

**Interagency Food & Nutrition Policy Advisory Council  
(IFNPAC)  
Meeting Minutes**

**DATE:** February 16, 2021

**TIME:** 9:00am-10:30am

**LOCATION:** Zoom

**COUNCIL MEMBERS:** Carol Hall-Walker (RIDOH – on behalf of Dr. Nicole Alexander-Scott, Ken Ayars (DEM – on behalf of Director Janet Coit), Steve Carey (RIDE), Ernest Julian (RIDOH), Doris Blanchard (Commerce), Laurie Cote (DHS), Maria Cimini (DHS), Ann Barone (RIDOH)

**Other ATTENDEES:** Diane Lynch (RIFPC), David Dadekian (Eat Drink RI), Kate Balestracci (URI SNAP-Ed), Amanda Clark, (RICFB), Andrew Schiff (RICFB), Sharon Pavignano (URI), Katharine Flynn (URI), Lorenzo Macaluso(CET), Representative Teresa Tanzi, Jesse Rye (FFRI), Cara Mitchell (FFRI), Margaret Read (No Kid Hungry), Erin Bertoldi (RIDOH)

**PRESENTERS:** Diane Lynch, (RI Food Policy Council), Katharine Flynn, (URI), Andrew Schiff, (RI Community Food Bank), Jesse Rye, (Farm Fresh RI), and George Ortiz, Jr, (The Elisha Project).

Call to order – Carol Hall-Walker called the meeting to order at 9:02am.

1. Approval of minutes from last meeting: Minutes from November 2020 were approved.
2. RI Food Strategy Implementation Updates Since Last Meeting:
  - Carol Hall-Walker shared the 2020 IFNPAC Legislative report has been drafted and will be reviewed for approval for a March 2021 submission. This report will also include an executive summary of the final recommendations State’s covid-19 food access workstream, led by Nell Abernathy from Governor Raimondo’s Office in partnership with several IFNPAC members.
3. Director of Food Strategy Vacancy and Plan
  - RIDOH, DEM and Commerce interviewed several candidates for the position and have offered the position and are waiting for a response. Will share the information as soon as it becomes available.
4. Hunger Elimination Task Force update
  - Diane Lynch from the RI Food Policy Council provided an update:
    - RI Food Policy is very excited to have agreed to assist with the facilitation of the Hunger Elimination Task Force meetings for 2021.
    - 2021 Q1 meeting was held virtually on 2/9/2021 on and was unfortunately “zoom-bombed”. It was reported and now security measures are in place. The follow up meeting to finish the small group discussions/presentation is scheduled for Friday, February 19 at 11:00am
    - 4 main objectives identified for the task force this year/ 2 near term and 2 long term:
      - Broaden participation by outreach to include more non-traditional organizations with a strong emphasis on resident input.

- Create a landscape map to put together a profile of the state in terms of order and delivery services, pilot programs and referrals that are available.
  - Focus meetings on enabling more medium- and long-term problem solving by creating workgroups.
  - Increase resiliency of food system
  - Proposed themes for 2021 quarterly meetings include: incorporating local food into emergency food and engage with organizations running small pilot programs in the community to scale up.
5. RI Food Strategy Implementation:
- a. Updates from each integrated focus area:
- Sustain & Create Markets from Rhode Island Food, Beverage Products
  - Preserve & Grow Agriculture, Fisheries Industries in Rhode Island

Ken Ayars provided an overview of the updates in these two focus areas, which are also outlined in the 2020 legislative report:

- To help foster the continued viability of the Rhode Island commercial seafood industry during the COVID-19 public health crisis, the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) enacted a new, no-cost Direct Sale Dealer License via an emergency regulation filed on April 17. It authorized commercial fishermen in Rhode Island to sell certain species of finfish, and to sell and transport for sale live lobsters and crabs, directly to consumers and licensed seafood retailers from the vessel on which they were harvested. DEM also distributed over 3 million dollars in NOAA stimulus funds directly to the RI commercial fishing industry. DEM subsequently went through the process of making the emergency regulation for dockside sales permanent.
- The pandemic created multiple new challenges and opportunities for local food suppliers using existing state resources and new Federal funding. A sampling of activities includes:
  - State: RI DEM called a weekly agricultural meeting that is ongoing and serves multiple farm entities and other stakeholders.
  - State: RI DEM called a monthly fisheries meeting that is ongoing and serves multiple fisheries agencies and other stakeholders.
  - RI DEM and RIFPC assisted with a successful application to the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program provided a contract that paid Farm Fresh RI to bring thousands of boxes of local food from multiple local farms to food insecure families for 4 months
  - The state communicated about programs to assist and guide farmers, including relating to farm loan flexibilities and compliance with COVID health and business operation standards,
  - The state communicated about PPP/EIDL loans and advances to farm, fish businesses through RI DEM and Commerce, helping scores of small businesses survive.
  - RI DEM and RIFPC are running an online marketing intensive pilot for a small number of farms this winter with USDA FSMIP funding.
  - DEM is preparing for a round of the LASA Grants, which will be entirely state funded for the first time this year.

- In the next 4-5 months DEM will be directing \$500,000-\$600,000 towards local fisheries economy. Will work with IFNPAC and other stakeholders to strategically and effectively use these funds with a forward look.

Diane Lynch (RIFPC) shared that the direct sales license for fisheries had much success, and is in need of some work. Last week legislation was introduced in the Senate to make it permanent. Senate Bill No. 206 By: Sosnowski, Coyne, Seveney, Felag, Gallo ENTITLED, AN ACT RELATING TO FISH AND WILDLIFE - COMMERCIAL FISHERIES (Permits dockside sale of fish by commercial fishing license holders.)

RIFPC will support this and if anyone else is interested please contact RIFPC to learn how to assist: [dianeroselynych@gmail.com](mailto:dianeroselynych@gmail.com) or [nessa@rifoodcouncil.org](mailto:nessa@rifoodcouncil.org)

- o Ensure Food Security for all Rhode Islanders
  - Carol Hall-Walker reviewed the following strategies that are in progress to improve efforts in this critical area:
    - Reactivating the Hunger Elimination Task Force with assistance from the RI Food Policy Council
    - Securing needed federal support for supplemental nutrition and school meal program waivers.
    - Increased support to the RI Community Food Bank
    - Identify strategies for online ordering and delivery.
    - Equipping vendors for SNAP online ordering and delivery services
    - Engaging business and nonprofit organizations
    - Providing funding to community-based organizations
  - Kate Balestracci (URI SNAP-Ed) shared that they produced a food access qualitative analysis report due to come out in a couple of months. This report will be helpful when applying for resources and funding.
  - Diane Lynch (RIFPC) said the council has been successful in identifying grant funding opportunities available and is willing to help. Contact [nessa@rifoodcouncil.org](mailto:nessa@rifoodcouncil.org)
- o Enhance the Climate for Food & Beverage Businesses
  - DLT Funded program, Real Food Jobs RI, is committed to continue this program. The Workforce trainings have been well attended.
- o Minimize Food Waste & Divert it from the Waste Stream
  - Lorenzo Macaluso (Center for EcoTechnology) shared updates on their ongoing collaboration with DEM:
    - Reached 7500 people in RI through virtual workshops and newsletters.
    - Provided direct technical assistance to many businesses in RI
    - 150 tons of annual diversion, donation and compost with collaboration with URI, restaurants and other locations across the state
    - 270 tons avoided carbon emissions

- Coordinating with URI to participate in follow up learning opportunities (detailed in presentation info).

## 6. Presentations:

- “URI Food System Summit: recap and key findings” Katharine Hazard Flynn, Executive Director of the URI Business Engagement Center
  - This virtual event was extremely successful with great participation and overall feedback.
  - To continue the important conversation, the following virtual events are scheduled:
    - Wednesday February 24, 2021 10AM –12PM RI Public Health Institute and Grow Smart RI will join URI with two panel discussions: One which examine the efficacy of 1.5 cent per ounce RI Sugar Sweetened Beverage Tax (SSBT) to fund the Retail SNAP Incentive Program (RSIP); and the second to understand how the state uses equitable transportation as a means to addressing food access.
    - Wednesday, March 10, 2021 10 AM –11:30 AM The Center for Eco Technology and a selection of expert panelists will discuss creative approaches to prevent and divert wasted food.
    - Wednesday, March 24, 2021 10 AM –11:30 AM The USDA Farm Service Agency and the RI Department of Environmental Management will discuss how these agencies can assist both beginning and long-established farmers. Upcoming Events Wednesday,
    - April TBD, 2021 10 AM –11:30 AM URI Professor John Taylor, the URI Multicultural Scholars, and Southside Community Land Trust will discuss how they aim to collaboratively improve sustainability and equity in our food system.
    - Wednesday, May 12, 2021 10 AM –11:30 AM URI Cooperative Extension will discuss a new EPA funded train-the-trainer program on food waste reduction that they are developing for the fall of 2021. \*\*275 people have registered for all these events as of 2/11/2021 Upcoming Events (cont.)
    - For more info and to register, visit: [web.uri.edu/food-center/foodsummit21](http://web.uri.edu/food-center/foodsummit21)
    - The Rhode Island Food Center has been completed. Classes are being held there, the Plant Protection Clinic will soon be operational, and the University’s agricultural extension agents will have new offices.
    - [khflynn@uri.edu](mailto:khflynn@uri.edu) and [spavignano@uri.edu](mailto:spavignano@uri.edu) can be contacted directly for any inquiries.
- “Increasing food access during Rhode Island’s second surge”

The following organizations were funded in December 2020 with remaining CARES Act funding to provide support to Rhode Islander’s impacted by the second spurge of the pandemic.

  - Rhode Island Community Food Bank, Andrew Schiff, Chief Executive
    - Calls to 2-1-1 for food assistance increased each month from July 2020- December 2020. The CARES (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security) Act, passed by Congress in March, gave extra financial assistance to laid-off

workers, adding \$600 per week to their unemployment insurance compensation. These supplemental benefits ended in July.

- RICFB has seen a 40% increase in new people seeking assistance, increasing annual purchasing from 12 million pounds to 14 million pounds. The state has supplemented previous allocations COVID Relief Funds to support a statewide response to rising food insecurity.
  
- The Elisha Project, George L. Ortiz, Jr, Co-Founder
  - In the midst of the second surge this organization supported Rhode islanders in quarantine and isolation with delivered food, household needs, and PPE.
  - On average, delivered 300-400k pounds of food per week through partnership with United Way 2-1-1, RIDOH, Office of Housing, Housing authorities and organizations.
  - With the Governor transition in RI occurring, it will be important for IFNPAC members to engage and determine next steps for the continuation of this work.
  
- Farm Fresh Rhode Island, Jesse Rye, Co-Executive Director
  - Farm to Pantry partnerships bolster the local and regional food system.
  - Investment in local food infrastructure means increased food access in times of crisis.
  - Key Partnerships: RI Community Food Bank, Providence Healthy Communities Office, Hopes Harvest, COVID Relief Funders
  - Impact:
    - Weekly deliveries to 28 hunger relief organizations in Q4 of 2020
    - 52 unique crops ordered from 76 local farmers in 2020.
    - FFRI staff align fresh, local supply with specific site needs.
    - Sites have access to network of over 100 local and regional farmers for fresh produce

## 7. Open Discussion

- The Elisha Project highlighted the critical work that Hope's Harvest has provided in this response.
- There was overwhelming gratitude expressed for United Way and the 2-1-1 program.
- Members discussed the USDA Farmers to Family FoodBox program and the challenges Rhode Island has experienced with it. Ken Ayars its actively talking with the Congressional Delegation and continues to voice concerns, feedback and recommendations for improvements.
- Carol Hall-Walker asked the group what is being done to ensure that culturally appropriate food items are available?
  - The Elisha project works with different vendors and local market to meet such needs through a pilot program.
  - RIFPC has connected Hope's Harvest with Southside Community Land trust to engage with immigrant farmers.

- URI has a program utilizing multicultural fellows engaging with the Providence community and is happy to make connections.
- URI SNAP-Ed Program, comprised of Registered Dietitians, offered to provide technical assistance to any congregate meal sites to adjust menus to be more culturally appropriate. Contact Kate Balestracci [katebal12@uri.edu](mailto:katebal12@uri.edu)
- Steve Carey (RIDE Child Nutrition Program) acknowledged the public schools food service providers. They all pivoted and continue to provide the essential service of meals at schools, pick-up sites and in delivery in Providence. They have all done a wonderful job and are essential workers.
- Steve Carey also acknowledged Bethany Caputo of DHS for being the lead on the P-EBT program. This program is in the planning process to expand to children under the age of 6 in childcare. RIDE working closely with DHS now to determine a plan for this expansion.
- Carol Hall-Walker informed the group that in addition to the Director of Food Strategy position, the state is also advocating for a Food Access Manager at the state level. RIDOH previously had funding for this position and is hopeful with the new administration CDC will eventually offer funding opportunities to apply for.
- Jesse Rye shared that the Farmer's Market program saw a 40% increase in markets from 2019 to 2020, with \$200,000 in bonus bucks.

Meeting adjourned at 10:20am.

Next meeting: May 2021 – date/time TBD