

RI FOOD POLICY COUNCIL



RI Hunger Elimination Task Force - Q3 Meeting

August 18, 2021 | 1:30-3:00 pm

Recording:

https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/OVdX0dYrUDg5I5cuV0CrIvs8QxL_J0jsL0helk30n98tQ0KYvCX_09kS66feEFG-.XZhYoiVHatXoumva?startTime=1629308357000

Narrative Summary

The third quarterly 2021 meeting of the Hunger Elimination Task Force (8/18) was attended by over 55 participants. The meeting began with updates from Randi Belhumeur, Policy Liaison & Health Systems Transformation Administrator at the RI Department of Health (RIDOH). Randi announced that RIDOH will be collaborating with the RI Food Policy Council to hire a Food Access and Equity Program Manager to help coordinate food security work. Deb Golding, Health Equity Project Officer at RIDOH, shared [information](#) on the community-based Health Equity Zone model and the numerous food access activities undertaken, including distributing 531,658 meals since June 2020. Juli Stelmaszyk, Director of Food Strategy, and Ken Ayars, Chief of the Agriculture Division of the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) presented DEM's \$36 million [proposal](#) for American Rescue Plan Act funding to address food insecurity and supply chain resilience.

We then learned about four unique programs that connect local food with emergency food providers across the state. Caitlin Mandel and Lisa Raiola discussed Hope & Main's 'Nourish Our Neighbors' program, which funds local makers to prepare high-quality meals with local ingredients for East Bay, South County and Central Falls residents experiencing food insecurity. Eva Agudelo described how Hope's Harvest has grown exponentially since its founding in 2018, purchasing and gleaning produce from local farms for hunger relief agencies to distribute, recovering over 200,000 pounds of produce in 2020 alone. Fred Mattera, of the Commercial Fisheries Center of RI, and Kate Masury, of Eating with the Ecosystem, shared the mutually beneficial model of the 'Local Seafood to Community' program that pays fishermen for whole, underutilized species to distribute to people experiencing food insecurity through a group of community-based organizations. Thea Upham talked about Farm Fresh Rhode Island's 'Farm to Food Pantry' program which has evolved to enable food pantries to order local produce directly from Market Mobile. Across all the programs, challenges with supply chain logistics and costs arose, as well as the tremendous benefits these models provide for local producers and consumers.

Following the panel, attendees participated in six facilitated breakout room discussions on how the state can

support programs that connect local food with people experiencing food insecurity and preparations for a fall COVID-19 surge. These individuals represented multiple state agencies and many nonprofit organizations and community groups. Collectively, these attendees work to address hunger in RI through multiple means, including emergency food aggregation and distribution, supplemental nutrition program maximization, policy advocacy, community organizing, food sovereignty initiatives, and more. Please see the next section for key themes that emerged from the breakout rooms (full breakout room notes can be found [here](#)).

We concluded the Task Force meeting with an [update](#) from Dr. Amy Nunn from the Rhode Island Public Health Institute on the legislative efforts to pass a Sugary Sweetened Beverage Tax to fund a Statewide Retail SNAP Incentive program. Though the legislation did not pass, there was broad legislative support and work continues to fund the program with American Rescue Plan Act funds. Nina Wolff Landau from the Rhode Island Food Policy Council also shared that the initial survey on critical uses, key data, and platforms for an emergency and supplemental food delivery resource is wrapping up next week and final results will be shared soon after.

Participating legislators:

- Representative Liana Cassar (District 66 - Barrington and East Providence)

Participating stakeholders:

Name	Affiliation	Email
Aleatha Dickerson	Network Manager for Rhode Island Office of Healthy Aging	Aleatha.Dickerson@oha.ri.gov
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Alison Tovar	Associate Prof. Dept. of Nutrition & Food Sciences, University of Rhode Island	alison_tovar@uri.edu
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Alyssa Gleason	Director of East Providence Health Equity Zone at East Bay Community Action Program	agleason@ebcap.org
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	Action Program	
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David Goldstein	Hunger Down, Build Pawtucket, RIPULSE	tmdgroup@yahoo.com
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Dennis Horta	WIC Nutritionist/Manager at Thundermist Health Center	DennisH@thundermisthealth.org
Diane Lynch	RI Food Policy Council Board member	dianeroselynych@gmail.com
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Fred Mattera	Executive Director of the Commercial Fisheries Center of RI	fredmattera@cfcri.org
Gemma Gorham	Former research program coordinator at Brown and Outreach Coordinator for the URI Feinstein Institute for a Hunger-Free America	ggorham62@gmail.com
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Juli Stelmaszyk	Director of Food Strategy	julianne.stelmaszyk@commerceri.com
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Lisa Raiola	President and Founder of Hope & Main	lisa@makefoodyourbusiness.org
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Yanine Castedo	Community Organizer at RI Coalition to End Homelessness	yanine@rihomeless.org

OBJECTIVES

- Learn about programs connecting local food with community-level emergency food providers
- Discuss how the state can support sustainable food security solutions
- Learn how to contribute to a statewide emergency/supplemental food delivery resource

AGENDA

- 1:30 pm Welcome and Introductions**
- Nessa Richman, RIFPC Network Director
- 1:37 pm RI Department of Health Update**
- Randi Belhumeur, Policy Liaison & Health Systems Transformation Administrator
 - Deb Golding, Project Officer, Health Equity Institute
- 1:47 pm Addressing Hunger in RI with COVID-19 relief funding**
- Juli Stelmaszyk, Director of Food Strategy, RI Commerce Department
 - Ken Ayars, Chief, Agriculture Division, RI Department of Environmental Management
- 1:55 pm Panel Conversation: Connecting Local Food with Local Emergency Food Providers**
- Farm Fresh RI 'Farm to Food Pantry' program
 - Hope's Harvest RI
 - 'Local Fish to Community' program

- Hope & Main 'Nourish Our Neighbors' program
- Facilitator: Diane Lynch, RIFPC Board Director

2:20 pm **Facilitated breakout room conversations**

2:45 pm **Updates**

- Statewide SNAP Incentive program update, Dr. Amy Nunn, Executive Director, Rhode Island Public Health Institute
- Emergency/Supplemental Food Delivery Landscape Map update

3:00 **Close**

Save the date for the RI Hunger Elimination Task Force Q4 meeting: November 10th, at 1:30 pm!

RI HETF GOAL AND 2021 OBJECTIVES

Goal: To reduce hunger and increase access to healthy, culturally-appropriate food for all RI residents.

Objective A: Broaden the network of actively engaged stakeholders

- *We will update and continually expand the invitation list, including agency staff, nonprofit organizations, community-based organizations, and other stakeholders.*

Objective B: Deepen the collaborative environment for medium/longer term problem solving

- *We will invite presenters highlighting innovative hunger elimination programs, with a focus on those that are bootstrapping community-led innovations.*
- *We will use technology to engage attendees in small group conversations and 'harvest' learnings from those conversations.*
- *We will seek funding to perform rigorous evaluations of a subset of innovative programs to assess their costs, benefits, and potential for growth..*

Objective C: Collect data for the creation of a statewide hunger/food delivery landscape map

- *Data will include, but not be limited to:*
 - *Homebound, hard-to-reach and limited mobility populations who are experiencing food insecurity*
 - *The various pilots/programs that are serving these populations*
 - *Gaps in service (i.e., the places where target populations are falling through the cracks).*
 - *Pending funding, we will conduct formative research to inform the HETF, including focus groups with homebound and other hard-to-reach people; information-gathering and concept-testing interviews or surveys with state agency leaders; information-gathering and concept-testing interviews with food retail store, delivery and community agency staff providing services to older adults.*

MATERIALS

- **P** RIDOH HEZ Update.pptx
- **I** DEM Update on Proposal to Address Hunger with COVID relief funds.pdf
- **P** Statewide SNAP Incentive program update (RI Public Health Institute).pptx

NOTES

1:30 pm **Welcome and Introductions**

- Nessa Richman, RIFPC Network Director

OPENING REMARKS

*No introductions verbally, but on Chat instead: Name, Affiliation, your favorite thing about August in RI
Brief overview of HETF objectives: hosted by RI DOH and other State agencies. RIFPC coordinates by request as of Jan 2021. Working to broaden the network with more stakeholders. Collecting data about resources related to food and hunger.*

Connect local food with emergency food providers

How can the State support this effort?

How can we contribute?

1:37 pm **RI Department of Health Update**

- Randi Belhumeur, Policy Liaison & Health Systems Transformation Administrator

Taking over for Carol Hall-Walker, who is retiring.

UPDATES:

1. *Announcement of Food Access and Equity Program Manager position. 2 year CDC COVID grant. Help with food access and food insecurity work.*
2. *Interagency Food and Nutrition Policy Advisory Council meeting next week - Director of Department of Health will be present. Focus rooted in the pandemic.*

- Deb Golding, Project Officer, Health Equity Institute ([slides](#))

Health Equity Zone initiative & activities

RIDOH's investment in community empowerment

Community-led process

Goal to have a positive impact on social determinants of health and improve the lives of people living in our communities

15 HEZs in RI

5 new in July

300 collaborative partners

20+ sectors represented (including resident engagement)

531,000+ meals distributed since June 2020 in response to the pandemic. HEZ have been on the frontlines for referrals through the RIDOH Case Investigation team.

Community led advisory

Increased focus on food access to vulnerable populations (we want to ensure to support community based organizations to connect all the dots)

HEZ developed by geographic location, building a collaborative, assess community needs and assets, prioritize needs, develop an action plan

1:47 pm **Addressing Hunger in RI with COVID-19 relief funding**

- Juli Stelmaszyk, Director of Food Strategy, RI Commerce Department ([slide](#))

Proposal submitted by DEM to address food insecurity and supply chain resilience (ARPA funding)

\$36mil submission

Four critical areas, addressing negative economic impact

Funding through 2024. Still under review! Hoping to hear back in the next few weeks

1. *Connecting food system and food economy*
2. *Urban ag & farmland access*
3. *Food/farm business infrastructure*
4. *Farm to School*

Long term and short term solutions incorporated

Hunger increased 45%

Food costs increased 30-50%

- Ken Ayars, Chief, Agriculture Division, RI Department of Environmental Management

Over \$1billion given to RI

DEM was among 4 other applicants

1:55 pm Panel Conversation: Connecting Local Food with Local Emergency Food Providers

- Farm Fresh RI 'Farm to Food Pantry' program (Thea Upham)
- Hope's Harvest RI (Eva Agudelo)
- 'Local Fish to Community' program (Kate Masury and Fred Mattera)
- Hope & Main 'Nourish Our Neighbors' program (Caitlin Mandel and Lisa Raiola)
- Facilitator: Diane Lynch, RIFPC Board Director

PURPOSE

Inform everyone about the folks on the ground in RI who are supplying various places in the emergency food system with locally sourced food.

This subject has already been top of mind, but Covid has increased activity around finding solutions.

Q1: How did you get started and what do you see as current challenges right now of increasing local food?

HOPE & MAIN

- *recognized the "virtuous circle" in linking producers with neighbors in need*
- *Meals vs. groceries were key - many recipients do not have the capacity to cook*
- *Buy One Give One meals help keep the program sustainable*
- *Partnerships have been key*
- *Working on a delivery model (chest freezer/on demand)*
- *Cost of the meals is still high (\$10 to produce) - supports local chefs, local products - an investment in the local food economy*

HOPE'S HARVEST

- *Started in 2018 as a solo effort*
- *Hopes's Harvest gives to hunger relief agencies to provide fresh, healthy food from local farms*
- *Growing exponentially*
- *Fiscally sponsored by FFRI (access to coolers, storage, loading dock, etc)*
- *Last year 150-200 volunteers harvested 80,000# of food and recovered 200,000 pounds of surplus food from farms*
- *Contract with some growers for hunger relief*
- *More resilience and more connections for our local food system*

SEAFOOD

- *Fred Mattera, Exec Dir. Commercial Fisheries Center of RI*
- *Kate Masury, Program Director Eating with the Ecosystem*
- *Supply and demand flopped in 2020*

- Mismatch of species fished vs what was wanted
- Some funding came from RI Foundation/anonymous - paid fishers for would-be wasted catch
- Connected with 7 community organizations throughout RI to provide locally caught healthy seafood
- Started with a few hundred pounds. Now, thousands of pounds per week (eclipsed 107,000lbs, equivalent to 75,000 meals)
- Prices have recovered now
- Whole fish are purchased - lack of processing access
- Hope & Main's Nourish Our Neighbors is one partner
- More work to try to get local seafood into the food bank ongoing (frozen, processed, family packs)
- Packaging costs have also increased, impacting sale cost

FARM FRESH RI

- Small scale funding through the Olneyville HEZ in 2013
- FFRI staff gleaned farmers markets to take excess produce to needed sites
- Work with Hope's Harvest has been very beneficial
- Family food box contract - distributed local goods to food pantries across the state
- Leveraged infrastructure (distribution, refrigeration, etc)
- 20 local food pantries are currently ordering through Market Mobile
- Volunteer management and delivery logistics still challenging
- Auto-ordering feature very helpful

Recurring Themes:

- Supply chain and logistics challenges (timing, geography, availability)
- Tremendous benefits for small business and fisheries
- Getting the word out to the right people
- Costs (of food, packaging)

Q: Fred - Coordination is a challenge. They do not have trucks/vehicles available to lease. Box trucks are needed - new truck coming soon. To be stored at FFRI site.

2:20 pm **Facilitated breakout room conversations (full notes [here](#))**

Note: An additional resource mentioned by an HETF member is "[RI Serves](#)," the veterans' services e-referral system. This system aggregated data from RI Serves that showed that food access was number five out of ten in terms of veterans' needs (for more information contact Jeff Hill from RIDOH at jeffrey.hill@health.ri.gov).

2:45 pm **Updates**

- Statewide SNAP Incentive program update, Dr. Amy Nunn, Executive Director, Rhode Island Public Health Institute ([slides](#))
- Emergency/Supplemental Food Delivery Landscape Map update

Amy Nunn

- Sugary drinks tax to fund retail produce SNAP incentive did not survive due to Covid cash surplus (State is at a wash)
- Strong coalition - nearly 30 groups
- Overwhelming support, media coverage, positive appeal
- This bill had 16 co-sponsors in both the house & senate

- *33 people submitted oral and written testimony in support*
- *Large scale advocacy implemented across social, digital, print and earned media*
- *Would have passed if was allowed to the floor for a vote*
- *Currently working to use American Rescue Plan Act funds for first year of program*

Nina

- *Food delivery landscape resource*
- *Working with subset of taskforce to support work on developing emergency and supplemental food delivery service resource*
- *Collecting data through survey (due Aug 25) on critical uses, platforms, and data for resource*
 - *Preliminary evaluation shows two main groups who want to use this resource :*
 - *Direct service providers*
 - *Policy makers/decision makers*
- *Plan to provide final analysis of survey results*