

RI FOOD POLICY COUNCIL



Meeting Summary

Rhode Island Hunger Elimination Task Force (HETF)

May 2021

The second quarterly 2021 meeting of the Hunger Elimination Task (5/21), attended by over 65 participants, began with updates from Andrew Schiff, CEO of the RI Community Food Bank, and Maria Cimini, Associate Director of Policy at RI Department of Human Services. Andrew highlighted the Food Bank's commitment to sourcing local produce and their pilot with Farm Fresh RI that has already distributed over 40,000 pounds of local produce to Rhode Islanders experiencing food insecurity. Maria shared updates on the work of DHS and other agencies to quickly respond to regulatory changes allowing additional nutritional assistance to Rhode Island families.

We then learned about 3 innovative and high impact community-led approaches to solving food insecurity problems from three panelists: Dannie Ritchie (Community Health Innovations of RI), Margaret DeVos (Southside Community Land Trust), and Melanie Borges (Sankofa Initiative). All are focused on the importance of food sovereignty for Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BI&POC) communities by moving towards community control over all aspects of the food system rather than access to food solely through emergency food systems. They identified land access as a huge challenge and area of need, as well as the need for multilingual resources for growers.

Following the panel, attendees participated in facilitated breakout room discussions regarding the challenges and opportunities associated with these models and ways the HETF can identify and support investment in high priority community-based initiatives.

We concluded the Task Force meeting with a proposal for moving ahead with the development of an emergency and supplemental food delivery access mapping resource based on feedback from the Q1 HETF meeting. The goal for this resource is an open access resource for comprehensive data on emergency/supplemental food delivery services. Participants indicated that there are two main ways they would want to use this: i) to help service providers help individuals find the services they need in real time; and ii) to help state and municipal decision-makers identify and implement structural changes that make the statewide food system more resilient and effective. To gather more feedback on the proposal, the RI Food Policy Council is gathering input from members over the next 2 weeks.

Please see the next page for key themes that emerged from the breakout rooms and panel conversation (full breakout room notes can be found [here](#)).



Key Themes

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1. **The COVID crisis has created a unique opportunity to create new partnerships and to educate consumers and stakeholders about some of the deeply-rooted dysfunctions in our food system.** Building these partnerships and building understanding and knowledge among consumers and stakeholders is a critical long term goal that we need to embrace and develop resources and strategies to address. This work is the foundation for making lasting and large changes in how our food system works. The gap between emergency response activities and longer-term planning activities remains large and needs to be bridged as part of this work.
2. **Food sovereignty has to take its place as a top priority as we work on ways to improve food system resilience and equity.** The community-based organizations building food sovereignty are making positive impacts across multiple dimensions. Wider and more effective communication about their work, their impacts, the resources they need and their role in the long term strength of our food system and sustainable solutions to food access has to be a priority. Margaret DeVos shared that “when people have control over the food system, they make sure their neighbors are fed.”
3. **Land access across all communities is a major barrier to improving food sovereignty and the resilience of our food system.** There are efforts underway to address this challenge, and they will require increased resources and support in coming years to make real systemic change happen. Increasing equitable access to land will require significant policy changes and a significant transfer of resources in the state.