



Relish
RHODY

RHODE ISLAND
FOOD STRATEGY

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A strong food system supports Rhode Island's economy, culture & people.

BUILDING ON OUR STRENGTHS



Over 60,000 local jobs are supported by RI's food sector



RI leads the nation in the number of public schools that participate in local food purchasing and education



Over 100 million pounds of seafood landed in RI in 2016 with an export value over \$1 billion



International buzz
Rhode Island's food scene has been touted by Zagat, The NY Times, Forbes, Thrillist, GQ, BuzzFeed & More



Over \$2 billion in sales were captured by RI restaurants in 2016

As part of her efforts to grow Rhode Island's green economy and support healthy families, in spring 2016, Governor Gina M. Raimondo announced the hiring of the state's (and nation's) first director of food strategy to lead the development of Rhode Island's first comprehensive food plan. With the support of many partners, efforts are underway to develop an actionable vision for food in Rhode Island that would build on the state's momentum in growing its local food economy, benefit all Rhode Islanders, connect to regional and national food planning efforts, and celebrate the state's unique food cultures and landscape.

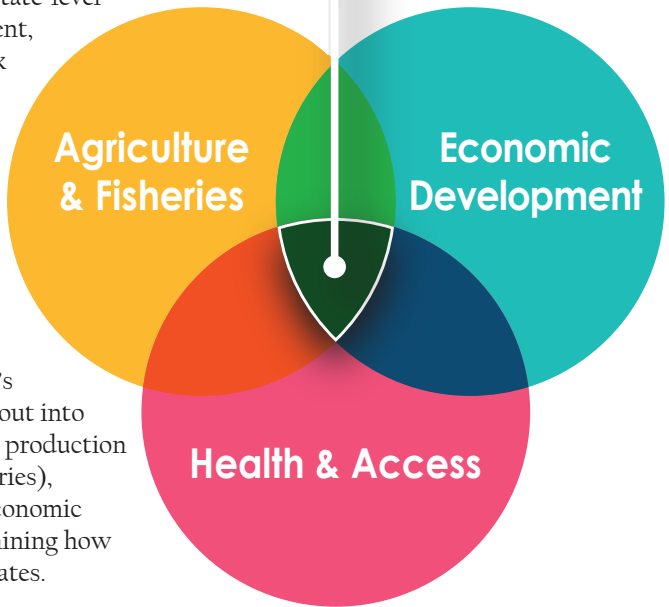
Rhode Island stands at an exceptional moment in time to engage in the development of a food strategy. In addition to State-level leadership and engagement, there is a robust network of partners across business, government and community who are energized by and committed to the effort. **The Rhode Island Food Strategy**, designed to be a five-year action plan, takes a holistic view of the state's food system, breaking it out into three core components – production (such as farming or fisheries), health and access, and economic development – and examining how each component interrelates.

The Strategy sets forth five focus areas and related actions to guide and prioritize efforts over the next five years:

- 1** Alleviate Food Insecurity & Hunger In Rhode Island
- 2** Make Food Production More Accessible
- 3** Create, Sustain & Grow Markets For Rhode Island Products
- 4** Prioritize Environmental & Economic Sustainability
- 5** Create & Sustain The Climate For Food-Related Businesses

Core Components of the Food System

The Rhode Island Food Strategy outlines key actions that leverage all three components of the food system: Agriculture and Fisheries, Economic Development, and Health and Access.





The **Rhode Island Food Strategy** envisions a sustainable, equitable food system that is uniquely Rhode Island; one that builds on our traditions, strengths, and history while encouraging innovation and supporting the regional goal of 50 percent of the food eaten in New England be produced in the region by 2060.

1 Alleviate Food Insecurity & Hunger In Rhode Island

- A. Create a statewide hunger taskforce
- B. Make produce and other healthful food items more affordable and accessible for all Rhode Islanders
- C. Decrease transportation barriers to food access
- D. Continue to support and grow school and other meal programs
- E. Support access to land and means of food production

2 Make Food Production More Accessible

- A. Grow and support programs that increase availability and access to means of production
- B. Support the development and expansion of technical assistance for food enterprises
- C. Create a community engagement/education task force

3 Create, Sustain & Grow Markets For Rhode Island Products

- A. Support direct-to-retail market opportunities
- B. Expand connections between local producers and regional institutional buyers
- C. Highlight and celebrate local restaurants and food businesses
- D. Lead by example in local food purchasing in state government

4 Prioritize Environmental & Economic Sustainability

- A. Support a thriving pollinator population in Rhode Island to support diversified agriculture
- B. Continue to support sustainable management of the state's ports and fisheries
- C. Divert food from the waste stream

5 Create & Sustain The Climate For Food-Related Businesses

- A. Identify, prioritize, and tackle regulatory challenges for food enterprises
- B. Assess and implement best practices for communications and engagement on process, regulations, and rules
- C. Assess the availability of funding programs and address gaps
- D. Identify job training programs and skills gaps
- E. Center growth of the local food sector around Rhode Island's unique strengths and values

To learn more

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Learn, engage, and discuss at
relishrhody.com

ANCHOR TACKLING AREAS OF NEED



33 million meals were missed
in 2016 by Rhode Islanders



12% of Rhode Islanders
are food insecure



35% of waste in Rhode Island
is food and compostables



Only 1% of food consumed
in the state is harvested locally

Context: Rhode Island's Unique Food Culture & History

Food is central to Rhode Island's character – it's an integral part of our history, as well as a core piece of our current identity. Our food story is uniquely Rhode Island.

It's quahoggers – commercial and recreational – digging in the Bay three hundred and sixty-five days of the year. It's small-scale agriculture feeding our neighbors fresh, local diverse fruits, vegetables and humanely-raised meat. It's working ports and commercial fishermen hauling in sustainably caught seafood – and State management of ports to keep them accessible and working. It's recent immigrants farming in community plots in the urban core, growing foods native to their pre-Rhode Island homes. Friends and community members bumping into each other any of the nearly 50 farmers markets across the state. Converting the empty mills that dot our landscape into breweries and small food manufacturing/processing. Small business and community support. The generous individuals and organizations donating time, money, and goods to the food bank and food pantries across the state. It's coffee milk and Johnnycakes – Del's lemonade and New York System Hot Weiners – and 'hey neighbor, have a 'gansett.'

It's the Providence Public School system partnering with the Ice Cream Machine to provide 1,000's of locally-baked whole grain pastries with local fruit to their students. Portuguese families growing grapes in their backyard to craft unique small-batch wines. Youth from Juvenile Corrections making apple sauce and pickles – and learning job and life skills at Harvest Kitchen in Pawtucket. Volunteers and staff at Farm Fresh Rhode Island waking up before the crack of dawn to work on the pack line – distributing food from local farms to restaurants and institutions from Boston to Southern Rhode Island. It's aquaculturist planting oyster seeds in the Bay that will be served at the best restaurants in the State. It's the Compost Plant picking up waste from Brown dining services and creating amazing soil for use across Rhode Island farms and gardens. It's Hope

& Main incubating exciting new food businesses, and mentors like Blount Fine Foods helping to lead the way. It's fifth and first generation farmers. Fifth and first generation Rhode Islanders. It's seven fishes on Christmas Eve and oysters on Thanksgiving. It's hoop houses and indoor wintertime markets filled with greens and root vegetables, pastries, and wool. It's Dave's Market, Eastside Marketplace, Ocean State Job Lot, and corner stores alongside Whole Foods and Stop & Shop.

And what we are is uniquely Rhode Island and uniquely New England. Our is a story of community and human-scale production.

And this Strategy is about where we are going. It's about building and supporting a food system that's uniquely Rhode Island – building on our traditions and history – while also encouraging growth and innovation. We envision a Rhode Island food system that **builds on our strengths** and connects **Rhode Island eaters to Rhode Island producers** – and that we play our role in achieving the Food Solutions New England goal that 50% of the food eaten in New England will be produced here by 2060.

It supports **Rhode Island-scale agriculture, fisheries, and production** – taking advantage of the bounties of our state to grow in a way that retains open space and the character of our state. We are a densely populated state – our farms, production, manufacturing, and people are all mixed together in a way that can enhance our communities and increase access. Diversified farms, humanely-raised livestock, sustainably harvested fish and shellfish, unique usage of existing infrastructure and landscapes, and preservation of open space for future generations. Production scale that feeds our state and our region – with award-winning products, businesses, and restaurants that draw in residents and visitors alike.

It supports a **Rhode Island where no person goes hungry** – where we see access to sufficient and healthful food as a basic human right, and also as a way to increase the economic potential of our workforce and efficiency of our healthcare spending.

And we envision a Rhode Island that **celebrates** its food and food system. Food is nourishment – but also pleasure. Our food system – award-winning restaurants, diversity of cuisine, access to farmstands and farmers markets, plethora of prepared products, unique beers and wine – make Rhode Island an attractive place to live and experience – both for native Rhode Islanders and transplants looking for new opportunities.

And we envision a Rhode Island where the food system provides **good jobs for people of all backgrounds – and where innovation and entrepreneurship are encouraged**. Where established businesses mentor younger businesses. Where micro-enterprises have access to space and resources to expand and grow. Where food businesses think as a system – processors and restaurants buying inputs from local farmers and fishermen; schools and institutions serving local seafood on their menus, farmer entrepreneurs growing crops that aren't traditionally grown in New England for Rhode Islanders from varying cultures.

What follows is the Strategy to put us on the path to create this Rhode Island.

FOUNDATION FOR THE FOOD STRATEGY:

Food is an integral piece of Rhode Island's history, cultural, identity, and economy. Food is multifaceted and represents many areas of strength for our state. A small sampling includes:

We have one of the most highly regarded food hubs, we are consistently ranked as one of the top food destinations in the country because of our top notch restaurants, we are home to world-class ports that coexist on our coastline with recreational uses, the USDA ranks us as #1 in the country for Farm to School programs with all of our K-12 school districts participating and purchasing some amount of local food, we are home to one of the most highly regarded food hubs in the country at Farm Fresh Rhode Island, and we are home to progressive programs that work to alleviate hunger and food insecurity.

Rhode Island stands at an exceptional moment in time to engage in the development of this strategy, with an enormous amount of momentum built over the last five

years and an incredibly unique public-private partnership across the state. We have a rare combination of State-level leadership and engagement, coupled with leadership, and partnership across the State.

HISTORY: 2011 – 2016:

In 2011, a collection of representatives from across the food system formed the Rhode Island Food Policy Council (RIFPC). They commissioned an initial "Food System Assessment" to ground their work and focus in data. Throughout the last six years, that team has grown into an active network across the state, engaged on regional and state food systems issues ranging from supporting production, collecting and disseminating data, running programs to decrease food waste, and more. In 2016, they released an update to their original assessment to lay the data groundwork for this Food Strategy. Further, in 2011, the Ag Partnership also released their five-year Strategic Vision – and over the last 5 years has worked with partners across the state (including State agencies such as the Department of Environmental Management) and have accomplished nearly all of the goals set out in the Vision.

And while organizations across Rhode Island have been engaged on building a more local food system – they have also been engaged in active regional work. A New England regional organization – Food Solutions New England (FSNE)– released a bold goal that Rhode Island has signed on to: By 2060, 50% of the food consumed in the region will have been produced in the region. (Referred to as the FSNE 50x60 goal). States around the region have been working to determine how to move toward implementation of this bold goal.

This has all been supported by an amazing array of funders across the region. The Henry P. Kendall Foundation, focused on food systems issues across New England, saw the strategic potential in Rhode Island and has invested nearly \$2 million in our State in the last five years. The Rhode Island Foundation, Van Buren Foundation, John Merck Fund, Island Foundation, Main Street Resources – and many others have been instrumental and foundational in developing and growing the food system work in Rhode Island.

Across State government, departments and agencies have been growing their work in this sector. For example, the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) has been steadily supporting local agriculture and seafood for many years. DEM manages the state's commercial fishing ports to ensure access for commercial fishing boats and ancillary businesses. They have been dedicated to protecting open space and agricul-

tural land, and in December 2016 announced that they had just saved their 106th farm for 7,400 acres of conserved farmland across the state. They have also partnered with non-profit philanthropists and the RIFPC to administer the Local Agriculture and Seafood Act grant program (LASA), supporting farm and food businesses with small grants. The Department of Education has been partnering with stakeholders and school systems across the state to implement nation-leading nutrition requirements for schools and the top-ranked Farm2School initiative in the country. The Department of Health (RIDOH) has been managing and supporting myriad of programs related to food for the last several years – from food protection to obesity prevention to the large Health Equity Zone initiative, focused on community-level engagement on health equity issues (including access to healthy, affordable food) across the State.

In 2013, the General Assembly created the Interagency Food and Nutrition Policy Advisory Council (IFNPAC) as a way to ensure cooperation and coordination on food policy issues across Departments. IDOH and RIDEM have served as the backbone agencies for this Council, but IFNPAC membership has grown since its inception and includes seven agencies including the Department of Education, Department of Administration, Elderly Affairs, Department of Human Services, among others. The RIFPC also regularly attends an reports in at IFNPAC meetings. The General Assembly has continued to support food initiatives – and in 2016, the Senate published a Grow Green Jobs Rhode Island policy report supporting green industries, and highlighted food and agriculture.

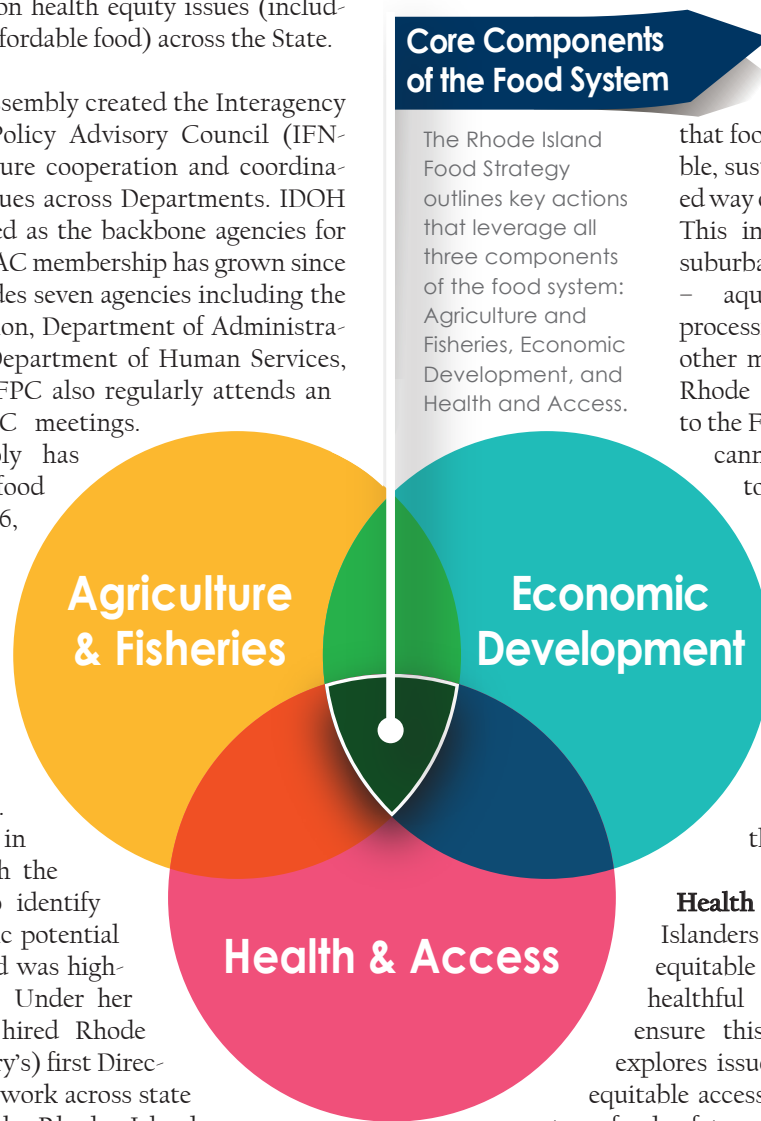
After Governor Gina M. Raimondo took office in 2014, she worked with the Brookings Institute to identify areas of major economic potential for the State – and food was highlighted in that report. Under her leadership, the State hired Rhode Island’s (and the country’s) first Director of Food Strategy to work across state departments and with Rhode Islanders across the food system to create and implement the State’s first comprehensive food strategy.

This Strategy builds on this work – as well as the amaz-

ing efforts of hundreds of people and organizations across the State, many of whom have already directly given input. This Strategy aims to be inclusive and stakeholder-driven and reflective of Rhode Island as whole – not just State government.

INTEGRATED VISION OF THE RHODE ISLAND FOOD SYSTEM:

The Rhode Island Food Strategy looks at the food system holistically, from an integrated systems perspective. It looks at the food system from its core components: production (Agriculture, Fisheries, etc.), Health and Access, and Economic Development – and how they inter-relate.



Core Components of the Food System

The Rhode Island Food Strategy outlines key actions that leverage all three components of the food system: Agriculture and Fisheries, Economic Development, and Health and Access.

Production: The Food System looks to ensure

that food production is a viable, sustainable, and respected way of life in Rhode Island. This includes agriculture – suburban, rural, and urban – aqua-culture, fisheries, processing, co-packing, and other means of productions. Rhode Island is committed to the FSNE 50 x 60 goal, but cannot reasonably hope to reach this aim without increasing food-based agriculture and other forms of productions within the state. However, real challenges exist to this growth that we will explore throughout the strategy.

Health & Access: All Rhode Islanders should have full and equitable access to safe and healthful food. In looking to ensure this, the food strategy explores issues of food insecurity, equitable access, physical infrastructure, food safety, and population health across the state.

Economic Development: Rhode Island seeks to be a state where food system businesses are empowered to

thrive within a culture of food safety and are recognized for the important roles they play in the state: making Rhode Island an attractive place to live and visit across demographics, creating good jobs that support and provide opportunities for Rhode Islanders, among others.

These pieces do not exist in isolation – but work together as a system and in which each component interrelates.

The Food Strategy that follows zooms in on that center triangle and identifies strategies that can leverage all three food system components. The Food Strategy is meant to be used as an Action Plan to guide and prioritize strategies across the food system over the next five years. The five strategies it highlights are:

- Alleviate Food Insecurity and Hunger in Rhode Island
- Make Food Production More Accessible
- Create, Sustain, and Grow Markets for Rhode Island Products
- Prioritize Environmental and Economic Sustainability
- Create and Sustain the Climate for Food-Related Businesses

STRATEGY

1 Alleviate Food Insecurity & Hunger In Rhode Island

No Rhode Islander should go hungry or worry about where their next meal is coming from.

In 2014, 147,460 people in Rhode Island were food insecure – that means that about 12% of Rhode Islanders had ‘limited or uncertain access or availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods and/or limited or uncertain ability to acquire foods in socially acceptable ways.’

To look at this from another perspective – in 2016, Rhode Island had approximately 198,000 people living at or below 130% of the federal poverty level. These Rhode Islanders missed 33 million meals in 2016, which equates to about 3 meals per week per person – though the number is not evenly distributed across the population. This takes into account all of the resources that are available to people in Rhode Island – individual families’ incomes, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, or food stamps), WIC funds, meals eaten at school (breakfast, lunch, and summer meals), and emergency food (e.g. the food bank or pantries).

This Food Strategy is an opportunity to look at Food Insecurity through a broader, more inclusive lens. Food insecurity is an incredibly complex issue with many interwoven causes. For example, we recognize that poverty is the root cause of food insecurity – and poverty and hunger create a reinforcing feedback loop. There is a growing body of research that demonstrates the linkages between hunger and child and adult performance at school and work. In schools across America – and in Rhode Island – both absenteeism and disciplinary problems increase, correlated to when SNAP and family budgets have been depleted and families don’t have enough to buy food. It just makes sense – when you are hungry or uncertain of where your next meal will come from – how can you pay full attention in school or at work? Creating and sustaining good jobs not only gives people access to buy food – access to food also increases performance at work and school.

By thinking more holistically, we can include efforts to improve the economy and create good jobs for Rhode Islanders as a key part of the strategy to reduce food insecurity across the State. Since most individuals and families who receive food assistance are employed, we need to ensure that we are creating good jobs that lift people out of poverty. We can also include the important role that production can play in addressing food insecurity – providing access to land for Rhode Islanders to grow their own food or creating good jobs in the food industry for entrepreneurs and other food system workers. The food sector is known for having opportunities across demographics, including those who sometimes have trouble in other fields – those with limited English language abilities, the formerly incarcerated, recent immigrants, among others.

Throughout Rhode Island, there is an impressive network of people engaged on both eliminating food insecurity and providing emergency relief to Rhode Islanders in need. This includes public health professionals, academics, people managing emergency food organizations, shelters, State agencies, among others.

Further, the Department of Health currently supports a statewide Health Equity Zone initiative (HEZ). The Zones identify areas of health inequities to address as a community – bringing new voices to the table to address these system issues. Unsurprisingly, nearly all of the Zones identified food access and insecurity as major areas of inequality. In developing this food strategy, we have brought together representatives from these HEZ’s to ensure that their learnings and priorities are reflected here.

In these and other conversations across the state, a few major themes emerge:

- Poverty, as the root cause of hunger, and the need to create good jobs for Rhode Islanders across the State
- Need for clear, consistent communication and coordination. There are a lot of programs and resources that exist, but communication needs to be improved through increased coordination among agencies, service providers, and organizations across the State. Clear communication also requires translation into languages that reflect our diverse population.
- Transportation access is a primary barrier to food access.
- Similarly, healthy options – fruits, vegetables, whole grains – need to be more accessible (physically, monetarily, and temporally) for consumption to increase.
- Meal programs for children are vital for ensuring adequate nutrition and academic success
- There is demand for access to land for self-production as a means to reduce personal food insecurity and enhance the resilience of communities.

Given these key themes, partnerships across the state, and the integrated lens through which we are looking, the following initiatives are recommended for priority action:

RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. Create a Statewide Hunger Taskforce:

The Hunger Taskforce would elevate the conversation around hunger and food insecurity in Rhode Island and more explicitly coordinate across agencies and stakeholders to tackle these systemic issues as a State. This Task Force would assist in streamlining and coordinating programs and communications – across agencies, departments, and organizations across the State. It would enable and allow for coordinated statewide initiatives – and a statewide voice on hunger programs in federal discussions. This Task Force would also help prioritize as opportunities for funding programs becomes available.

The Task Force will be launched in Spring 2017, and will adopt a 2020 goal to reduce food insecurity and missed meals in Rhode Island.

Key Partners could include (but are not limited to): Director of Food Strategy (who would serve to staff and coordinate the Taskforce), Director of the Department of Human Services, Director of Department of Health (or designee), OHHS, Rhode Island Community Food Bank representative and representatives of other hun-

ger relief organizations, Representatives from the HEZ Food Action Teams, Rhode Island Food Policy Council, Farm Fresh Rhode Island, The RI Public Health Institute, interested members of the General Assembly, among others. The Task Force will report to IFNPAC at their quarterly meetings, and the Director of Food Strategy will also regularly communicate relevant parts of this work to the State's Congressional Delegation.

B. Make produce and other healthful food items more affordable and accessible for all Rhode Islanders.

There are many reasons why families across Rhode Island lack access to healthful and culturally-appropriate foods – but the relative cost compared to fast food and unhealthy options can play a major role.

There are currently multiple very successful programs that provide incentives and lower the cost of purchasing healthful foods. These currently include the Rhody Food on the Move program facilitated by the RI Public Health Institute – which doubles incentives for fresh fruits and vegetables at mobile markets across the states – and Farm Fresh Rhode Island's Bonus Buck program – which provides 40% bonus incentives for fruits and vegetables at Farm Fresh Farmers Markets and other farmers markets across the state. These programs provide an invaluable service to help Rhode Islanders afford to purchase healthful foods. Both programs look to expand and grow – in terms of total number of participants, geographical area covered, and products that can receive the bonus. As the programs expand, we will ensure that it is done in a coordinated manner that does not preclude other types of incentive programs, but that is user-friendly for participants. We will also plan to strategize new locations, new types of incentives, and new funding opportunities. These new models could include clinics and hospitals creating healthy food prescriptions for foods provided at on-site food pantries, incentive programs providing bonuses for healthy prepared foods (not just raw ingredients), delivery for SNAP-eligible purchases, among others. Given our innovative leaders across the state – and our unique size, and coordinated infrastructure – Rhode Island has an opportunity to innovate and create model programs for the rest of the country to follow.

Key Partners would include: RI Director of Food Strategy, RIDOH, RIDHS, Farm Fresh Rhode Island, RI Public Health Institute, RI Farmers Market Managers Association, Rhode Island Food Policy Council

C. Decrease transportation barriers to food access.

There are many communities across the state that lack access to markets that sell healthful food, such as fruits

and vegetables. The 2016 Food Assessment update shows that density of fast food restaurants continues to be greater than density of grocery outlets, for example. Further, many Rhode Islanders lack access to personal transportation, and without access to markets within walking distance, they need to rely on public transit to meet their basic mobility needs. This can add both time and monetary expense to each shopping trip.

In developing this Strategy, the Director of Food Strategy is partnering with the Health Equity Zone food action teams, the Food Policy Council, DOH, and the RIDOH SIM to use GIS to map public transportation routes overlaid with different types of grocery stores, corner stores, farmers markets, and emergency food access. This work will inform further partnership across State agencies, including the Department of Transportation and RIPTA, and other stakeholders on transportation planning and public transportation design, with the goal that changes in public transportation will prioritize access to safe, healthful food when designing/reforming public transportation.

The State will also investigate and prioritize innovative pilots that could reduce transportation costs or delivery fees for low-income and SNAP eligible families – to save them time and transportation costs from shopping.

D. Continue to support and grow school and other meal programs:

Rhode Island has made significant commitments to ensuring children have access to healthful, good food in schools. We currently have among the highest standards for nutrition for K-12 school meals in the country, at the same time that we are a national leader in farm-to-school programs for K-12 – with all school districts across the state participating in farm-to-school programs at some level. Many Rhode Island children depend on school meal programs for a significant portion of their nutrition – and the child food insecurity rate still hovers above 21% across the state (with even higher percentages in Providence County).

Over the last several years, through the hard work of the Department of Education, Farm Fresh Rhode Island, cities and towns, public school districts, HEZ partners, Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition, and many others, schools across the state have seen a growth in summer meals programs and innovative meals programs for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and healthful snacks. As a state, food insecurity among children continues to be a persistent challenge, and we need to continue to support both programs that we know work through sustained funding and other lev-

els of support – as well as test innovative new models to ultimately reach more children in a way that prioritizes access and dignity.

E. Support access to land and means of food production

Having access to the means to grow, catch, and/or process your own food is a valuable tool for fighting food insecurity and inequities in the food system. Not only can that access connect you to a potential means to generate income, community farms and gardens across the state are giving people the means to grow their own food and directly reduce their own hunger – all while improving the livability of communities. The strategies around how to increase the accessibility of food production will be elaborated in Strategy 2.

STRATEGY

2 Make Food Production More Accessible

Supporting food production – commercial agriculture and fisheries, small-scale gardening, aquaculture, processing, etc – is a key way to support a sustainable food system in Rhode Island. This food strategy specifically supports the growth of production that is environmentally sustainable, grows good quality jobs for Rhode Islanders, and is mutually supportive of other parts of the food system where possible.

Encouraging expanded and accessible food production is directly within the target of the Venn Diagram – supporting not just agriculture and fisheries – but also increasing access to healthful local foods for all Rhode Islanders and creating opportunities for stable and innovative economic development. Expanded production serves many purposes at the same time.

For starters, it preserves the culture and unique character of our State: Rhode Islanders have been farming our land for generations with dairies, potato farms, diversified vegetables crops and more for hundreds of years. Similarly our waterways – including our Narragansett Bay and the Atlantic Ocean – have served as grounds for wild harvest of seafood, as well as productive aquaculture. We are also known for our unique Rhode Island products created within the state. While the types of production have shifted over the years, active food production is an integral piece of the Rhode Island identity.

Further, supporting access to production also helps preserve open space – both in rural areas, as well as in neighborhoods within cities and suburbs. Preservation of open space is increasingly important in our dense state, and also creates more viable, livable neighborhoods with thriving sense of community. Increasing access to production could also help leverage our existing infrastructure in new ways – while we are no longer the manufacturing center we once were, the factories and infrastructure created to support those industries could serve as beautiful and functional space for new industries, such as indoor farms, food hubs/distribution warehouses, breweries, and more.

Moreover, increasing access to production – both at a commercial level and an individual level – can help address issues of food insecurity. Expanding neighborhood gardens would provide a source of healthy nutrition for Rhode Islanders, regardless of income levels – and ensuring access across the spectrum of Rhode Islanders can help ensure that we are growing and creating products that are culturally appropriate and meeting needs and demands within communities.

Food is also a resilient industry and builds resiliency into our economy. Even in times of economic distress, people fundamentally still need access to good, healthful food. During the Great Recession, food was one of the few areas of the RI economy consistently adding jobs, and having access to jobs creating, growing, catching, serving, or otherwise dealing with food provides you with opportunities that cannot be outsourced.

However, we experience many challenges to production in Rhode Island. The amount of farmland has declined by 80 percent from the start to end of the 20th century in Rhode Island. More than half of our active farmland is being used for non-food agriculture, and Rhode Island is known for having the most expensive farmland in the country, creating serious accessibility issues. Similar problems exist for the fishery industries – with access to dockspace, boats, gear, and other necessities being prohibitively expensive. We also see across sectors the average age increasing to at or above retirement age – which brings with it immediate challenges and imperatives to partner with farmers to preserve good arable land for agricultural uses. But it also presents a longer-term challenge and opportunity to be more imaginative and innovative about the ways to facilitate the continuation and growth of production in Rhode Island that is inclusive for all interested Rhode Islanders. We have an opportunity to put in some hard thinking to design programs that conserve land for farming – and docks for fishing – that allow for innovative business models and designs.

Further, while we have many assets in the state – some of them present their own additional challenges. There are many vacant buildings across the state and land set aside for commerce and manufacturing – but for a variety of reasons, small and medium-scale food businesses have difficulties accessing those resources. The growth of processing and manufacturing can require specific needs and access to specific inputs/resources. Rhode Island has grown a great many medium, small, and micro food businesses, but finding access to resources (appropriately-sized space, financing, etc) to grow can be extremely limiting.

Across the board, we also see a real need for increased technical assistance. To meet a growing need for legal technical assistance, the Conservation Law Foundation recently expanded their successful Legal Food Hub in Rhode Island to both provide free/low-cost legal assistance to agricultural and other food-related businesses and also build out the bench of qualified/trained food-systems legal assistance in Rhode Island. However, other needs abound, such as business development skills, finance and capital access, and job training. Programs at Social Enterprise Greenhouse are often over-subscribed – and Hope & Main continues to expand.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Expanding access to production is a key lynchpin of the Food Strategy, without support for expanded and appropriate production, Rhode Island will not be able to fulfill our goals in the 50x60 vision – and we will miss out on opportunities to create good jobs, reduce food insecurity, and increase the well-being of Rhode Islanders. Recommended initiatives in this strategy include:

A. Grow and support programs that increase availability and access to means of production

As discussed, access to land and reasonably-sized step-up facilities is cited as one of the biggest impediments to the growth of production in Rhode Island. This strategy supports the development and expansion of programs to preserve working landscapes and make them more accessible to all Rhode Islanders – for agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries, and other forms of food production and processing. This includes farmland – currently in production for food and nonfood purposes – city lots, ports, existing buildings, etc.

The State – and partners across the state – have created some innovative programs to support this access. For example, DEM and others buy development rights on

farm to prevent the loss of farmland upon sale. Land for Good has created outreach programs to connect farmers to under-utilized land. But the underlying problems still remain – retiring farmers rely on their farm for their retirement and have difficulty selling their land for a fair value, while new and young farmers still struggle with the financing and availability of land (even land that has been conserved).

The Director of Food Strategy will partner with DEM (Division of Agriculture), CommerceRI, and many other stakeholders – including existing farmers and farm families, the Farm Bureau, the Young Farmers Network, Rhode Island Food Policy Council, Southside Community Land Trust, the Rhode Island Land Trust, Conservation Law Foundation, and others to develop new tools and policies to bridge these gaps. New tools could include new types of conservation easements – such as the Option to Purchase at Farm Value being pioneered in Vermont – or student loan debt forgiveness for new/young farmers, new financing mechanisms, support for farming education in schools, support for apprenticeship programs, additional funding mechanisms for land conservation, among others.

B. Support the development and expansion of technical assistance for food enterprises

Food businesses have many types of technical assistance needs. One common thread across all of the sectors of the food system, especially as businesses grow and access larger markets, is a need for assistance in navigating the regulatory landscape – State, Federal, and marketplace requirements – as it pertains to food safety. At the federal level, the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) will be adding new mandatory food safety measures to many types of food businesses – farms, processors, distributors, among others. There are additional regulations at the State level – and increasingly, the marketplace (institutions, distributors, buyers) are requiring additional food safety verification for traceability and insurance purposes. These rules can be incredibly valuable for protecting the health and safety of consumers – but can also be confusing and expensive to navigate, especially for the small to medium-scale businesses that predominate and that we are cultivating in Rhode Island.

This strategy recognizes the work currently being done by DOH's office of Food Protection, URI's Extension services, CommerceRI, DEM, Social Enterprise Greenhouse, Hope & Main, and others to provide technical assistance for food businesses related to food safety and regulatory compliance. We also recognize existing partnerships between State agencies and the

University of Rhode Island, as well as the role that land and sea grant universities have played on this issue in other states.

Building on that, this Strategy recommends a formal partnership between the State and the University of Rhode Island/ the URI Business Engagement Center to hire capacity (at least one full-time staff person) who can help food businesses design their processes to comply with relevant regulations and requirements – particularly related to food safety. This person would also act as a liaison, connecting businesses to URI resources (labs, relevant faculty), as well as provide opportunities for students to get real world/hands-on experience in food businesses – particularly in food science and regulatory affairs. Without this type of technical assistance, food businesses of all types – farms, fisheries, processors, hubs, etc – will have a more difficult path for growth.

C. Create a Community Engagement/Education Task Force

Across the State, there are organizations supporting the existence and expansion of community and school gardens. These gardens can serve not only as important access to safe, healthy, and culturally-relevant food, but also serve as living laboratories and educational opportunities for students and community members. There is also a real need in food businesses for better-trained, experienced potential employees – at the same time that formal “Ag in the Classroom” programs that could provide this training are looking for additional support.

This Strategy recommends the creation of a Community Engagement and Education Task Force, which will ensure connectivity of efforts across the state and allow us to work in a more strategic way to increase community and school garden infrastructure and grow possibilities for educational opportunities like “Ag in the Classroom”, apprenticeships, and connection to job training programs. The Taskforce will be formed by Summer 2017 and will include by invitation (but will not be limited to) the Director of Food Strategy, the RI Department of Education, Farm Fresh Rhode Island, Master Gardeners, the URI Outreach Center, Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition, Farm Bureau, among others. URI Outreach will be integral in the management and leadership of the Task Force.

STRATEGY

3 Create, Sustain & Grow Markets For Rhode Island Products

While Rhode Island currently leads the nation in percent of farm sales direct to consumers – currently only approximately 1% of food eaten in Rhode Island was produced on Rhode Island farms. We also ship much of the fish landed in Rhode Island out of state, and most of the fish eaten in Rhode Island is imported from outside of the state and country.

We will not be able to support the development of sustainable in-state agriculture, fisheries, processing, and other forms of food production or have the chance to achieve the FSNE 50x60 Vision unless Rhode Island systematically works to sustain, create, and grow markets for Rhode Island products. As we work to increase access to production – ensuring that there are ample markets available is the necessary corollary: we can't have increased productions without growth, and we can't have more marketing opportunities without increase production. This will require several recommended workstreams:

A. Support direct-to-retail market opportunities

As already stated, Rhode Island currently leads the nation in direct-to-retail sales from farms. Our unique, diversified agriculture, myriad of food businesses and producers, density of population, and fierce loyalty to Rhode Island products (across the board) make this a strong environment for direct to retail sales.

Farmers markets are a great example of direct-to-retail opportunities. They provide a physical marketplace for farmers and small food businesses to connect to potential customers, and provide vital testing ground for new businesses experimenting with innovative products – allowing for the opportunity for businesses to experiment and grow inexpensively. They are often also consumers first experience with local food – and serve as educational platforms for shoppers reconnecting with fresh ingredients and their local community.

There are fantastic organizations who have been doing the messy work of organizing and providing market opportunities for farmers and other food producers across the state – including DEM, Farm Fresh Rhode Island, and a myriad of small organizations. Managing farmers markets is difficult work – and many are managed by volunteers or staff wearing multiple hats within an organization. The volunteers and staff at

these organizations have recently formed a farmers market managers organization to share resources, best practices, and other types of support.

This Strategy both affirms the importance of thriving farmers markets for our state and supports the development of the farmers market managers alliance to provide resources and consistency across the state's nearly fifty farmers markets.

B. Expand connections between local producers and regional institutional buyers

Local food purchasing and farmers markets have become synonymous. However, if we are to connect more Rhode Island eaters to Rhode Island-grown food and Rhode Island producers to additional opportunities, we need to think beyond just direct consumer sales and create opportunity at larger, stable markets. Rhode Island currently leads the nation in Farm to School programs – with every one of our state's K-12 school districts participating in Farm to School activities and some level of commitment to purchasing local foods. There are also a number of organizations who have been leading the effort to connect Rhode Island foods to Rhode Island institutions – including the Department of Environmental Management, Department of Education, Farm Fresh Rhode Island, Healthcare without Harm, and others. There are also an increasing number of institutions whose customers are demanding more good food that supports the local food system – hospitals, employers, universities across the region.

The opportunities for growth into institutional markets in the region is enormous – and could be inclusive of not only farm/agricultural products, but also fish and processed goods.

As part of the development of this Strategy, a Food to Institution Rhode Island (FIRI) Steering Committee has already been created to coordinate and align the work to connect Rhode Island products to local and regional institutional markets. This Steering Committee kicked off in Fall of 2016, and the membership includes (but is not limited to) the Director of Food Strategy, Rhode Island Food Policy Council, DEM Division of Agriculture, Department of Health Division of Food Protection, Partnership for a Greater Providence, Coastal Resources Center, Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation, Food to Institution New England (FINE), Farm Fresh Rhode Island, and Healthcare without Harm.

C. Highlight and celebrate local restaurants and food businesses

One of our greatest assets as a State is our vibrant restaurant scene and local food businesses. Our state's density and easy access to some of the best restaurants in the country, farmers markets, seafood, breweries, wineries, and food businesses is unmatched. As Rhode Island looks to attract more tourists, as well as increase our ability to attract new talent and jobs into the State – the importance of our thriving food scene cannot be over-stated.

Further, chefs across Rhode Island have shown real leadership in the support of Rhode Island's food system – and chefs and food producers can play a vital role in shaping the palate and trends of eaters in Rhode Island and across the country. For example, many of the fish that could be harvested or processed by Rhode Island fishermen and processors are delicious, but not always the types of fish that domestic consumers are accustomed to buying and preparing – for example scup or porgy. Chefs across Rhode Island have participated in events learning how to cook these unique fish and have begun featuring them on menus – helping to bring consumers along and create the demand and palate for these products.

Rhode Island food businesses need to be highlighted and celebrated for their important contributions to the State as a whole, and to other areas of the food system when relevant. This strategy seeks to celebrate support restaurants and hospitality and other food-related business – for more on specific recommendations, please see Section 5.

D. Lead by example in local food purchasing in state government

The State has come a long way in facilitating the purchase of local, healthy food through State contracts. However, more work remains. This includes the need to benchmark current practices, as well as set larger goals and targets for State purchase of local and regional foods. This type of support would help the State Lead By Example and help bolster the industry and provide economic development opportunities across the state. Increased purchase of local food by the State and State entities (such as URI) will require a hard look at regulations that require contracting with the lowest bidder without consideration of additional economic impact and positive externalities. After undergoing a thorough assessment of the regulations and current practices, the State will release purchasing goals in the final version of this Strategy to be released Spring 2016.

STRATEGY

4 Prioritize Environmental & Economic Sustainability

In thinking holistically about the Rhode Island Food System, we need to increase the sustainability – environmentally and economically – both of the inputs into the system, as well as the outputs. This involves consideration of the effects of pesticides/fertilizers on pollinators, how we manage our fisheries, and how we manage our waste stream.

A. Support a thriving pollinator population in Rhode Island to support diversified agriculture

In 2016 the General Assembly created a Pollinator Working Group, which will release recommendations by spring 2017. This Strategy will analyze and incorporate relevant recommendations from that effort in the final version of this Strategy.

B. Continue to support active and sustainable management of Rhode Island's ports and fisheries

The State of Rhode Island currently owns all of the active commercial ports in Rhode Island – ensuring that as coastal real estate prices rise, commercial fishing can remain economically viable across the state. Continued investment in needed port infrastructure and maintenance will enable Rhode Island to continue to be a national leader in supporting working ports and fisheries.

Rhode Island fisheries are also subject to federal rules and legislation to ensure the sustainability of our fishery resources. The State enforces these mandates, as well as state-specific rules – to ensure that our waters and fisheries remain viable for many years. The environmental sustainability of our resource should be celebrated and used as a marketing tool in differentiating against fish from regions and countries with less stringent standards – instead of being seen as overly onerous.

Further, as climate change continues to make changes in our state water ways and oceans – our fishery practices will need to adapt.

C. Divert food from the waste stream

Currently, 35 percent of the waste sent to the central landfill is food or compostable material. Across the U.S., approximately 40% of the food produced ends up in the landfill. Further, in 20TK, the General Assembly passed legislation requiring organizations that produce

large quantities of food waste to divert that waste if a commercial compost facility or anaerobic digester were available within a 15 mile radius. As we look at an imminently filling landfill, as well as the persistent problems with food insecurity, our need for additional organic inputs for our soils and our aggressive climate change and clean energy goals – diverting food waste from the landfill begins to look like a series of great opportunities. Rhode Island will think and plan holistically for waste reduction and adopt the US EPA’s goal to reduce food loss and waste by 50% by 2030.

There are two major types of food waste:

- Food that is still safe and edible that should be connected with potential consumers
 - We will term this “wasted food”
 - This could include leftovers from catered events or institutional dining halls, unsold food at grocery and other retailers, etc.
- Food that is no longer safe or edible.
 - We will term this “food waste”
 - This could include the inedible parts of food that are discarded during processes (e.g. fish scales), food that has potentially been exposed to pathogens, food that has ‘gone bad’ or has become unsafe.

Wasted Food: There are two major components preventing diversion for people in need. The first is the need for clarity around the important food safety rules that regulate the donation of food. These rules need to be appropriately and clearly communicated to facilitate the safe donation of food to those in need. This could take the form of information sheets, classes, seminars, information hotlines, technical assistance, etc. For example, Harvard Law School has already partnered with the State and the Food Policy Council to create legal fact sheets detailing the state’s rules governing the donation of wasted food. Secondly, distribution of prepared foods can present logistical hurdles. We need to encourage innovation in organizations – and learn from surrounding states who are further along in facilitating these types of programs.

The Director of Food Strategy will partner with sister agencies and colleagues across the state and region – such as US EPA, Rhode Island Food Policy Council, Johnson & Wales, the Rhode Island Community Food Bank, URI Extension Food Safety, among others – to move forward the conversation and work to connect potentially wasted food to Rhode Islanders in need. This will take the form of facilitating forums, creating/ disseminating fact sheets and toolkits, encouraging innovators to bring technology and process improve-

ments to Rhode Island, and following in the footsteps of our sister states (MA, CT, and NY) who have hired additional technical assistance capacity in their states.

Food Waste: Dealing with actual food waste can be a messy and expensive endeavor for the producers of the waste. For example, fish processors cite dealing with waste water (which is filled with dissolved biological solids) and the capacity of current infrastructure as their primary impediment to growth in Rhode Island. Large institutions who are required to comply with the organics recycling law are discovering that Rhode Island currently lacks the physical and distributional infrastructure to handle all of the waste being regulated.

The Director of Food Strategy will partner with DEM, CommerceRI, and stakeholders across the state (including the Rhode Island Food Policy Council, Resource Recovery, and others) to:

- Support technical assistance to connect the facilities that currently exist (such as anaerobic digesters and existing composting facilities) to producers of food waste. This could either be support for DEM to hire technical staff or for consultants/ contractors with experience in other states to perform this service – as is done in Massachusetts and Connecticut.
- Support and encourage development and growth of innovative food waste infrastructure. For example, digesters or processors that specialize in utilizing fish by-product to co-locate with processing facilities.
- Holistic cluster-based planning in considering funding for new infrastructure to ensure that facilities are built to support the industry – not necessarily any one business.
- Partner with Cities and Towns on new models for diverting household and small business compost from the Waste Stream. Pilot and develop curbside pick-up programs for compost in residential and commercial neighborhoods across the State as the infrastructure develops to process it. These programs can be modeled after successful programs that exist across the country.

STRATEGY

5 Create & Sustain The Climate For Food-Related Businesses

Rhode Island has a growing reputation as a state that encourages and supports Food Businesses, ranging from farmers to fishermen, restaurateurs, food trucks, small food entrepreneurs, light processors, distributors, and more. In just the last few years, we've seen an explosion in growth in this sector – supported by organizations like the Social Enterprise Greenhouse and their Food Accelerator program and a nationally recognized food incubator in Hope & Main.

However, there are barriers to growth for food-related businesses that need to be addressed across the state to unleash further growth. These range from infrastructure investments to regulatory changes to identifying training needs and gaps in communication.

The State is focused on how we continue to allow these food businesses grow in ways that produce safe food that supports Rhode Island jobs and other players in the Rhode Island food system. Some of the top recommended focus areas include:

A. Identify, prioritize, and tackle regulatory challenges for food enterprises

In conversation with food businesses from across the state – and those looking to relocate to Rhode Island – a top concern for many continues to be regulations that prohibit or hinder their growth. This ranges from unnecessarily-complicated processes to actual regulatory language prohibiting potential opportunities to the complicated array of annual fees. Addressing these challenges in a way that is supportive of the growth of businesses in Rhode Island and encourages/supports innovation within this sector/allows Rhode Island to be a leader in innovative food businesses, while also protecting the safety of our food system, is a top priority of the Food Strategy.

Starting in Summer 2016, the Director of Food Strategy, in partnership with CommerceRI, the RI Department of Health, Department of Environmental Management have already begun holding public sessions with stakeholders from across the food system to obtain specific examples of these hurdles and begin to address them systematically. In the course of developing and finalizing the Food Strategy, this process will continue – which will result in a specific list of hurdles and processes for action.

Continuing to address hurdles – and regulating business in a way that facilitates and paves the way for innovation and growth – will continue to be a priority of the State.

B. Assess and implement best practices for communications and engagement on processes, regulations, and rules

In conducting focus groups and research across the state on potential regulatory hurdles – a common theme emerged: There were a lot of practices that members of the community believed to be prohibited by regulations and legislation that are actually allowed. The feedback was heard – improvements need to be made both in how processes and requirements are communicated to Rhode Islanders – and there needs to be an increased focus on inter-agency partnership for consistency. This involves not only how rules/processes are communicated – but also how they are designed – with a customer-centered and coordinated approach.

C. Assess the availability of funding programs and address gaps

As business go through their growth stages, they require different types of capital and investment. Ensuring that all Rhode Island businesses have equitable opportunity to access capital and other resources is a priority, as is ensuring that Rhode Island businesses have access to the right types of capital to meet their needs to facilitate growth and innovation.

This support necessitates mapping out resources that currently exist and ensuring that the opportunities are communicated and made available to all Rhode Islanders. This would also require technical assistance and training targeted at building up business and finance acumen so that small businesses can understand the opportunities available to them.

On the flip side – this analysis should highlight gaps and areas where we need to work in a coordinated way to attract or create new capital products to support different sectors of the food business. At the same time, we should not take for granted that existing programs will continue to exist – and we should support the continuation and expansion of programs, like the LASA grants program – that strategically and successfully plug gaps in the finance map.

Partners in this effort are myriad, but include CommerceRI and Social Enterprise Greenhouse, as well as programs that support small entrepreneurs, such as the Center for Women and Enterprise.

D. Identify job training programs and skills gaps

The Rhode Island Food system is incredibly diverse – from farmers (urban, rural, suburban; vegetables, animals, etc.), fisheries, restaurants, emergency food providers, retail stores, farmers markets, and so much more. But a common theme across the system has been that as the job opportunities grow in this sector, finding skilled, trained employees is a challenge. At the same time, many have noted that the opportunities in the food sector appeal to a great number of people and can be more ‘forgiving’ than in other sectors of the economy – often providing pathways for the formerly incarcerated, people whose primary language is not English, workers without a college degree, and others.

While we work to build a food sector that creates good, sustainable jobs that provide pathways out of poverty – we also need to emphasize the importance of training programs to ready workers for jobs in this sector. This will involve many things: communicating about existing opportunities to those who could utilize the services, working with existing schools and training programs to grow and/or tailor existing programs to fit the needs of the food sector, creating and growing new apprenticeship and job training programs that connect people with new career opportunities.

Key Partners in this effort include Commerce RI, the Small Business Development Center, Department of Labor and Training Real Jobs RI program, Rhode Island Nursery and Landscape Association, among others.

E. Center growth of the local food sector around Rhode Island’s unique strengths and values

Rhode Island’s food system is unique to Rhode Island. We will never be Iowa with rows of mono-cropped cornfields or Colorado with feedlots of cattle – nor should we strive to be something we are not. We have an incredible number of strengths on which to build – and this strategy recommends a place-based approach to considering the focus, size, and potential location for food-related business growth. We have some of the best and most sustainably managed fisheries in the world, we lead the nation in percentage of farm products sold direct-to-retail, we are a hot-bed of small business growth, we have an incredible link geographically between large population centers in New York and New England, we are densely populated with high-achieving universities, we are a treasured tourist destination, we have a history and infrastructure built for manufacturing – with many buildings and infrastructure assets lying vacant or underutilized, among other assets.

As we look to grow Rhode Island’s businesses – we should seek to identify opportunities that build on Rhode Island’s key strengths and areas for growth and support Rhode Island’s food system – and build on the regional infrastructure needs. As discussed earlier, we will look to utilize existing infrastructure, such as empty lots in cities for community farms and gardens or empty mill buildings to house expanding food businesses or storage for farm products. We will encourage the relocation of innovative food businesses to Rhode Island that are synergistic with the types of businesses that support our economy – and our regional economy. We will prioritize businesses who are supportive of our entire food system – from production (local ag and fisheries) to increasing health outcomes and equitable access – not just economic development, while also helping us meet our regional goals.

In this effort, Rhode Islanders’ fierce state loyalty and collaborative spirit are a big asset. As small businesses grow, we often see larger RI-based companies acting as mentors or sharing best practices. The Ice Cream Machine, which supplies thoughts of whole grain baked goods to Rhode Island school children every week, is a great example. They have grown from a small bakery into a larger businesses selling into institutional markets, while continuing to purchase raw ingredients from Rhode Island and regional farmers (carrots, apples, zucchini) – and have experienced the growing pains that come with that type of change, and have advised other Rhode Island businesses looking to adapt to new markets on the best practices and pitfalls they’ve learned. Blount Fine Foods is another great example of a larger Rhode Island-based business who has served as a mentor and partner for growing small Rhode Island businesses. This strategy look to celebrate and encourage this type of collaboration.

We will also think strategically about growth and how clusters of businesses can be mutually supportive, mutually benefit from infrastructure investments. Instead of building out systems for any one individual business – we need to build infrastructure that benefits a cluster of businesses and organizations together – and leave the space for innovation and flexibility in the system. For example, the campus that Farm Fresh Rhode Island plans to build in Providence would be a space that not only houses their organization and programs – but could also potentially house a rooftop greenhouse, processing facilities for other small businesses – while connecting to distribution systems. Or in looking to expand fish processing in Rhode Island – are there ways to build infrastructure that would benefit not only the processors themselves, but also ancillary services and secondary products – such as the

aforementioned anaerobic digestion and composting for waste product.

OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS

Finally, in looking to strengthen the system as a whole – we need to continue to invest in the system as a whole. We are in a unique position and we need to capitalize on it. As the only State with a director of food strategy and a really functional collaboration between the public and private sectors through IFNPAC and the RIFPC, we could be a real model for other states. But it will require continued focus and investment.

At the State level, there are agencies – such as the Department of Environmental Management, Department of Education, Department of Health, and others – who have been supporting this effort and these programs for many years, while continuously facing dwindling budgets and decreasing levels of staff. As we look to ramp up this effort – and as we face an increasingly uncertain future with federal funding opportunities – we need to understand the long-term benefits of investing in the backbone agencies and system that support this effort. Without their continuous and often uncelebrated accomplishments – Rhode Island would not be the food scene it currently is or is poised to grow into. Much like our roads and physical infrastructure – without investments in our staff and support systems – the entire system could crumble.

SUPPORT STATE-LEVEL BACKBONE AGENCIES INVOLVED IN FOOD SYSTEMS WORK & THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS STRATEGY:

In this regard, recognizing that food is an area of strategic importance, the State needs to continue to invest in key programs and personnel that enhance this effort. For example, the Director of Food Strategy needs to have continued funding through the state's general budget starting in 2018. The position is currently funded through the generous support of philanthropic foundations, with the intention that after two years it would be made permanent by the State.

Further, in a time of continually shrinking budgets, agencies who play a key role in the support of this strategic sector need to be fully supported with the staff and resources they need. Moreover, several agencies supporting this work take in revenues from program fees but aren't given access to those funds for staff or programs. For example, DEM's Division of Agriculture annual takes in approximately \$1 million related to agricultural licenses and fees that rolls into the General Treasury.

Further, many of the goals identified in this Strategy will require support from policy, regulatory, and funding perspectives to be successful. The Strategy envisions partnership across the Executive Branch, the General Assembly, and outside stakeholders to enact and implement sustainable programs.

The same holds true outside of state government. Organizations like the Rhode Island Community Food Bank, Farm Fresh Rhode Island, the Rhode Island Food Policy Council and others play vital roles for people and businesses across Rhode Island. They are often not only providing vital services but are the 'ears on the ground' that can inform the rest of the system – it is important to support and empower them.

LEVERAGE REGIONAL & NATIONAL PLANNING EFFORTS:

Rhode Island has committed to active engagement in the regional Food Solutions New England goal that 50% of the food consumed in New England will be produced in the region by 2060. To that end, representatives from Rhode Island will continue to be intimately involved in the FSNE planning effort – providing two-way communication and activity between our state and their planning team.

Rhode Island is further currently part of a "Community of Practice" (COP) with other New England states, who have all been involved in statewide food planning at some level. Currently, the 'backbone organizations' from each state have been actively involved in regular phone conversations, information sharing, and in-person meetings. In Rhode Island, the backbone agency has been the Rhode Island Food Policy Council in partnership with the Director of Food Strategy. Continued regional connection and best practice sharing in this way will be a key way to implement both our in-state strategy and partner regionally.

Rhode Island should also learn from best practices nationally and be a model for other states nationally. In this regard, we are active participants in the National Governors Associations Food and Farm Working Group, sharing our successes and priorities with other states and supportive industry representatives.

To learn more

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