

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

Q4 Meeting Minutes

November 16, 2021, 9:30am-11:00am

Location: RI Commerce, Narragansett Room

Note: Due to the elevated transmission levels of Covid-19 and the need for physical distancing, it was advised that only Council Members or their designees listed by statute attend in-person. IFNPAC Council Members are leadership from RIDOH, DEM, DOA, DHS, OHA, RIDE, DOC and RI Commerce, or their designee. All others were requested to join by Zoom.

COUNCIL MEMBERS (present): Randi Belhumeur (RIDOH – on behalf of Dr. Nicole Alexander-Scott, Ken Ayars (RIDEM – on behalf of Terry Gray), Makeba Hardy-Thomas (DEM), Jack Sisson (DEM), Julianne Stelmaszyk (Commerce), Terrence McNamara (DOC), Maria Cimini (DHS on behalf of Celia Blue) Doris Blanchard (Commerce), Daniela Fairchild (Commerce), Christopher Abhulime (GO), Paul Gonsalves (DOA), Jade Borgeson (DOA)

GUEST PRESENTERS: Nessa Richman, RI Food Policy Council (RIFPC)
Pat McNiff, Pat's Pastured
Margaret DeVos, Southside Community Land Trust

Other ATTENDEES: Diane Lynch (RIFPC), Allison Montagnon (RIFPC), Juliana Esposito (RIFPC), Gemma Gorham (RIFPC), Sara Amin (URI SNAP-Ed), Kate Balestracci (URI SNAP-Ed), Hannah Ornburn (URI- SNAP Ed), Amanda Cantrell (RICFB), Andrew Schiff (RICFB), Coryanne Malacuso (CET), Jesse Rye (FFRI), Cara Mitchell (FFRI), Margaret Read (Share Our Strength), Erin Bertoldi (RIDOH), Deb Golding (RIDOH), Bob Ballou (DEM), Alyssa Gleason (East Prov HEZ), Karin Wetherill (RIHSC)

Welcome and Introductions

- Randi Belhumeur called the meeting to order at 9:33am. She introduced herself as Dr. Alexander-Scott's designee and welcomed those joining in person and remotely.
- She provided an overview of the agenda
- Council members introduced themselves and participants in zoom did so in the chat.

Approval of August 2021 Meeting Minutes

- Minutes from August 2021 were approved by Maria Cimini and Juliane Stelmaszyk.

Hunger Elimination Task Force Update

- Randi Belhumeur provided the following overview/background to introduce Nessa Richman, RI Food Policy Council (RIFPC):
 - In an effort to advance one of the 5 pillars of the Relish Rhody food strategy “Ensure Food Security for all Rhode Islanders”, the Inter-Agency Food Nutrition and Policy Council convened the Hunger Elimination Task Force (HETF) with the goal to reduce food insecurity in 2018.

- With recent changes in leadership over the last year and a limited capacity to manage the taskforce, the RIFPC entered an agreement with RIDOH and partner state agencies to facilitate the HETF which they have done quite effectively for the past year. She reminded attendees of the three main objectives established for this past year as we reflect on what has been accomplished and lay a path for what should be priorities for 2022.
- Co-led by state agency partners, RIDOH, DEM, Commerce and the RI Food Policy Council (through an MOU) provides a quarterly meeting space for CBOs, state and municipal government and the food industry to work together to reduce hunger and increase access to healthy, culturally relevant food.
- Nessa Richman provided an overview of the HETF Goals and 2021 Objectives:
 - (Presentation included as an attachment of meeting minutes)
 - Broaden the network of actively engaged stakeholders
 - Deepen the collaborative environment for medium/longer-term problem solving
 - Collect data for the creation of a statewide hunger/food delivery landscape resource
- HETF 2021 output and outcomes were presented
 - Enhance medium/longer-term planning approach
 - Facilitate communication and consensus-building
 - Educate/broaden everyone’s knowledge base
 - Ensure community input into medium/longer-term plans
 1. DEM & RIFPC ARPA recommendations
 2. Invest in urban and rural ag land
 3. Increase support for emergency food providers
 4. Support local Farm-to-School
 5. Long term investment in Food Access/Equity staff
- Emergency & Supplemental Food Delivery Work Group update
 - Work Group Objectives:
 - Improve access to delivery services by building an up-to-date database/landscape map and identifying ways to share as widely as possible with communities in need
 - Identify gaps and potential areas for increased state/non-profit support, short or longer term
 - Key Finding: Utilize platforms such as: Unite RI, 211, Integra
 - Map was reviewed to showcase the number of emergency and supplemental home delivery providers active in each town.
 - Overall strengths
 - Diverse range of providers, Consideration of multiple cultures. Most options are free, or donation based, Focus on seniors and disabled individuals
 - Challenges
 - Staff capacity and volunteer supply, Gaps in Burrillville, Foster, Gloucester, Scituate, & Smithfield, Little focus on newly immigrated families, Knowledge gap surrounding local or community-focused operations that act as a “last resort
 - Providers dealt with:
 - Inadequate staffing, staff capacity, volunteers, Inadequate funding, Transportation challenges, Access to storage, Access to materials/supplies (e.g., boxes)
 - Recommended Next Steps:

- Share data with food access platform developers
- Primary Food Security Indicators were Reviewed

RELISH RHODY IMPLEMENTATION UPDATES

ENSURE FOOD SECURITY FOR ALL RHODE ISLANDERS:

Responding to emergency hunger relief

DHS (Maria Cimini)

- DHS continues to focus on hunger and nutrition through SNAP. Focusing on maintaining on Covid-19 flexibilities. SNAP increased benefits will continue through month of December. Continue to work through p-EBT program. Example: Pilgrim HS. Requesting ongoing waivers to continue beyond December the recertification process and do any communication services via remote. But also preparing if the requests are denied. Continuing to issue benefits monthly to SNAP recipients.
- Enrollment collaborations ongoing with SNAP, Heating Assistance, WIC and Childcare.
- DHS website will soon have RI SNAP state plan posted.

Office of Healthy Aging (OHA) *unable to attend; updates were shared by Randi Belhumeur*

- During May – September 2021, Office of Healthy Aging utilized supplemental funding from the Administration for Community Living to deliver additional home-delivered meals to individuals 60+ statewide via Meals on Wheels resulting in 1,341 total clients served and 23,859 total meals served.
- Through a pilot project, The Elisha Project delivered culturally relevant hot meals and food & supply boxes to individuals living in households and communities with the greatest social and economic need statewide with a focus on the core cities. Those eligible for the service included: individuals 60+, those with disabilities, adult caregivers + spouses, and grandparents or caregivers age 55+ and caring for grandchildren or foster children under age 18. This effort resulted in 3,933 total hot meals served and 6,856 total food/supply boxes distributed.

Hiring a Food Access Manager

RIDOH (Julianne Stelmaszyk/Randi Belhumeur)

- In partnership with the RI Food Policy Council RIDOH was able to secure COVID funds to hire a full time Food Access & Equity Manager which will be co-managed by our team at RIDOH and the RI Food Policy Council. Job posting can be found [here](#). The role will lead implementation of food access- related aspects of the State Food Strategy Relish Rhody and coordinate food security and food access programs across the state.
- We continue to co-host calls with state agency partners and CBOs monthly to help coordinate emergency food relief and food access initiatives (typically 20-30 organizations attend).

SUSTAIN & CREATE MARKETS FOR RI FOOD, BEVERAGE PRODUCTS:

Connect Rhode Island products to Institutional Markets

From Jessica Patroliia, (RIDE) - *unable to attend; updates were shared by Juli Stelmaszyk*.

- The [RI Farm to School Network](#), established in 2019, has reorganized for its new launch in 2022 and is currently [looking for new members to join the Leadership Council](#) which serve a one-year minimum term, helping to provide strategic guidance and serve as part of the overarching

decision-making body for the Network. The new Network format is made up of action committees and communities of practice for producers, institutional buyers and educators. As a reminder, there are over 138,000 public school students in RI and 69% school lunches served are free or at reduced price. Almost 90% of schools claim to serve local food, however it is a small percent of their total food spend at just 9% (FINE, 2019 & USDA, 2020). The newly reorganized RI Farm to School Network will engage partners across the state to develop, expand and strengthen local procurement, education and school gardens all of which supports local farmers and leads to healthier and better students. If you know someone who may be a good fit for the Leadership Council, please reach out to Julianne or Jessica Patroliia at RIDE. We are looking for expertise or experience in education, distribution/supply chain, food access, school community and school-based initiatives.

- USDA FY22 Farm to School grant funding has nearly doubled to \$12million with up to \$500,000 in grants available to state agencies. RIDE is exploring a potential collaborative proposal with DEM, Commerce, DOH and others.
- This fall RIDE was awarded a Technology Innovation Grant for 3 years to develop an electronic Farm to School local procurement tracking platform which will be integrated with current administration of federally funded child nutrition programs. RIDE has been working with the RI Farm to School Network for two years to develop a local definition and identify food purchasing data to be tracked. This system would help lay the groundwork for a possible local purchasing incentive legislation and will improve program evaluation and expansion.
- Relish Rhody and SupplyRI will be co-hosting a [RI local food show for institutional buyers Dec. 7th](#) with Hope and Main and Farm Fresh RI as part of continual efforts to connect more RI food producers with large food purchasers in state. We expect to have over 25 institutions and 20 RI food producers and farms.

PRESERVE & GROW AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES:

- Ken Ayars (DEM) - DEM is administering stimulus funds in agriculture and seafood. FR-SAN to support producer mental health, health and wellness, business planning. Formed a partnership to administer that, which will happen in the very near future.
- Anticipate receiving a grant announcement from USDA ~ 1-1.5 million to buy food from local growers to support the emergency food system. Will work with RICFB and FFRI. Hopefully it will be more than just a 1-year program. Proposal in for ARPA funding. Those are being considered by legislature and governor. This will be for many of the local and community organizations that were mentioned by the RIFPC. Identified critical issues that need support in RI. Hope to be able to support that network of food delivery.
- Looking at the infrastructure bill to see what impact that has on the overall food system. Supply chain is currently constrained. DEM administering funds to help seafood processors affected by Covid-19.
- Bob Ballou (DEM) – DEM was awarded a \$300,000 federal Saltonstall-Kennedy grant by NOAA Fisheries to strengthen the local seafood market through a multi-year marketing campaign. The majority of the 80 million + pounds of seafood landed in RI, valued at \$100 million (ex-vessel) is exported out of state and most of what is consumed is imported. This initiative will involve a multifaceted approach to promoting the consumption and sales of seafood in RI. This should

benefit a range of interests in RI including businesses, consumers, and the state – a stronger local food economy. ([See recent press release](#))

- Marketing campaign to promote “Rhode Island Grown” foods: There are current discussions between DEM and Commerce to re-engage a pre-pandemic initiative to promote food tourism under a unified brand message and image, a goal stated in the Food Strategy. This will likely kick off in 2022.
- Seafood wastewater processing continues to be a bottleneck for increasing local processing of squid, our largest state food export. A proposal to fund pre-treatment incentives for seafood processors has been included Commerce and URI’s Build Back Better Grant Application for “Blue Economy and Technology”.
- Growing year-round food production: Several vertical and controlled environment farming businesses are interested in expanding to Rhode Island. There is collaboration between DEM, Commerce and DLT to support the growth of this industry.

MINIMIZE FOOD WASTE & DIVERT IT FROM THE WASTE STREAM:

Coryanne Mansell, Center for EcoTechnology (CET),

- A nonprofit of over 40 years, helps people and businesses save energy and reduce waste. Thanks to our partners, including EPA, USDA, RI DEM, and 11th Hour Racing, we are able to offer [Wasted Food Solutions](#) to businesses and institutions in the state. To date, we have helped entities with surplus food reduce, recover, or divert over 1,000 tons from the landfill.
- On Wednesday, November 17th, we are hosting a [virtual workshop](#) geared to k-12 schools [centerforecotechnology.org], which will also include a presentation from RI School Recycling Club. This workshop focuses on the opportunities to implement programs to reduce, recover, and divert food scraps within the institutional sector.
- CET is working with Clean Ocean Access and Zero Waste Providence to offer a series of meetings for restaurants across the state from January to March of next year. This series of meetings will encourage peer-to-peer learning, showcasing that the interest and need for more donation and composting efforts is not unique to one organization or one part of the state.
- We would like to develop Part Two of a [training video](#) we just produced for Middletown, CT, and their Feed the Earth initiative. Part 1 video focused on the downtown effort to source separate food scraps for the nearby anaerobic digestion. However, this follow up video will focus on best practices for donation in Rhode Island and will be developed over the coming months.
- With support from USDA, and in collaboration with Clean Ocean Access, we are offering assistance to sites that may be interested in pursuing food scraps composting. This includes evaluating best practices and overall considerations to this endeavor.
- As part of our work with EPA to build awareness and understanding of anaerobic digestion (AD) as an option to process wasted food, we are just about to finalize a two-pager on anaerobic digestion for RI School Recycling Club to incorporate in their conversations with schools they are working with in the state. The goal is to familiarize folks with the technology and support its use, when applicable and appropriate.

OVERARCHING FOOD STRATEGY:

Julianne Stelmaszyk (Director of Food Strategy)

- Tuesday Nov 16th, RI Food Policy Council testified on ARP stimulus investment in food system (link to recording [here](#))

- URI and JWU will be hosting two food-related conferences this winter. The 6th Annual URI Food Summit January 20th and JWU CFIT Food & Innovation Symposium March 7-9th.
- Regional Partnerships - Dir Food Strategy now serves in advisory capacity to these initiatives:
 - RI Farm to School Leadership Council
 - Farm to Institution New England (FINE) Network Advisory Council
 - New England Feeding New England Food Partnership between six states
- The 2017 food strategy Relish Rhody is set to expire in May 2022, therefore we will work on updating the plan beginning in January 2022. Preliminary conversations with stakeholders has already begun and we expect that the IFNPAC will serve as an advisory committee to oversee the process. Please reach out with any ideas or suggestions for how we can continue to use it as a tool to achieve our state's food vision and expect the preliminary work to begin in January.

Open Comment/Discussion

- Margaret Read, representing Share our Strength, shared that she would be happy to have a conversation with anyone to discuss the "Build Back Better" Act in relation to nutrition, child tax credit, etc. She can be reached at: mread@strength.org
- RI Farm to School Leadership Council [Recruitment Flyer](#)
- USDA Farm to School [grant opportunity](#)

Randi Belhumeur acknowledged and thanked all of the state agencies and community partners for attending, both in person and virtually.

The meeting adjourned at 10:55am