

**Interagency Food & Nutrition Policy Advisory Council
(IFNPAC)
2022, Q1 Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, March 1, 9:30am-11:00am
Location: Zoom**

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@rifofoodcouncil.org
 - Allison Montagnon, Communications Manager
allison@rifofoodcouncil.org
 - Caitlin Mandel, Food Access & Equity Manager
caitlin@rifofoodcouncil.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.
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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
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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