD SYSTEM PLAN ISSUE BRIEF



ISSUE: Farmland Conservation

What's At Stake?

Over the past 40 years, Vermont made substantial investment and programs in farmland conservation, permanently conserving 15-20% of the state's farmland. Farmers have greatly benefited from ongoing, coordinated conservation efforts, but there is more to be done. The state continues to lose large, at least 1,000 Vermont farms and many more acres of high-quality agricultural soils are not conserved. Over the last few years, as many as 300 Vermont farms (conserved and not conserved) may change hands as existing farmers retire. If managed strategically, these transitions could lead to the next generation of vital farms and strengthen Vermont's rural economy. If not, land farmed for generations could sit fallow, become less productive, or be lost to development. The COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on the urgency of securing our agricultural land base in order to support a more localized food supply.

Current Conditions

Farmland conservation is one of the best ways to protect Vermont farmland from development, keep it in production, ensure localized food production capacity in case of emergencies, and maintain an economically viable agricultural sector.

Land is conserved with a legal document called a conservation easement (typically held by a land trust) which permanently limits development, restricts subdivision, and protects natural resources. This is also known as "sale of development rights," as landowners are usually compensated for the loss of the potential income from development (though some donate or partially donate this value). Conservation easements generally reduce the land's appraised value and can impact a future sale price. In Vermont, the Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value (OPAV) tool is typically part of the conservation easement, to keep land affordable for farmers with commercial agricultural operations and discourage conversion of good farmland into estate-type properties.

Selling development rights is a critical economic tool for Vermont farmers, allowing them to sell a legal asset while still retaining ownership of the land, and use sale proceeds to expand, diversify, invest in new infrastructure, buy more land, and/or facilitate a family transfer. Despite its social, agricultural, and economic benefits, land conservation is also challenging. Not all farmers want or are able to conserve their land. The demand for land to purchase development rights far exceeds the supply, despite state's relatively stable federal and state funding for farm easements.

Permanent farmland protection plays a critical role in the economic transformation and ownership transitions that Vermont agriculture is facing, but conservation alone will not ensure the survival of Vermont's agricultural sector. Fortunately, Vermont's farmers, land trusts, agricultural lenders, and service providers are well coordinated and share key goals around the successful transition of Vermont's agricultural economy to the next generation, responsible land stewardship, and the importance of farm viability.

Conservation of Farmland

Current Conditions

Farmland and land parcels are established criteria to assess a land parcel's resources (e.g., soils, water, special ecological attributes), development desire, and proximity to other conserved parcels, as well as the plans for the farm operation. The land is appraised to determine the current value with full development rights and the value after conservation with limited development rights. The easement value, and financial compensation to the landowner, is the difference between the two.

- For the past several years, the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board (Vermont's primary funder of farm easements) has typically funded 28 to 22 farm projects each year, projecting about 1,000 acres.
- \$1.7 million in state funding each year (an example: Vermont's 13 million in federal dollars through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and \$1 million per year in philanthropic and local funds, as well as landowner bagpipe sales).
- VHCB's current conservation pipeline has 40 projects waiting to be funded with a value of over \$9 million of easement funding.

Bottlenecks & Gaps

- An easement's value may not offer sufficient financial return for certain landowners.
- Certain farm leaders do not always reach the available land.
- Easement transactions may not accommodate a landowner's plans.
- The volume of land that could transfer over the next five years will create bottlenecks for some transactions and staff capacity at Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB), land trusts, and agricultural service providers.

Opportunities

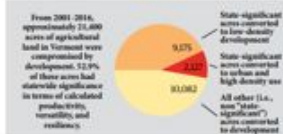
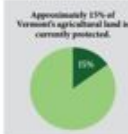
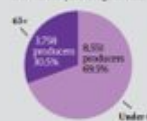
- Securing more land for food production through farmland conservation can be an effective strategy to address threats posed by climate change and global pandemics.
- The Vermont conservation community is coordinated and skilled at working together (e.g., *Business and Investment Assistance Fund*).
- Vermont farmers continue to have a strong interest in selling development rights, and understand the importance of securing their land base.

Conservation and Land Transfers

Current Conditions

The amount of farmland expected to transfer creates a tremendous opportunity to conserve more acres, add ecological protections and affordability options to already conserved land, help new or beginning farmers gain access to the transferring land, or expand existing businesses. Conservation during a sale process can be a powerful tool to make land more affordable for a new owner, and if the property is already conserved, it may be more affordable than non-conserved parcels.

36.5% of Vermont's producers in 2017 were 65 years of age or older



Summary

Vermont has a long and successful track record of protecting farmland. Although Vermont ranks in the top 15% of American farmland, there's a lot of work to be done. More investment and new tools are needed to keep up with the current and anticipated demand, and to ensure that conserved farms stay in active agriculture and remain economically viable. As the pace of farm transitions intensifies, new opportunities and tools are emerging to help farmers access land. Vermont needs well-funded, coordinated programs, including land conservation, to support the transition of farmland and farm businesses in Vermont. Ultimately, successful farmland conservation strengthens both community vitality and farm viability.

Recommendations

- Support the development of additional tools that can be applied to already conserved properties to ensure affordability and access for the next generation. Some examples include performance easements, shared equity models, ground leases, and more. To support this, create a funding vehicle specifically set up to provide low- and capital-to-alleviate ownership models that may be challenging to finance through traditional farm loan programs.
- Fully fund the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board through the Property Transfer Tax Fund. This funding is critical in order to capture the opportunity to protect farmland now in succession scenarios and the risk of losing farmland forever.
- Allocate \$1 million annually to VHCB's Farm & Forest Viability program to order to expand their capacity to provide critical business and technical assistance services to farms and forest products businesses of all sizes across Vermont. (see *Business and Investment Assistance Fund*).
- Appropriate \$1 million of flexible, low-cost financing to a Community Development Financial Institution or other lender, to support new farmers in purchasing farmland. This could be managed by VEC's \$1 million farmland Finance Fund. These funds would be used in coordination with VHCB's Farm and Forest Viability Program as well as the Working Lands Enterprise Fund.
- Enhance equitable access to farmland, as VEC has done with the Pine Island Community Farm in Colchester. Partner with and support organizations that assist Black, Indigenous, and People of Color farmers gain access to viable farmland.



From Farm to Plate is Vermont's food system plan being implemented alongside its economic development and jobs to the table and food security and agriculture access to healthy food tool for its Vermonters.

Lead Authors: Abby White and Maggie Charney, Vermont Land Trust
Contributing Authors: Mike Olson, Land for Good | Emily Rappaport-Fisher, Young Farmers Coalition | Peg Winters, Upper Valley Land Trust | Nancy Eisenhauer, Vermont Housing & Conservation Board | Tyler Miller and Tracy Zedler, Vermont Land Trust

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFM) facilitates, supports, and encourages the growth and viability of agriculture in Vermont while protecting the working landscape, human health, animal health, plant health, communities, and the environment.

To read other food system briefs, visit: vtfarmtoplate.com/briefs

VT Farm to Plate 2.0 developed 54 Product, Market and Issue Briefs to inform strategic priorities, metrics and goals



2.0 UPDATE

TIMELINE

Spring 2023

Five-Year "Look Back" 2016-2022 Food Strategy 1.0

Summer/Fall 2023

Stakeholder engagement (focus groups, issue briefs, statewide gathering)

Winter/Spring 2024

Final report launch

*Consider joining the
Advisory Board to
bring your voice to the
planning process!*

DEADLINE MAY 8

The background of this section is a photograph of a large, arched greenhouse filled with rows of young green plants in raised beds. The Relish RHODY logo is positioned at the top center. Below it, the text "OPEN CALL to join the Relish Rhody 2.0 Advisory Board" is displayed in a mix of blue and black fonts. At the bottom left, a paragraph of text describes the partnership between RI Commerce, RIDEM, and RIDOH to update the state's food strategy. A QR code is located at the bottom right of the section.

Relish RHODY

OPEN CALL
to join the Relish Rhody 2.0
Advisory Board

RI Commerce in partnership with RIDEM and RIDOH are leading the process to update the State's 2017 Food Strategy "Relish Rhody".

We are seeking partners across RI's food system to support the planning process.

Food Recovery Landscape & Legislative Updates

RI FOOD
POLICY
COUNCIL



RI Cannot Afford to Waste Food

Approximately 31% of all households face food insecurity in Rhode Island.

This rate is 10% higher among households with children, and even higher for Black and Latino households

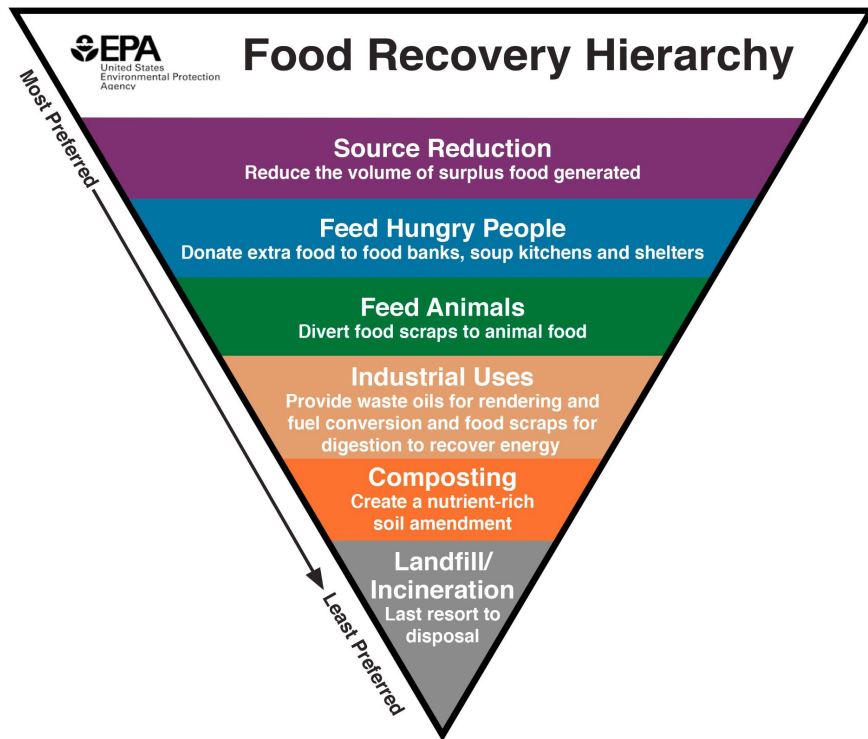
RI's Central Landfill is expected to run out of space by 2040.

The landfill collects 3,800 tons of trash daily, 722 tons of which is food

Landfilling wasted food releases potent methane gasses.

These gases affect air and water quality, threaten human and environmental health, and contribute to climate change

RI Needs Comprehensive Solutions



Source Reduction: Strategic planning at the source can avoid creating excess food in the first place, saving money and helping the environment.

Feeding Hungry People: Diverting just 15% of all wasted food would reduce the number of food insecure Americans by 50%.

Feed Animals: Using food scraps for animal feed can save money for farmers and prevent landfilling of these organic materials.

Industrial Uses: Wasted food can be transformed into clean renewable energy from technologies such as Biomass gasification.

Composting: Generating compost from food scraps helps improve soils, grow the next generation of crops, and improve water quality while protecting the environment.

Food Recovery Policy Landscape

LIABILITY PROTECTIONS

1996 **Emerson Act**

Protects any person from civil and criminal liability when donating “apparently wholesome” or “apparently fit grocery product” when doing so “in good faith to a nonprofit for distribution to needy individuals” (FEDERAL)

2019 **Rhode Island Food Donation Act**

Applies protections to direct donations from food facilities and covers food that is past the best-by date if determined by the distributor to be wholesome

2023 **Food Donation Improvement Act**

Extends Emerson Act protections to include “qualified direct donors” and donations at “zero cost or at a Good Samaritan Reduced Price” (FEDERAL)

TAX INCENTIVES FOR FOOD DONATION

2015 **Protecting Americans from Tax Hikes (PATH) Act**

Incentivizes businesses to donate eligible food products using enhanced tax credits (FEDERAL)

As of today, Rhode Island does not provide state-level tax incentives for food donation. Two proposed pieces of legislation have been introduced in the General Assembly this session.

Proposed RI Tax Credit Legislation

SB517 - An Act Relating To Taxation -- Tax Credit For Food Donation

Sponsor: Sen. Alana DiMario (D)
Intro Date: 3/7/2023
Summary: Provides a tax credit for food donations by qualified taxpayers to nonprofit organizations.
Complete History: 03/07/2023 Introduced, referred to Senate Finance

HB5803 - An Act Relating To Taxation -- Tax Credit For Food Donation

Sponsor: Rep. Carol Hagan McEntee (D)
Intro Date: 2/22/2023
Summary: Provides a tax credit for food donations by qualified taxpayers to nonprofit organizations.
Complete History: 02/22/2023 Introduced, referred to House Finance
04/22/2023 Scheduled for hearing and/or consideration
04/22/2023 Scheduled for hearing and/or consideration (04/27/2023)
04/27/2023 Committee recommended measure be held for further study

Food Recovery Expert Panelists



DANA SILES

Rescuing Leftover Cuisine

@rlc.ma.ri



EVA AGUDELO

Hope's Harvest RI

@hopesharvestri



Rescuing
Leftover
Cuisine

What RLC Looks Like



The food is packaged by our Food Donor Partner:
Each partner is equipped with an online portal to schedule/cancel pickups on a recurring and as-needed basis, measure real-time impact, glean metrics & data, download donation receipts, and more. No food donation is too large or too small!



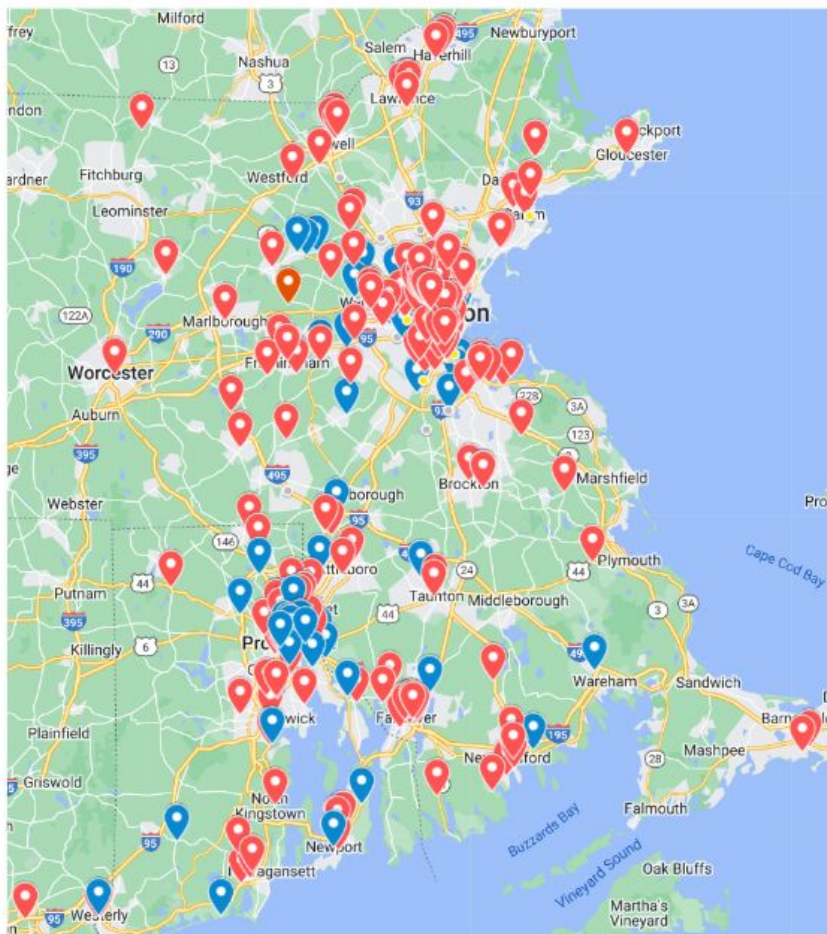
An RLC Rescuer picks up the surplus food:
We offer volunteer (individual, corporate & group) and paid *Rescuer* opportunities with no minimum time commitment. *Rescuers* may sign up for *Rescue Events* on a one-time, sporadic or recurring basis on our [online calendar](#).



The Rescuer delivers the food to the designated Organization Partner:
Each *Rescue Event* rescues an average of 40 pounds of food, provides 33 meals, prevents 15 pounds of emissions and takes <90 minutes; and may be completed via 2 feet, 2 wheels, any size vehicle or public transportation.



The food donations are served by the organization:
RLC does all of the heavy lifting to match food donations to our organization partners based on geography, schedule and capacity, while aiming to meet specific cultural, religious & nutritional needs and preference to propel food & nutrition justice.



Our Local Impact

May 2023

MA

Since 2016

RI

Since 3.17.21

900+

168

Rescuers

18.9K

1.7K

Food Rescue Events

986.7K

50.1K

Pounds of food

822.2K

41.7K

Meals Provided

305K

16.4K

GHG Pounds Prevented

184

21

Food Donor Partners

143

41

Nonprofit partners

+ 350 MA Homes (direct service)

We operate all day, every day, spanning over 100 miles between Westerly, RI and Lawrence, MA.



**Rescuing
Leftover
Cuisine**

RI ORGANIZATIONS THAT WOULD BENEFIT FROM INCREASED FOOD DONATION RESULTING FROM BETTER POLICY

"Giving more people benefits through nutrition assistance programs, food donations and hot meals may help reduce food insecurity and hunger in our community. The West End Community Center (WECC) serves about 500 new families at our food pantry each month. **WECC serves the diverse community of Providence's WEST END clients, who are low income and encounter many barriers to economic success.**"

– Melisa Pena, West End Community Center

"This would allow us to **provide for even more** for those struggling in our community and homeless individuals that stay with us. We would be able to use this food to do even more outreach than we currently do, allowing us to go to camps and tent cities to reach those who cannot come to us!"

– Pastor Luis Cardona,
Providence Rescue Mission

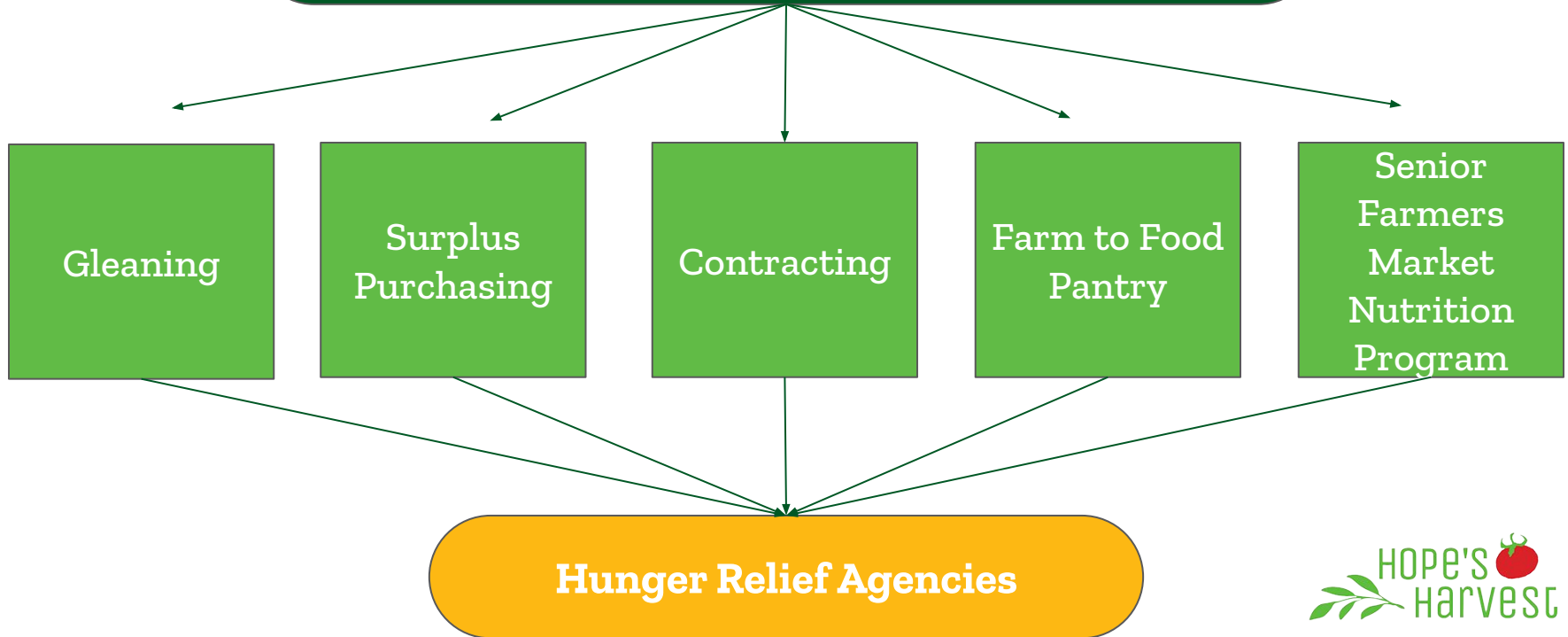
"...This will be helpful to struggling families across the State. The money needed to purchase that food could be used for something else."

– Alice Howard, Sunrise Forever

"Because rents have gone up, it will supplement food stamps. The cost of food has gone way up as well, so this will **help a great deal.**"

– Debbie Rushworth,
Reaching for the Fringe Ministries

Hope's Harvest at Farm Fresh RI



Hope's Harvest was founded in 2018



From 2018-2022, **350+ volunteers** spent **6,000+ hours** rescuing...



852,000 lbs of fresh, healthy, local fruits and vegetables from...



48 farms across Rhode Island and Southeastern MA, and...

Distributed to **48 hunger relief agencies**, serving over **35,000 individuals** per month.



A group of people are seated in a large circle in a spacious room with high ceilings and large windows. They appear to be engaged in a community meeting or breakout session. The room has a modern, industrial feel with exposed pipes and bright lighting. The participants are diverse in age and appearance, and some are looking towards the center of the circle while others look towards the camera. The text 'BREAKOUT ROOMS' is overlaid in large, bold, blue letters at the top of the image.

BREAKOUT ROOMS

1. Where do you know about food being wasted in your community?
2. What do you think are the most important ways your community can recover wasted food?
3. What are the biggest barriers to more food recovery in your community, and what would it take for them to be overcome?

SEE YOU NEXT TIME!

Quarter 3 Meeting
Tues. 8/15, 2023
@ 2 - 3:30pm
IN-PERSON

Quarter 4 Meeting
Tues. 11/28, 2023
@ 2 - 3:30pm
VIRTUAL



THANK YOU!

Max De Faria, RIFPC
max@rifoodcouncil.org

Randi Belhumeur, RIDOH
randi.belhumeur@health.ri.gov

Juli Stelmaszyk, Commerce RI
julianne.stelmaszyk@commerceri.com

rifoodcouncil.org/hunger-elimination-task-force

