

MEETING MINUTES

Rhode Island Interagency Food & Nutrition Policy Advisory Council (IFNPAC) Q1 Meeting

Chair, Director Terry Gray

Tuesday, March 19, 2024 | 9:30 - 11:00am

RI Commerce Corporation

315 Iron Horse Way, Suite 101 (Narragansett Room)

Council members must attend in person, per RI Open Meetings policy.

Members of the public can attend in person or via zoom.

IFNPAC was established by the general assembly in 2012 to serve as a coordinating body between 8 state agencies to examine regulatory and policy barriers to developing a strong sustainable food economy and healthful nutrition practices. Since the launch of the 2017 State Food Strategy, Relish Rhody, the Council has served as a coordinating council to drive outcomes toward the Strategy which include: preserving and growing agriculture and fisheries; enhancing the climate for food and beverage businesses; ensuring food security for all Rhode Islanders and minimizing food waste in the waste stream.

Q1 Meeting Minutes

March 19, 2024

Location: RI Commerce Corporation

COUNCIL MEMBERS (present): Terry Grey, Jessica Patroliia, Juli Stelmaszyk, Randi Belhumeur, Meredith Brady

COUNCIL MEMBERS (virtual): Jenna Simeone

Other attendees: Jack Sisson, Alison Macbeth, Kathy, David & Michal Monaco (Encore Catering), Aleatha Dickerson, Vernon Martin, Sarah Blau, Max De Faria, Kayleigh Hill, Irmalees Alcantara, East Bay CAP, Rachel Newman Greene

Other attendees (virtual): Maggie Sheerin, Candace, Andrew Schiff, Kate Balestracci, Tony Silbert/Spartina Consulting, Jennier Silbert/Spartina Consulting, Peter Allison, David Dadekian, Pierre, Isaac Bearg, Mark Kravatz, Rozie Schleinig, Ryleigh Mullens, Maggie Longo, Nancy Sutton, Nessa Richman, Natalie Varrallo, Cara Mitchell, Meghan Grady, Holly Fowler/Northbound Ventures, Jeanette Nessel, Rachel Tauber, PACE – RI Marketing, Maryellen Girard, Stephanie Pike, Gennifer Keller, Molly Ogren.

Guest Speakers:

Sarah Blau, RI Department of Health

Jessica Patroliia, RI Department of Education

Juli Stelmaszyk, RI Commerce

Max De Faria, RI Food Policy Council

Rachel Newman Greene & Spartina Consulting, RI Food Policy Council

Liz Stone, RI Department of Environmental Management

Approved at Q2 2024 Meeting (07.11.2024)

1. Welcome and Introductions

Welcome - for any new attendees, a bit of background on the Council. The IFNPAC was established by the general assembly in 2012 to operate as a coordinating body between 7 state agencies to examine regulatory and policy barriers to developing a strong sustainable food economy and healthful nutrition practices. Since the launch of the 2017 State Food Strategy, Relish Rhody, the Council has served as a coordinating council to drive outcomes toward the Strategy which include: preserving and growing agriculture and fisheries, enhancing the climate for food and beverage businesses, ensuring food security for all Rhode Islanders and minimizing food waste in the waste stream.

Terry Gray – The USDA published 2022 Ag Census data. Rhode Island did well. The number of young farmers rose and land subject to farming rose.

Jack Sission – Young farmers are looking for support and Rhode Island is leading the charge.

Terry Gray – We are looking at regulatory issues for farms. Currently under federal law, you must have a certain amount of revenue. We need to recreate more of an on ramp for the regulatory programs. RI Seafood Marketing Collaborative did a display at the SENA. People from all over the world were there talking about seafood markets and products. Lots of excitement on the RI presence. RI Commerce and RI DEM put together a booth. Businesses got leads. LASA grant announcements will be taking place with Gov McKee on March 29th. It will be held at Newport Vineyards.

2. Approve Q4 Meeting Minutes

Pg 2 due to the loss of USDA should be CDC, Simeone last name misspelled. Aleatha's last name misspelled. Motion approved pending editorial comments.

3. Update on SPAN Grant/HEAL Program – introduce Procurement Working Group

Sarah started with RIDOH in January as State Nutrition Coordinator and will be presenting research and introducing the institutional working group,

Randi B - one of 6 strategies in SPAN funding. Is institutional procurement The SPAN funding is a 5-year cooperative agreement with CDC. Lost the funding in 2018 and got the funding back in 2023 and will support the State's Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL) Program.

Sarah B – The CDC's milestones under the institutional procurement strategy are to develop an institutional plan around food service guidelines and form a partnership with state agencies to update their food service guidelines to be in alignment with federal food services guidelines.

Federal food services guidelines:

- 1) Food and Nutrition Standards
 - a. Salt content, sugar, fat etc.
- 2) Facility Efficiency
 - a. Purchasing
 - i. There are numbers around a local procurement expectations – an agency should be providing 20% local food. The definition of local is operating at 400 mile radius.
 - ii. Promoting the healthy choice.
 - b. Waste Diversion
 - c. Food Service Management
- 3) Food Safety
 - a. Food code
 - b. Food safety
- 4) Behavioral Design

- a. Placement and layout
- b. Product innovations
- c. Pricing and Promotion
- d. Tableware
- e. Information

Has started to warm relationships with the Office of Rehabilitative Services who oversee state agency vending to diversify vending options. This was an employee request. Also, hoping to introduce opportunities that move beyond the CDC expectations and pursue values based purchasing, ie centering Rhode Island producers, thinking about equity and transparency.

How do we define state agency: It is a broad definition. From the definition, created list of state agencies – department of administration (where state purchasing is house), department of corrections, department of Environmental Management, Department of Health, Department of Transportation, Eleanor Slate House, Office of Healthy Aging, Office of Rehabilitative Services, 4 state owned k-12 schools and state universities.

Laws and Policies of purchasing in the state: there hasn't been much movement of procurement policy since the late 80s.

Foodstuffs Law – it directs purchasing agents to buy from RI producers when the food is of good quality, prevailing marketing and required by a state institution. This definition is highly variable. Terminology around prevailing market price – this provision is never going to benefit a local producer.

The Milk Purchasing preference for RI milk producers. This .25 preference will never be high enough to be will never be competitive. The practice is not favoring local producers.

The Master Price Agreement (MPA): In 2014 there were efforts to establish a robust purchasing system. This would allow the Dept of Admin to set a benchmark. The state agency is not necessarily responsible for tracking data.

The local MPA put out in 2020 to establish a list of qualified local vendors. This would allow any local vendors in MPA to connect with state agency. 4 distributors are listed on MPA. Contract is up in October 2024.

There is no shortage of ways that state agencies influence procurement. DOC are likely providing 6000 per day. RIDEM parks at peak season are reaching 1 million. There is no universal purchasing practice. DOC is purchasing through DOA MPA/ Parks Department has more flexibility. OHA is working through 5 contracted organizations for dining program.

Challenges: limited supplies of local products. It can be hard for local producers to hit volume requirement. Hard to compete with market price. State agencies have price constraints. Additionally, processing and cooking capacity constraints. Are there opportunities for using universal language in RFPs to procure local food? Can we improve tracking systems and data transparency? Can we reevaluate local MPA, do appropriate networking to navigate system? Local food purchasing is happening. Farm Fresh RI is working with individuals, schools and restaurants. What opportunities do we have to recognize them as an official state partner? A lot of researchers have noted the benefits of a higher price preference. Can we reopen Foodstuffs law?

Next steps: introducing institutional procurement work group. Identify avenues for purchasing practices. Working with state partners to update their food services guidelines. The institutional procurement work group can provide recommendations on local MPA, guidelines and tracking, for statewide changes. Work is happening in some capacity in local and regional settings. URI has strong purchasing model for working directly with producers. Maine's Mountain View Correctional Facility is a model. Illinois and Boston have introduced Good Food Purchasing Bill.

Questions

- Rachel Newman Greene: Definition of state agencies doesn't include RIDE. Sarah B: RIDE is subject to fairly strict guidelines for federal breakfast and school programs.

STEPH PIKE: I would add that in the F2S world we are pursuing similar initiatives that would be great to be able to coordinate with and adapt for schools even not falling under the state agency definition

- Juli: explain within timeline/guidelines of SPAN/CDC grant. What is required? And what does success look like in 5 year? How can the Council support group? Sarah Blau: working with state agencies, updating purchasing guidelines, CDC is looking for agency to agency partnership. Success would look more like cross-agency influence in addition. The CDC is expecting that we form relationship and initiative and expand to other state agencies. Looking to launch the initiative and working group in the next year. Council members to be part of group offer subject matter expertise and insight as part of agency to address statewide level work.

- Juli: how many total dollars based on state institutions in given year. Sarah Blau: A lot of research from report from Harvard in 2014 data through MPA. No dollar amount yet.

PETER ALLISON (FINE): Doing work with RI DOC and other correctional offices in region. There is no shortage of rules that get into the way of smart local purchasing opportunities. Taking look at contracting and flow of material for distribution. There are a ton of things that don't make good sense when thinking of mechanics of moving materials. When local foods are available – changed by small and big p priorities. Would be happy to share work with other states. Really exciting to see you on this path.

Terry Gray– a lot of working to change state purchasing. Almost nothing changed. Wishing you luck.

4. Presentation: Local food procurement in K-12

Jessica Patrolia is RIDE's coordinator of child nutrition programs and spoke to the sphere of influence that state agencies can have.

Jessica - RIDE administers school nutrition programs, community nutrition programs, and farm to school program. RIDE is not listed as state agencies partners with CDC span. RIDE doesn't purchase food, but administers reimbursements. Don't typically access the MPA, but represent \$50 million dollars passed through RIDE office to sub recipients.

The "Big p" policy effects federal and state statute side. The "little p" speaks to agency administration side of implementation. RIDE has additional layer of regulations through the Federal Statute. We are able to develop internal policy, practices, and procedures that influence. Can influence vague big p through little p regulations and policies.

Regulatory level / statutes opportunities – are the least flexible. It would take an act of the legislature to change. School meals for all includes language around purchasing local food as much as possible. RIDE would have oversight. RI has state specific nutrition requirements – set standards for amount of varieties of fresh fruits and vegetables. Opening up legislation can welcome opposition as well. There is no ability for waivers to change statutes, but for policies.

Administrative opportunities – RIDE solicits vendors that will go on MPA that can be accessed by subrecipients. MPA 421 – local schools can jump on board and not go through procurement (to help drive down fees). RIDE has introduced broader specifications. Working toward Good Food in next solicitation. MPA 596 allows RIDE to access consultants/qualified vendors (ie FFRI). MPA 627 – local schools can access local vendors. Reduce administrative burden and influence specifications. Making the easy choice the best choice.

Local Level influence – making sure people are in compliance and trained. Documents can include best practices on procuring local food. Fresh Fruits and Vegetable Program MPA interested to get more indigenous foods.

Access to grant funding

- Supply Chain Assistance Local Food Hub & Local Food for Schools (1.5 million) were able to purchase food. Partnered with FFRI.

Approved at Q2 2024 Meeting (07.11.2024)

- Innovating Grant Funding – very challenging to track and create benchmarks. Research and development of beta product that will be a model for the nation. (500k)
- Farm to School Formula Grant Funding – providing training, TA, connecting to resources. (680k)
- Team Nutrition Funding – providing culinary training to open the door for more local procurement.

Juli – thinking of how we can support through food strategy and IFNPAC. So much of this has been Jessica’s creativity and leadership. Peer to peer administrative support group. Jessica: Federal policy is hard to navigate. The little p must be documented as the torch is passed.

5. Legislative Updates – Max De Faria

Max De Faria shared a brief update from RI Food Policy Council on the legislative session. There are over 220 pieces of legislation that have some things related to food, over 90 have relations to food business.

The Rhode Island Food Policy bill tracker is updated regularly. (See here: <https://rifoodcouncil.org/bill-tracker/>).

Legislation aligning with RIFPC’s 2024 policy priorities are:

- [SB2320](#) | [HB7400](#): Introduced by Senator Cano and Representative Caldwell respectively, these bills would provide access to free breakfast and lunch for all students in public schools while creating new programs to promote local and culturally responsive meals (IFNPAC priority)
- [SB2335](#) | [HB7684](#): Introduced by Senator Mack and Representative McGaw respectively, these bills would exempt urban and small farmers from sales taxes, real, tangible, and personal property taxes, and income taxes.
- [SB2496](#) | [HB7550](#): Introduced by Senator DiPalma and Representative Cotter, these bills include funding for several Green Bond initiatives including RIFPC’s policy priority to preserve active farmland. (IFNPAC priority)
- [SB2753](#) | [HB7856](#): Introduced by Senator Valverde and Representative Cortvriend, respectively, these bills would establish the “Compost Fund” to award grants related to reducing the amount of solid waste generated in the state.
- [SB2757](#) | [HB7995](#): Introduced by Senator Kallman and Representative McEntee, respectively, these bills would provide a tax credit for food donations by qualified taxpayers to nonprofit organizations to five thousand dollars (\$5,000) per year.

Terry Gray – farmland preservation discussion puts state agencies in odd position. Put request in summer with the OMB. But it was not in the final budget with Governor. All the hearings went well and strong arguments. It is up to the legislature now.

6. Update on RI State Food System Planning for 2030

Juli Stelmaszyk - In 2017, launched statewide food systems plan under Gov Raimondo. We are currently renewing. We don’t have a big p legislative mandate for food system resiliency. This is more like a little p to create a shared vision. More than 30 subject matter experts are involved in developing food system briefs that will inform the new strategy. (See slides)

Juli: How do you want our SPT to involve the IFNPAC as a core body who will be holding the plan accountable?

RANDI: short term and longer-term question. There’s the development and implementation. Don’t have the answer – there are immediate needs and long term needs.

Terry: borrowing from update on 2022 carbon reduction plan. Public engagement is critical. Engage in July – share with market plans and let people weigh in. Had a lot of listening sessions. Had a comment portal open all the time. It was almost written online. Putting key chapters of significant interest were published early.

7. Update on RI Food System Preparedness and Recovery Plan

Rachel Newman Greene – Wanting to keep people informed on the strategy development for Rhode Island Food System Preparedness and Recovery Plan – this plan will help the most vulnerable communities in RI to prepare and recover from disruptions. It will be a standalone accompaniment to Food Strategy 2.0. Published RFP and engaged with Spartina Consulting. The audience of this plan is state agencies and partners. IFNPAC members are part of Core Planning Team, as well as other state agencies, HEZ and partners.

Tony and Jennie Silbert from Spartina Consulting: Create shared meaning and understanding for coordinated action. Include those who are most impacted in the disruption. Currently in the discovery phase and ran two sessions at HEZ. If you or other colleagues that are representing the food system, come to the May 9th state agency meeting. We will be mapping the food system and doing background research on regional approaches along with key stakeholder interviews. Will be using a SOAR analysis to understand what can be even better. Asset visual mapping will help with discussion. 5 major sections: production, processing and storage, wholesale distribution, retail and community based distribution, consumption. Timeline for discovery is now through middle of June. There will be a strategy retreat in the summer with the plan to be developed in September.

8. Update on 2025 Climate Strategy Planning

Liz Stone works in the Director's office and staffs the Climate Coordinating Council -- 2021 Act on Climate mandates to reduce greenhouse gas emissions with net zeros by 2050. 2022 update to 2016 plan with lots of stakeholder engagement! 2025 Act on Climate Strategy is required at the end of 2025 and will be partnered with EPA planning grant. Will need a consultant to help produce report at the end of 2025. With federal climate planning money, announced climate community engagement grants. Six community organizations will be working in engagement piece to be eyes, ears and voices of community organizations to inform the plan. Develop a public metrics and climate dashboard in progress now. Climate Action Strategy 2025 has a Smart Comment portal and can weigh in now (see slides).

EC4 and active member agencies have core principles – engagement with stakeholder, wider involvement across member agencies/offices, robust and comprehensive HGH emissions scenario modeling, incorporate municipal and business voices, directly involve expertise of EC4 STAB and Advisory Board, develop an actionable strategy with specific roles and responsibilities.

Can be added to listserv doa.climatechangeri@coa.ri.gov for climate related news or sign-up for EC4 newsletter.

Terry Gray – A lot of overlap between IFNPAC agenda and climate agenda. Zero emissions by 2050 is a moonshot. We know we need to electrify everything and power everything by renewable energy. The greatest impact to emissions is transportation. Buying local is shortening emissions for transportation. Composting eliminates methane emissions but not a big impact in Rhode Island. Really need to focus on transportation.

9. Updates from IFNPAC members

No updates.

10. Public Comment

Vernon shared gratitude for being at IFNPAC meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 11:05.