2021 ANNUAL REPORT

Healing Through Hope: Centering Equity and Inclusion to Build Sustainable Food Systems
LETTER FROM THE NETWORK DIRECTOR

IT IS A SERIOUS THING / JUST TO BE ALIVE / ON THIS FRESH MORNING / IN THIS BROKEN WORLD.

— MARY OLIVER

Working to create a more just and resilient food system in Rhode Island is a central part of the job description for Rhode Island Food Policy Council members. Actively engaging in undoing systemic White supremacy in all of its manifestations is the aim of the RIFFPC staff, as we go about our daily activities in support of the Council’s priorities. This isn’t easy work: we do it knowing that our efforts may never reach a final, satisfactory conclusion. In 2021, we took a stance to confront obstacles to justice and equity in our food system. What does this mean in action? It means the Council and staff explicitly committed to taking on work to rid the food system and adjacent systems from embedded institutionalized racism, acknowledging that it affects people differently across race, ethnicity, class, gender, immigration status, sexual identity, and more. Our efforts are far from perfect. We hope that, moving into 2022 and beyond, we will be able to do more, collectively, to heal some of the harms inflicted on underserved people and communities in Rhode Island.

Our commitment can be summed up as follows:

• We will work intentionally to heal harms done to individuals as a result of systemic White supremacy. Beyond engaging in action collectively, all Council members and staff will work to overcome embedded social problems that are woven into our interpersonal relationships, group cultures, and individual biases. We believe that this work can release us from the limits placed on individuals by systemic White supremacy and allow us to better live our shared values.

RHODE ISLAND FOOD SYSTEM HIGHLIGHTS

$12B FOOD SECTOR ECONOMIC OUTPUT
This represents 7% of the state’s GDP and includes 7,211 food businesses

75,800 FOOD JOBS
15% of all Rhode Island jobs

55,000 ACRES IN FARMLAND
Rhode Island could reduce up to 4,200 tons of carbon dioxide per year by adopting conservation practices on current crop land

1,043 FARMS
Rhode Island is #1 in the nation for direct-to-consumer sales as a percent of overall sales

$100M WILD-CAUGHT SEAFOOD AND AQUACULTURE VALUE
This industry includes 6,428 firms, generating $538.3 million in annual gross sales

1 IN 6 HOUSEHOLDS STRUGGLING WITH HUNGER
In homes with children, the risk is 1 in 4

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RIFPC 2021 ANNUAL REPORT
• We will build relationships across boundaries of privilege and oppression. Inequity leads to division. Unequal access to food, healthcare, green spaces, education, capital, housing, and more causes everyone to suffer. We believe that the struggle for justice from oppression must be addressed at its root through undoing White supremacy. Partnerships built on mutual trust with those most affected by inequity are critically important in this work.

• We will engage actively with those who are part of the movement for justice. This means groups that are acting to end environmental racism, theft of native lands, cruelty on the basis of immigration status, criminalization of poverty, and more. We will support, observe, affirm, and engage in action with those who are leading these movements. Our actions will include policy advocacy, community asset building, and more.

• We will fulfill our role as the state’s backbone network with a mission to create a more equitable, accessible, economically vibrant, and environmentally sustainable food system in Rhode Island. Our role as the Rhode Island Food Policy Council requires a strong administrative and financial foundation, a dedicated staff, and an unwavering focus on developing partnerships, programs, and policy priorities that support our vision.

At this time of social, racial, environmental, public health, and democratic crisis, we must urgently engage in relationship-building as well as internal examination and transformation in order to undo systemic White supremacy and promote a more just and equitable food system in Rhode Island. This message underpinned our work 2021:

• We welcomed our first BIPOC-majority Council member cohort
• We established working groups to support Council priorities and grow our network capacity
• We advocated for American Rescue Act Funding for RI’s local food systems
• We worked with national and regional partners to facilitate a SNAP Delivery Pilot Ensures Residents with Limited Mobility Have Access to Healthy, Fresh Food
• We coordinated Rhody Feeding Rhody initiatives, increasing food security and addressing the collapse of markets for local produce and seafood
• We provisioned technical assistance to local farmers, bringing Rhode Island over $1M in federal grant funding ...and will continue to do so in 2022 and beyond. We hope it inspires you to connect, engage, and become a catalyst for change in your individual work as well as our collective network’s efforts.

Nessa Richman
Network Director

MISSION IN MOTION: 2021 HIGHLIGHTS

Advocating for American Rescue Act Funding for RI’s local food systems

Ensuring SNAP customers with limited mobility have access to fresh, healthful food

Building markets that connect RI farmers and fishers with food insecure residents

Providing technical assistance to local farmers in successfully applying for over $1M in federal grants

...and will continue to do so in 2022 and beyond.
Rhode Island received $1.13 billion of federal American Rescue Plan Act funds to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Following that announcement, RIFPC developed a comprehensive investment recommendation of $25.9 million, gathering input from hundreds of Rhode Islanders. The recommendations frame five priority areas that, overall, would provide relief to food insecure families, food businesses, farmers, fishers, aquaculturists, food access workers, food justice advocates, community health workers, and more.

In September, RIFPC hosted two Legislative Roundtables highlighting elements of the investment recommendation, convening state legislators and stakeholders in agriculture, fisheries, food manufacturing and food systems. The conversations were strategically centered around stakeholder voices, providing a platform to directly express concerns, needs, and potential impacts of investments in these sectors.

In November, RIFPC was invited to present the recommendation to the RI Senate Finance Committee. The presentation was well-received by legislators, and resulted in continued conversations with RIFPC about leveraging the funds.

Presenters were Council member Alice Howard (Washington Trust and SunRise Forever Inc.), Diane Lynch (RIFPC Board President), Eva Agudelo (Hope’s Harvest RI) and Network Director Nessa Richman.

The state has not released the entirety of the ARPA funds. RIFPC continues to inform state legislators about the critical need to invest in Rhode Island’s food system.

“Thank you (and everyone at the RIFPC) for organizing the Roundtable to push for all of the priorities you identified. That type of advocacy work takes great effort and skill, and all of Rhode Island is better off for your work. Thanks again for all you do!”

— Andrew Morley
Sweet and Salty Farm
Tiverton
In 2021, RIFPC worked with national and local partners to facilitate a pilot program offering fee-free grocery delivery to Rhode Island SNAP recipients who are homebound or have limited mobility. The pilot offered an online order form as well as reliable customer service and over-the-phone ordering assistance. Payments were processed efficiently and conveniently at point-of-delivery at curbside.

The Providence SNAP Delivery Pilot successfully provided safe, effective food access for Rhode Island residents and enabled SNAP shoppers to spend thousands of dollars at local grocery stores.

**PILOT IMPACT**
- 100% of program participants said the program helped them feel and stay safe
- 88% said the program made it a lot easier for them to buy food and fresh fruits and vegetables
- 42% often ran out of food before the pilot, while only 8% often ran out of food during the pilot

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**VOICE OF PARTICIPANT**
“Between 1-10, I’d give it a 9 or 10. I’d recommend it to my brother, and lots of other people. It’s so helpful if you don’t drive...and you have the choice of what you want.”
-Nathaniel

“I like that I had the time to look to think about what I want, and what I want to spend, so that I don’t have to go to the cashier and deal with that in the pandemic.”
-Marysabel

“It was great. Especially in times when my car wasn’t working, things were really hard. I have three kids, so it was really helpful. And the people, they were so respectful.”
-Carmen

**MISSION IN MOTION: 2021 HIGHLIGHTS**

**PROVIDENCE SNAP DELIVERY PILOT ENSURES RESIDENTS WITH LIMITED MOBILITY HAVE ACCESS TO HEALTHY, FRESH FOOD**

A win-win for local food retailers and homebound shoppers

**FUNDING PARTNERS**
- Tufts Health Plan
- Center for Science in the Public Interest

**PROGRAM PARTNERS**
- CartwheelRI
- City of Providence
- One Neighborhood Builders
- West Elmwood Housing Development Corporation

**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**
- Fund a dedicated phone line to help SNAP recipients order food for delivery
- Fund a technical assistance program for locally-owned food retailers to become SNAP-approved and online SNAP-approved vendors
Rhody Feeding Rhody: Whole Fish Donations Pilot Identifies Key Market

Rhode Island consumes just 1% of the seafood our thriving fisheries sector lands. Despite abundance and delicious variety, many local species of fish are underappreciated and therefore underutilized locally. Additionally, finding a consumer market for whole fish is particularly challenging. There is a vibrant and growing immigrant and refugee population in Rhode Island; many people from cultures that have strong culinary traditions that include skillful handling and cooking of whole fish. Unfortunately, these newcomers to Rhode Island face systemic barriers in economic opportunity, food access, and food sovereignty, among many other challenges. The Whole Fish Donations Pilot launched in August 2020, seeking to understand how to increase food security and to address the collapse of markets for local seafood. The program leveraged foundation funding, with which RIFPC, along with partners Commercial Fisheries Center of Rhode Island and Eating with the Ecosystem, made direct purchases of fresh, whole fish landed at Point Judith, to then be donated to partner SunRise Forever, Inc. and other community partners for food insecure Rhode Islanders.

PILOT IMPACT

• By August of 2021, over 100,000lbs of seafood was purchased and distributed to communities in need
• 87% of surveyed seafood program participants said that the program is very important in helping them from running out of food.
• 93% of surveyed seafood program participants said that the seafood from the program is very appropriate to the way their family likes to eat.
• 93% of surveyed seafood program participants responded that this seafood program makes it much easier to access seafood.
• 100% of surveyed seafood program participants responded that it was very important for a program that increases access to fresh seafood to continue.

Pilot Program Partners

- African Alliance of Rhode Island
- George Wiley Center
- The Narragansett Indian Tribe
- Refugee Dream Center
- SunRise Forever, Inc.
- Women’s Refugee Care
MISSION IN MOTION: 2021 HIGHLIGHTS

PROVISION OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO LOCAL FARMERS BRINGS RHODE ISLAND OVER $1M IN FEDERAL GRANT FUNDING

A record number of Rhode Island farmers and aquaculturists applied for the USDA’s Value-Added Producer grant in 2021, ultimately bringing $1,063,485 into the state’s food sector - also a record number.

Rhode Island producers experienced increased demand throughout the pandemic as consumer mindsets shifted in response to supply chain and sourcing disruptions. Through that, a greater sense of community and pride for local goods and services has emerged statewide. However, as more dollars circulated locally, producers were suddenly facing capacity challenges and needed capital to level-up their operations.

Four of the six awardees received technical assistance from RIFPC in partnership with the RI Small Business Development Center. Together, the businesses were awarded $1M of the total $1.06M Rhode Islanders received. The funds have enabled the businesses to develop new products that would be perfect for a Rhode Island picnic: Fresh cut flowers, oysters, grass fed beef and pork sausages, and small-batch gourmet ice creams.

“Nessa ‘held my hand’ and walked me through the process, as well as reviewed and suggested content. RIFPC staff also facilitated conversations with USDA and other contacts on our behalf, to help make sure the project made it through.”

– Cate Kennedy
Dairy Operations, Wright’s Dairy Farm and Bakery
2021 USDA Local Agriculture and Seafood Act Grantee

“Absolutely unbelievably grateful to [RIFPC and RI SBDC] and all of the folks that helped us pull it together…You were the ones that made it clear, and made it feel like it was doable. It was a VERY complicated grant.”

– Polly Hutchison
Owner and Lead Floral Designer, Robin Hollow Farm
2021 USDA Local Agriculture and Seafood Act Grantee
RIFPC’s network continues to enrich and expand. In 2021 we worked with many new partners: community-based organizations, nonprofits, and state agencies. Additionally, our 25 Council members launched new working groups focused on key topics like food access, food business, and food and climate. The creation of a full time position for a Communications Manager also greatly helped raise awareness of our mission and our overall reach, with 2,000 more individuals following us on social media and through our monthly e-newsletter than in 2020.

AN EVOLUTION OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE RE-ENERGIZES LEADERSHIP

After 10 years as a fiscally sponsored project of Third Sector New England (TSNE Missionworks), the Council approved the appointment of a Board of Directors, which allowed for the establishment of the Council as a 501c3. While Council members maintain leadership on policy matters, board members have fiduciary responsibilities. The Council and board work together on strategic planning.

2021 COUNCIL

Jazandra Barros  
Co-Chair, Southside Community Land Trust
Thea Upham  
Co-Chair, Farm Fresh Rhode Island
Steven J. Arthurs  
Rhode Island Food Dealers Association
Azura Cygler  
University of Rhode Island, Rhody Wild Sea Gardens
Joshua Daly  
Rhode Island Small Business Development Center
Raul Figuera  
Fuerza Laboral
Meghan Grady  
Meals on Wheels RI
Alice Howard  
Washington Trust & Sunrise Forever, Inc.
Maura Iv  
Providence Public Schools

2021 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Steven J. Arthurs  
Nessa Richman  
Network Director
Allison Montagnon  
Communications Manager
Rodney Solomon  
Director of Workforce Initiatives
Nina Wolff-Landau  
Program Associate for Research, Evaluation, and Operations

2021 STAFF

Nessa Richman  
Network Director
Allison Montagnon  
Communications Manager
Rodney Solomon  
Director of Workforce Initiatives
Nina Wolff-Landau  
Program Associate for Research, Evaluation, and Operations
Our funding partners are critical to our success. We are grateful for their ongoing support, which allows us to leverage innovative, inclusive ideas that create solutions to complex challenges, and foster a healthier, more prosperous food system in Rhode Island, as well as the Northeast region.

Rhode Island Foundation

Henry P. Kendall Foundation

Angell Foundation

The John Merck Fund

Island Foundation

van Beuren Charitable Foundation

USDA Rural Development

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service