

RI FOOD  
POLICY  
COUNCIL



2020 ANNUAL REPORT

**Now More Than Ever:  
Building a Just, Resilient Food System**

# RHODE ISLAND'S FOOD SYSTEM: PEOPLE, PLANET, PROSPERITY



## AGRICULTURE AND AQUACULTURE

5,331 jobs  
\$789.5 million sales  
1,181 businesses

## FISHERIES

3,147 jobs  
\$538.33 million sales  
42 businesses

## PROCESSING

3,902 jobs  
\$250.3 million sales  
201 businesses

## GROCERY

11,821 jobs  
695 businesses

## HOSPITALITY (RESTAURANTS)

57,600 jobs  
\$2.7 billion sales  
2,926 businesses

### TOTAL JOBS

75,800

### TOTAL SALES

\$4.28 billion

### TOTAL BUSINESSES

5,043



## LETTER FROM THE NETWORK DIRECTOR

2020 was a year like no other. Like the rest of the world, the Rhode Island Food Policy Council adjusted to new realities, took on new challenges, and responded to new opportunities. Although it was an incredibly difficult year, the RIFPC team continued to work alongside communities to create a more just and resilient food system where everyone has access to affordable, culturally relevant food.

The pandemic caused a drastic spike in food business closures, economic hardship, and food insecurity in our state. Thanks to support from our funders, we responded by creating new and stronger partnerships, launching emergency response programs, and advocating for responsive policy and regulatory changes at the state and federal levels.

As the state's backbone network for food system stakeholders, RIFPC weaves together industry, non-profits, government, and community-based entities. In 2020 our convening pivoted to remote formats, offering online education and training sessions and advocating for good food policy with state legislators over Zoom.

2021 is our tenth year of operation. It is safe to say that the foundation of those 10 years of collaborations and advocacy allowed us to respond more effectively to the multiple crises presented by COVID-19. Looking back, we are proud of what we accomplished and so grateful to the funders and partners who supported us in moving toward our vision of an equitable, accessible, economically vibrant, and environmentally sustainable food system in Rhode Island.

**Nessa Richman,**  
Network Director

# COMMITMENT TO EQUITY AND JUSTICE

**Rhode Island's food system will never be sustainable without accounting for its people and the environment.**

Among the many challenges spotlighted by COVID-19 was the disproportionate impact the pandemic had on communities of color. As the rate of household food insecurity in Rhode Island jumped to one in four — the highest rate in 20 years — residents of color suffered the most. While 21 percent of White households lacked adequate food, 36 percent of Black households and 40 percent of Latinx households reported food insecurity.

In the face of these appalling disparities, the Rhode Island Food Policy Council redoubled its focus and commitment to equity and justice in 2020. We began working with a consultant to help the Council form a strategy to plan our first annual retreat focusing on these principles. In addition to adopting its annual food system policy priorities, Council members collaborated on a “Commitment to Equity and Justice” statement, serving as an outward-facing manifestation of an internal commitment to making racial justice and equity central in all RIFPC activities.



# STORIES OF IMPACT



## Fueling New Partnerships to Respond to Pandemic and Beyond

State asks RIFPC to lead Hunger  
Elimination Task Force



## Steering the Emergency Food System to Local Sourcing

'Local Fish to Community'  
is a win-win for program



## Helping Food Businesses Weather the Storm

Free workshops train producers  
to build new markets

# Pandemic Relief Efforts Fuel New Partnerships

## RIFPC ASKED TO LEAD STATEWIDE HUNGER ELIMINATION TASK FORCE

One silver lining to the COVID-19 pandemic is that all of its impact — from supply chain disruptions to drops in household income to the closing of in-person K-12 classes — shone a spotlight on the challenges of food insecurity. In Rhode Island, the pandemic's impact was particularly harsh, pushing the state's level of food insecurity to its highest level in 20 years, with one in every four households worried about having adequate food.

In the face of so many closings and so much need, the Rhode Island Food Policy Council expanded its role as a resource and connector for state agencies and others working in emergency food access. "A number of state agencies collaborated to

start daily calls to ensure food access for all Rhode Islanders," Network Director Nessa Richman recalls. "We were invited to participate and offer resources and input."

Council members and staff initiated a number of support efforts (see list) that eventually led to the Rhode Island Department of Health, Department of Human Services, and Department of Environmental Management along with the Rhode Island Commerce Corporation asking RIFPC to lead the coordination of the statewide Hunger Elimination Task Force. The new partnership was announced in January 2021, and the first meeting of the newly reconfigured task force was held remotely in February 2021.



**"The task force is open to all who want to participate," Richman says. "By sharing information, collaborating, and identifying solutions, we aim to reduce hunger and increase access to healthy, culturally relevant food for all Rhode Islanders."**

# PANDEMIC RESPONSE: OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

## SUPPORT FOR DOCKSIDE SEAFOOD SALES

The pandemic caused the bottom to drop out of R.I.'s commercial seafood market, because restaurants are the largest buyers. The State of Rhode Island worked to temporarily remove restrictions against fishers selling directly to consumers. RIFPC supported and expedited these efforts by connecting the fishing industry, Department of Environmental Health, and the Department of Health to address concerns and boost marketing efforts.

## SUPPORT FOR FARMER TO FAMILY FOOD PROGRAM

When the federal government announced its food box program to help farmers as well as address hunger, RIFPC worked with Farm Fresh RI to become a federal contractor, able to purchase food from local farmers and aggregate for delivery via the R.I. Community Food Bank, the start of a strong and continuing partnership.

## COMPILED FOOD POLICY DATABASE

Nina Wolff Landau, newly hired as an RIFPC summer intern, created a publicly available database of 127

pandemic-related food policies from around the country. Landau (later named our program associate for research, evaluations, and operations) and Richman were invited to present the resource at a Food Policy Networks conference with a global audience.

## HOST VIRTUAL OPEN FORUMS

Through online convenings of nonprofit programs, agencies, community gardens and others, RIFPC facilitated information sharing and advocacy, resulting in everything from getting city water turned on for a community garden to the creation of a statewide listserv, which is still in use.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNOR

Early in the pandemic, the Council developed a letter offering R.I. Governor Gina Raimondo high-level guidance on how to support the local food system. The letter, also published in [golocalprov.com](http://golocalprov.com), called for supporting food sector jobs, expanding WIC and SNAP benefits, and identifying farmers markets and farm stands as critical infrastructure in the health crisis.

# Steering the Emergency Food System to Local Sourcing

## 'LOCAL FISH TO COMMUNITY' IS A WIN-WIN FOR PROGRAM

Since August 2020, the Rhode Island Food Policy Council has partnered with the Commercial Fisheries Center of Rhode Island and the nonprofit Eating with the Ecosystem as they purchase fresh, whole, local fish and shellfish from Rhode Island fishers and seafood businesses and donate it to Rhode Islanders in need through a number of community-based organizations. As of August 2021, the program had donated over 100K pounds of fish and seafood, or nearly 48,000 meals.

The program addresses two challenges created by the pandemic: the fishing and seafood industry's loss of restaurant and institutional markets due to closures, and the soaring rate of food insecurity as food pantries across Rhode Island struggled to keep up with demand. Over the months, the list of community partners distributing the

fish and seafood to their communities grew to include the African Alliance of Rhode Island, Alliance of RI Southeast Asians for Education, George Wiley Center, Narragansett Indian Tribe, Refugee Dream Center, Sunrise Forever, Inc., and Women's Refugee Care. Many of these organizations serve refugees for whom whole fish is a culturally relevant and welcome protein source.

"Having fresh fish made us feel like we were home in Africa," as one recipient reported.

Initially the fish was purchased with funding from the Rhode Island Foundation, an anonymous donor, and Vineyard Wind. RIFPC later landed a \$100,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Local Food Promotion Program.



**"The species change each week depending on what the fishers are catching," says Kate Masury, Project Director of Eating with the Ecosystem. "We started with scup, whiting, and hake; we've been able to add mackerel, butterfish, quahogs, Jonah crabs, fluke and more."**



# INCREASING ACCESS: OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

## **RHODY FEEDING RHODY**

The USDA Local Food Promotion Program funding is a planning grant, allowing RIFPC and its partners to experiment with products and price points to determine if the emergency feeding system — food banks and food pantries — can be a viable market for local farmer and fishers.

## **SNAP DELIVERY PILOT**

One gap in the food system is that federal SNAP benefits can't be used for online buying, a service that was much in demand when COVID-19 made in-person shopping far more challenging. RIFPC worked with partners in Newport to pilot a safe, quick, and free food delivery service for a few months.

# Helping Food Businesses Weather the Storm

## FREE WORKSHOPS TRAIN PRODUCERS TO BUILD NEW MARKETS

Matt LeRoux knows that small food business owners, especially farmers, aren't generally passionate about marketing. "They are producers, not marketers. They're often not even very profit oriented, they just have the dream of producing great food for people and loving their work."

In a series of online workshops sponsored by RIFPC (RI DEM via the USDA Federal State Marketing Improvement Program) in the spring of 2020, LeRoux offered training in basic marketing strategy. He has done this work for more than 20 years through the Cornell Cooperative Extension, working with a mix of produce and livestock farmers and food businesses.

"I pride myself on understanding this audience," LeRoux says.

**"They usually don't know where to begin with marketing and how to know if it's working. So I break the work down into practical, tangible steps that they can plan out, not something that has to be hanging over your head all the time."**

First LeRoux offered an in-person workshop in Providence in February 2020 on scaling your business up for wholesale markets. He followed that up by consulting with a cohort of five business owners who had attended the first workshop. They included a bakery specializing in lactation cookies, a gluten-free baker, a barbecue sauce purveyor, and others.



"We met for 7 to 8 weeks, one night a week, to essentially serve as a marketing team to help them roll out marketing plans as stores closed during COVID and they needed to shift to direct-to-consumer and online sales. The group really got into advising each other and brainstorming new ideas," he remembers.

Network Director Nessa Richman hired LeRoux to present the workshops after meeting him at an earlier conference and recognizing the valuable insights he could bring to small food business owners.

# SUPPORTING FOOD BUSINESSES: OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

## **SUPPORTED GOOD FOOD POLICY**

RIFPC staff and members advocated for continuing and increased funding for the Local Agriculture and Seafood Assistance grants by providing testimony at the State House and sharing an evaluation of the program's impacts with legislators. Our policy committee worked with Network Director Nessa Richman to plan our first legislative roundtable, held early in 2021.

## **PROVIDED TECHNICAL SUPPORT ON GRANT APPLICATIONS**

When federal and state grant opportunities open, as they did at an all new pace in 2020, we work to identify appropriate partners (nonprofits, private businesses, state agencies), educate them on the opportunity, and help them navigate the application process.

## **SUPPORTED EXPANDED LOCAL SEAFOOD PROCESSING**

We helped to clearly identify bottlenecks in the commercial seafood sector, bringing in resources, identifying entrepreneurs, and working closely with state agencies in order to navigate challenges related to site location, regulatory requirements, and financing.

## **INITIATED WORKFORCE ASSISTANCE IN FOOD SECTOR**

We connected food sector employers with job seekers to offer top-notch training and certifications and streamline the job seeking process. Rodney Solomon, our Director of Workforce Initiatives, built new partnerships with a number of programs to offer culinary training, assist the formerly incarcerated, and other initiatives.

## **BUILDING A UNIQUE ASSOCIATE'S DEGREE PROGRAM**

Through partnerships and grants, we are working with faculty at the University of Rhode Island and the Community College of Rhode Island to create a degree program with a focus on food, agriculture, and green sector opportunities, with experiential learning one of its features.

# GROWING OUR NETWORK



25

Council members bringing range of experience, networks, and interest in state's food system



70+

Businesses provided with training and technical assistance



164

Food-system related bills tracked



3,700+

Residents informed about state's food system through social media platforms



97

Job seekers completed training sessions



1 → 4

Grew full-time staff

# MEET THE COUNCIL

Our Council is made up of volunteers who bring a range of experience, networks, interests, and food systems expertise to advance our mission of building a more equitable, economically vibrant, and environmentally sustainable food system in Rhode Island.



Thank you to Diane Lynch, who served as the Council's chair in 2019 and 2020, after serving in 2018 as an at-large member of our Steering Committee. Diane's leadership, vision, and expertise have been invaluable as she helped guide us through a time of growth and unique challenges these past few years.

**Thanks to the Council members who finished their terms of service in 2020. You all contributed from your unique perspective and enriched the network in a special way: Sakinah Abdur-Rasheed, Diane Calvin, Nellie de Goguel, Kevin de Libero, Margaret Read, Dominique Resendes, Gerry Teixeira**



# 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.

R.I. Department of Environmental Management, via the USDA Federal State Marketing Improvement Program

R.I. Department of Labor & Training, via the Real Jobs RI Program

USDA Rural Development Rural Business Development Grant Program

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service Local Food Promotion Program

Rhode Island Foundation

The John Merck Fund

Island Foundation

Heron Foundation

van Beuren Charitable Foundation

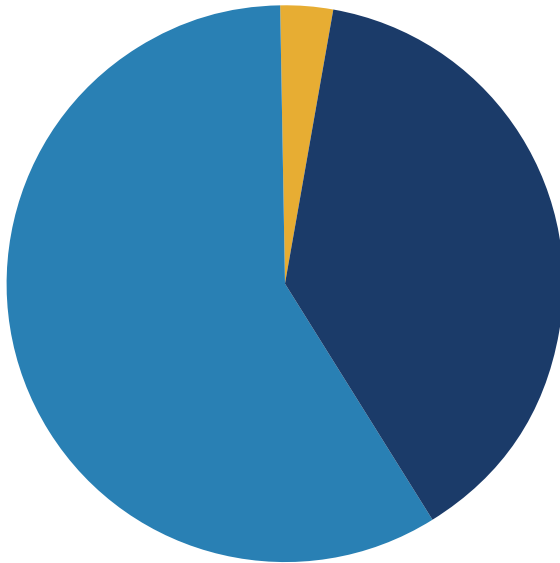
Henry P. Kendall Foundation

Angell Foundation

USDA Regional Food Systems Partnership Program via Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund

# 2020 FINANCIALS

FY2020: 1/1/2020 – 12/31/2020

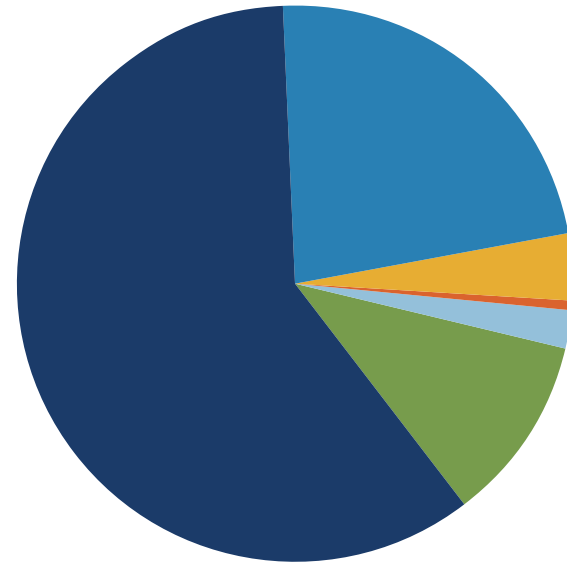


## REVENUE

- Private Foundations – \$218,009.00
- Government Revenue – \$331,410.87
- Earned – \$17,145.70

---

Total – **\$566,565.57**



## EXPENSES

- Personnel – \$236,035.01
- Contract – \$90,037.42
- Program – \$14,702.55
- Travel – \$2,204.56
- General admin – \$8,866.56
- Indirect costs – \$42,452.64

---

Total – **\$394,298.74**

**RI FOOD  
POLICY  
COUNCIL**

