

**RI FOOD
POLICY
COUNCIL**



2019 ANNUAL REPORT

Our Mission

The Rhode Island Food Policy Council's mission is to promote a more equitable, accessible, and sustainable food system.

We coordinate a statewide network of diverse, committed and engaged stakeholders from all sectors of the food system. We create partnerships, develop policies, advocate for improvements, and lead projects that enable the state to sustain and expand farming and fishing industries, support local food businesses, ensure food security for all Rhode Island residents, and protect the health of our abundant natural resources.



LETTER FROM THE NETWORK DIRECTOR

We believe in creating an equitable, economically vibrant, environmentally sustainable food system for all Rhode Island residents. We are a state with abundant local food assets, from our fisheries and farms to food business incubators and farmers' markets, but we are also a state that still has inequitable access to affordable food and food sector-related opportunities. Around 11% of Rhode Island households struggled with food insecurity in 2019 and low-income Rhode Islanders experience a significant meal gap, with over 11 million meals missed each year. These are some of the difficult realities that our Council members are working to change.

This year's Annual Report features highlights of key projects from 2019. We made great strides in the past year. In January 2019 we appointed 25 diverse community members, from all parts of the state to serve as our 2019 leadership. We worked closely with the state's Interagency Food and Nutrition Policy Advisory Council and Hunger Elimination Task Force on key state policy and regulatory priorities. We tracked implementation of the state's food strategy, *Relish Rhody*, on our new dashboard-based website, www.rifoodcouncil.org. We pushed to get the state's Local Agriculture and Seafood Act Grant Program fully funded to support the success of our small and beginning farmers and fishermen. We submitted recommendations to the Governor regarding the appointment of a state Director of Food Strategy. We worked with BIPoC-led organizations in Providence, Newport, and Washington Counties to plan community food system vision events. We signed on to multiple national letters pushing for good food policy at the Federal level. We worked with farmers, food entrepreneurs, and institutional food buyers in partnership with the state Department of Environmental Management interested in scaling to serve wholesale markets. We pushed for the expansion of local seafood processing and market development with the state Commerce Corporation. We established a new program in partnership with the state Department of Labor and Training and food employers to ensure a strong and flexible food sector workforce.

None of this could have been accomplished without the hard work and collaboration of our Council members, statewide core partners, community-based partners, and supporters. I deeply appreciate the 25 appointed Council members for their knowledge and insights. I wish to thank our many volunteers, especially student volunteers from our colleges and universities. As we move into our 10th year, we have no more urgent issue than helping to solve the problem of healthy food access in our low-income communities. Our top priority for the coming year is ensuring resilience in our state's food system by taking innovative approaches to accomplishing the goals set out in the state's food strategy.

**Nessa Richman,
Network Director**

The Rhode Island Food Policy Council creates a more just and resilient food system for all Rhode Islanders.

We address the state's most pressing food system needs through partnerships, programs, and policies that enable the state to sustain and expand farming and fishing industries, support local food businesses, ensure food security for all Rhode Island residents, and protect the health of our abundant natural resources.

RI FOOD SYSTEM 2019 HIGHLIGHTS



Number of Farms
1,043

Rhode Island is #1 in the national for direct-to-consumer sales as a percent of overall sales.



Number of Food Businesses
7,211

More than 100,000 people are employed by Rhode Island's food sector.



Dollar Value of RI Wild-Caught Seafood and Aquaculture
\$100,000,000

This industry includes 428 firms, generating \$538.3 million in annual gross sales.



Number of Residents Who Struggle with Hunger
1 in 9

1 in 6 of these are children.

OUR COMMITMENT TO EQUITY AND JUSTICE

In 2019 the RI Food Policy Council furthered its commitment to food equity and justice. We engaged in collaborative development of a Council statement, promoted participation in the Food Solutions New England "21-Day Racial Equity Challenge," and made progress integrating equity into our planning, our community engagement, and our implementation projects. This work is ongoing, and we intend to increase our explicit work in this area in 2020 and beyond.

Council members developed the following statement as an outward-facing manifestation of our internal commitment to making racial justice and equity central in all RIFPC activities.

"RIFPC recognizes the fact that many negative impacts of Rhode Island's current food system are grounded in a history of colonialism, genocide of indigenous people, slavery, private ownership of land and the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of too few. We also recognize that people with visible and non-apparent disabilities are among the most marginalized groups in our country. RIFPC believes that when power shifts to be shared more equitably across our communities and our state, we transform our future together for generations to come.

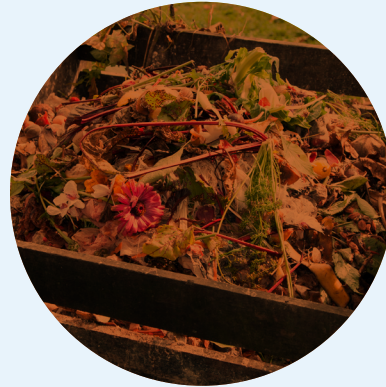
We believe that there are several key areas where the current state food system is not operating in a just and equitable way. RIFPC is working to improve conditions in all of these areas and will continue to do so until significant changes have been realized. These areas are food access, employment and workforce conditions, and environmental/public health impacts.

RIFPC is committed to ensuring that people from every part of our food system, with no exceptions, are empowered to have agency (the capacity of people to act independently and make their own free choices) and sovereignty (the full right and power of people over themselves without outside interference), especially those who have been marginalized by racist, classist, and sexist systems. We believe that food consumers, food producers and processors, and food workers from every part of our state's social, economic, racial and ethnic fabric should have the opportunity to participate and take a leadership role in developing our food policy and improving our food system.

NETWORK 2019 HIGHLIGHTS



**Growing the Local Food to
Institution Market**



**Advancing Wasted
Food Solutions**



**Supporting Expanded Local
Seafood Processing**



**Administrating the RI Local
Agriculture and Seafood Act
Grant Program (LASA)**



Supporting Good Food Policy



**Investing in Food System
Workforce: The Real Food
Jobs Program**



Growing the Local Food to Institution Market

Growing the Local Food to Institution Market

Rhode Island institutions — including our 44 school districts, 11 hospitals, and 11 colleges and universities — provide an important market for Rhode Island grown, harvested, and manufactured food. In addition to supporting local farm, seafood, and prepared food businesses, institutional food purchases also help increase access to fresh, healthy, local food for all Rhode Islanders. Despite the benefits of local food purchases, and strong interest throughout the supply chain, significant challenges hamper the growth of farm to institution.

How can local institutional markets be improved? In 2019 we worked on both ends of the supply chain to encourage market growth. Both the supply and demand side require attention in order for this opportunity to reach its maximum potential.

RI Food Policy Council convened a core group of local food to institution leaders in the state to better understand market demand for local food in institutions, deliver improved technical assistance, and identify viable models for bringing local food to institutions.

In April we held our first supply-side convening. Over 40 farmers, fishermen, and other local food producers, harvesters, 'makers,' and intermediaries registered to attend this half-day workshop at East Farm. The "Baskets to Pallets" curriculum was led by Cornell Extension trainer Laura Biasillo. Attendees went through a crash course in wholesale marketing, learning about trends, marketing channel assessment tools, and communication strategies for reaching out to wholesale buyers.

They also got a real-world perspective from a panel of local wholesale buyers. After the workshop they were provided with a toolkit composed of grading tools, a sell sheet template, a video playlist, and a manual.

Impacts

Many of the farmers who attended the workshop called it an eye opening look at a potential new market. Some were able to make connections with local wholesale buyers they hadn't met before.

"I didn't know anything about sell sheets before today. I will be making one and using it to call wholesale buyers."

"I have new information about branding and market recognition. My next steps are going to be updating my marketing materials and communicating with new buyers."

Takeaways and Next Steps

The workshop improved the ability of participants to assess and reach new markets. The core group of leaders is helping leverage that experience to plan additional supply-side opportunities and to plan outreach to the demand-side as well. **In 2020 we will expand our workshop offerings, launch an online local food to institution resource portal that serves the entire local food to institution marketing chain, and plan a new phase of work to strengthen local participation in this market channel.**



Investing in Food System Workforce: The Real Food Jobs Program

Investing in Food System Workforce: The Real Food Jobs Program

Rhode Island's food sector, across all scales and production methods, has been a bright spot even in difficult economic times. Supporting the viability of Rhode Island food businesses is a critical aspect of promoting a vibrant food system, yet it is frequently overlooked as a strategy by food systems organizations. In 2019 the RI Food Policy Council addressed this issue head-on by establishing the Real Food Jobs Program (RFJ) in partnership with the RI Department of Labor and Training 'Real Jobs RI' Program.

RFJ creates a ready, flexible, and enduring workforce for Rhode Island's food industry sector by taking an employer-driven approach to identify current and future industry demand. RFJ works to promote a strong workforce infrastructure throughout the state by closing workforce skill gaps and creating dynamic industry pipelines. In 2019 we will expand this program to provide an employer-led suite of services that will help them thrive.

In July we held two one-day workshops with Michigan-based ZINGTrain, the 'Art of Giving Great Service' and 'Servant Leadership & Bottom Line Change.' These nationally-recognized trainers come from the grocery industry and came to RI to share practical and proven tools that strengthen systems and build healthy organizational culture within food businesses. Our employer partners, which include Newport Restaurant Group, Sodexo, Wright's Dairy Farm, and Chi Kitchen, joined with other farm, fisheries, and food sector employers. Our first training, which was attended by about 30 individuals, identified the key elements that contribute to a culture of great service and equipped participants with tools and techniques for improving customer service. The second workshop, which had the same number of attendees, introduced 6 key

responsibilities of a Servant Leader, allowed attendees time to practice giving and receiving effective feedback, and supported participants in creating action plans for becoming effective Servant Leader, including new ideas and concepts to begin incorporating in their daily work.

Impacts

ZINGTrain workshops were rated very highly, with more than two-thirds giving them the highest possible recommendation. Those who attended went back to their businesses with plenty of resources to adapt and put to use right away.

"The trainers really presented a systematic approach to securing quality control of employee's customer service."

"Every page we went over today was full of information that I'll be definitely using in future."

Takeaways and Next Steps

The workshop provided food sector employers with an array of new perspectives, tools, and resources for improving their customer service and leadership skills. Farms and restaurants came together in a new way, to learn, and realized that they face many of the same challenges when it comes to customer service and leadership. In 2020 we will convene diverse employer cohorts, build relationships that advance high-impact food sector initiatives, provide a variety of targeted workforce trainings, create strategic pipelines into and through the food industry, inspire youth to explore career opportunities in food, and aggregate and disseminate value-added workforce resources.



Supporting Expanded Local Seafood Processing

Supporting Expanded Local Seafood Processing

The Rhode Island Food Policy Council is connecting RI fishermen and seafood processors with local and regional markets. Our state's commercial seafood industry is a critically important part of the economy. Rhode Island is home port to over 200 Federally permitted vessels and issues over 1,600 state commercial fishing licenses per year. The economic impact of the fishing industry is sizable. In 2016, Rhode Island vessels landed 82,541,000 pounds of seafood, with an ex-vessel value of close to \$100 million. A 2018 report by the University of Rhode Island estimated that the fishing and seafood sector contributes over \$538 million and over 4,000 jobs to the state's economy.

How can the vitality of the RI commercial fishing industry be maximized? In 2019 we conducted two major feasibility assessments with nationally-recognized experts. Their work resulted in the “green light” for investment in significant infrastructure improvements that would allow RI seafood businesses to create jobs and add even more to the state economy.

RI Food Policy Council convened a group of more than 50 Federal and state officials, fishing industry members, and key nonprofit partners in August 2019 to develop a shared understanding of infrastructure barriers and current market demand within the local seafood industry and market. A shared vision was born, and we followed up by establishing and initiating a scope of work to determine the feasibility of eliminating infrastructure barriers and growing local seafood markets.

Impacts

Our August 2019 public meeting, held at the URI Bay Campus Auditorium in Narragansett, featured USDA Rural Development Regional Director George Krivda. At this meeting, next steps were set to investigate opportunities to increase local seafood processing and grow awareness

and demand for fresh, locally processed seafood. Specifically, our objective was to evaluate the feasibility of building a byproduct processing facility in Rhode Island that would process the waste and wastewater from seafood processors into specialty protein products. This would solve some of the current waste and wastewater processing constraints in our state. The other major next step determined in 2019 was to evaluate several seafood wholesale/retail distribution models that have been successful in other parts of the country and discuss ways in which two of these models could be adapted in Rhode Island.

This project is funded through a public-private partnership between several private foundations and USDA Rural Development. Our core partner is the Council of Development Finance Agencies. We are working closely with RI DEM, the RI Commerce Corporation, and the Rhode Island Office of the General Treasurer toward our goal of developing a food infrastructure project in our state that supports the environmental sustainability and economic growth of Rhode Island's seafood sector.

Takeaways and Next Steps

There is general agreement that the state's commercial fishing industry would benefit from an increase in capacity for processing seafood wastewater, and that it would be beneficial to the industry to serve local markets. We closed out the year with two major feasibility assessments underway with nationally-recognized experts who are helping us move to a “green light” for investment. **In 2020 we will share findings publicly and define specifically how the seafood wastewater capacity constraint should be eased, and how public and private funding should work together to strengthen this critically important segment of our state's food economy.**



Advancing Wasted Food Solutions

The RI Food Policy Council is focused on supporting the highest and best use of excess food in Rhode Island. The hierarchy of best action is: reduction of the amount of excess food generated at the source; diversion for food consumption by humans; diversion for agricultural use, including consumption by animals; composting, land application, and digestion; and energy recovery. In 2019 we expanded our information resources and also convened stakeholder meetings on excess food reduction and management. This work resulted in the establishment of the RI Wasted Food Solutions Community of Practice which met 4 times and involved over 20 researchers, agency staff, nonprofit organizations, and composting businesses. This collaborative works to identify how to best support our food economy to improve excess food management, including discussion of strategies such as tax incentives for food donation, ensuring composters have access to adequate carbon sources, and funding of technical assistance to generators of excess food to increase best management practices.



Administrating the RI Local Agriculture and Seafood Act Grant Program (LASA)

The LASA Grant Program provides grants that directly benefit and strengthen the local food system in Rhode Island. It was initiated in 2012 via an innovative public-private partnership between the state and three private foundations — the van Beuren Charitable Foundation, the Henry P. Kendall Foundation, and the Rhode Island Foundation — and is now solely funded by the state. The LASA Grant Program is housed by the Division of Agriculture of the RI Department of Environmental Management and administrated by the RI Food Policy Council. In 2019 we coordinated an expert advisory board in reviewing over 70 applications and awarding 21 grants to Rhode Island farms, aquaculture operations, commercial fisheries industry members, and related nonprofit organizations.



Supporting Good Food Policy

When policy and regulatory change are called for, the RI Food Policy Council acts as both a forum for issues and a platform for coordinated action. Our policy work is grounded in our mission to promote the growth of Rhode Island's food sector in an equitable and sustainable way, working towards a day when all Rhode Islanders have enough to eat and our local food businesses are thriving. RIFPC policy priorities are developed annually through a process in which all members of the Council conduct outreach to the general public, solicit input on food sector issues and opportunities, and then collaboratively research and vet all potential policy initiatives. In 2019 our priorities were full funding of the LASA Grant Program, increased support for commercial food composting, improvements to K12 school food programs, and reduction of consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages.

Our Food Policy Bill Tracker was updated weekly during the 2019 legislative session. In 2019 we tracked nearly 80 bills that spanned from access to healthy food to agriculture and fisheries, to food business, food safety, and food waste. At the end of the session we published a Legislative Wrap Up summarizing progress.

THE VALUE OF THE NETWORK 2019

Our network is made up of 25 Council members and scores of public, private, and nonprofit partners, and hundreds of engaged Rhode Island residents. We track social metrics just like financial metrics, in an attempt to capture the value of our core network functions.

**Welcomed
25 diverse
members
from across
the state**

**Provided 100+
businesses
with training
and technical
assistance**

**Tracked
78 food
system-related
bills in
the State
Legislature**

**Educated
4,610
residents
about our
state's food
system**

LEADERSHIP

Shared leadership provides overall network governance and guidance for RIFPC. Work Group Leads and the Steering Committee are responsible for identifying gaps in strategies, developing processes for learning, helping organize events and initiatives, and shaping the evolution of the network over time.

CHAIR

Diane Lynch

POLICY COMMITTEE CO-CHAIRS

Margaret Read

Eliza Cohen

Rhode Island Public Health Institute

GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE CHAIR

Thea Upham

Farm Fresh Rhode Island

OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE CO-CHAIRS

Jamie Samons

Narragansett Bay Commission

Nellie de Goguel

City of Providence

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

COMMITTEE CHAIR

Betsy Skoda

Health Care Without Harm

WASTED FOOD SOLUTIONS

WORK GROUP CO-LEADS

Diane Calvin

FoodScape RI

Jayne Merner Senecal

Earth Care Farm

Eva Agudelo

Hope's Harvest RI

2019 STAFF

Nessa Richman, Network Director

Alexandra Neelis, Food Systems Research Fellow

FUNDING PARTNERS

RIFPC is extremely grateful to our funding partners who are actively engaged in our work in many ways. Their ongoing support allows us to find creative solutions to complex problems, and grow a stronger, healthier, more prosperous food system in Rhode Island and the New England region.

Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, Agriculture Division

Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training, Real Jobs Program

USDA Rural Development

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service

Rhode Island Foundation

The John Merck Fund

Island Foundation

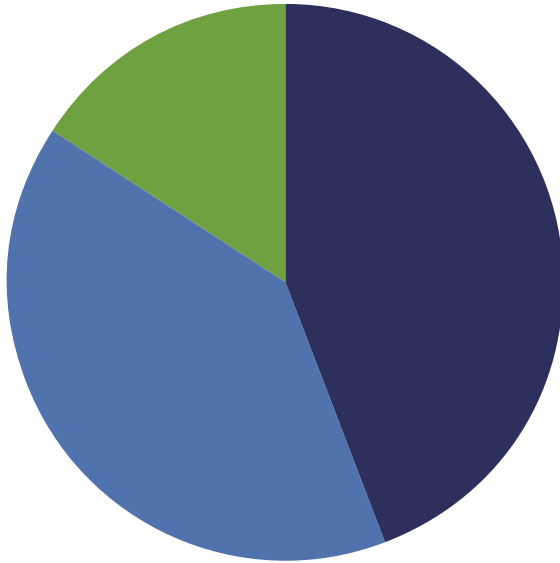
Heron Foundation

van Beuren Charitable Foundation

Henry P. Kendall Foundation

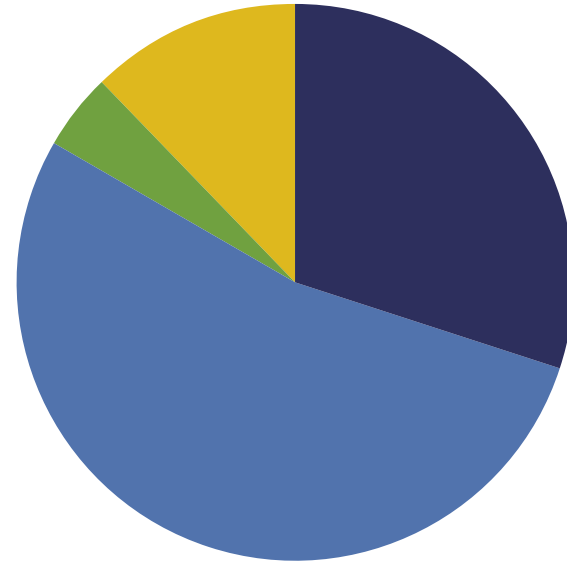
2019 FINANCIALS

FY2019: 1/1/2019 – 12/31/2019



REVENUE

- Beginning Balance – \$238,528
- Foundation Grant Revenue – \$216,000
- Government – \$84,501



EXPENSES

- Personnel – \$111,081
- Consultants/Contract – \$196,625
- Program/Administrative – \$16,406
- FS Services – \$45,063

RESOURCES



YOUR TOWN COUNTS

Our 'Your Town Counts' fact sheets give Rhode Islanders a better sense of the current impact the food system has on individual communities, and a better understanding of the network of businesses, agencies, organizations and institutions that make up our local food system. Downloadable PDFs are available for each of Rhode Island 39 cities and towns.

BROWSE FACT SHEETS



RHODE ISLAND STORIES

Our 'Rhode Island Stories' series highlights how Rhode Island agencies, organizations, businesses, and individuals are working to improve the state's food system. Each story is linked to a goal set out in Relish Rhody, our state's 5-year food strategy. Our library currently features 18 exciting programs, projects, and businesses that make our state's food system great.

READ STORIES



RI FOOD POLICY COUNCIL BILL TRACKER

RI Food Policy Council Bill Tracker is a live reference resource for all food system-related bills introduced in the RI State House related to the food system. It is run during the legislative session, each year from January 1 to June 30. The Bill Tracker provides the most complete and up-to-date information possible on each food systems-related legislative initiative and links each bill back to the state for full text and status. Inclusion in the Bill Tracker does not indicate either support or opposition by the Rhode Island Food Policy Council.

We track each bill into one of 8 categories:

- Access to Healthy Food
- Agriculture
- Climate Change
- Fisheries and Aquaculture
- Food Businesses
- Food Safety
- Miscellaneous
- Recycling, Recovery and Wasted Food

VIEW TRACKER

RI FOOD POLICY COUNCIL



OUR FUNDERS



HENRY P. KENDALL FOUNDATION

