

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 Patroia 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://landandseattogether.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