

**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 USDA, Kendall and Merck. NEfoodsystemsplanners.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.