

RI FOOD
POLICY
COUNCIL



2021 ANNUAL REPORT

Healing Through Hope: Centering Equity and Inclusion to Build Sustainable Food Systems

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 6428 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

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 RIFPC 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.

- 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

ADVOCATING FOR AMERICAN RESCUE ACT FUNDING FOR RI'S LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS



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

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



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

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

VOICES OF PARTICIPANTS

“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



RHODY FEEDING RHODY

Bringing fresh, local food from RI farmers and fishers to Rhode Islanders in need.



The *Rhody Feeding Rhody* initiative pays growers and fishers for food to distribute to Rhode Islanders in need.

This project, performed in partnership with Hope's Harvest RI and the Commercial Fisheries Center of RI, supported healthy communities by providing fresh, culturally appropriate foods to people who likely would not have access to them otherwise. Also important, these customers provide a consistent market for products that may not have robust sales channels otherwise (e.g., grade 'B' produce and underappreciated seafood species).

Pandemic-era supply chain failures exacerbated the American food system's longstanding issues with systemic racism, xenophobia, and poverty. During that time, RIFPC designed dedicated efforts to build and support sustainable, locally-based solutions that would have a lasting impact.

In September, WPRI-12 featured *Rhody Feeding Rhody* work in two pieces, aimed at raising awareness about hunger and highlighting locally-based solutions. The features included partner organizations SunRise Forever, Inc, Commercial Fisheries Center of Rhode Island, the RI Community Food Bank, and Hope's Harvest RI.

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

Pilot Program Partners

African Alliance of Rhode Island
George Wiley Center
The Narragansett Indian Tribe

Rhode Islanders 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.

Refugee Dream Center
SunRise Forever, Inc.
Women's Refugee Care

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.

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

THE NETWORK, BY THE NUMBERS

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.



NETWORK METRICS

6

Full Council meetings

69

Work Group members

15

Work Group meetings



POLICY METRICS

\$26.9M

investments recommended for ARPA funds

10

state hearings where testimony was provided

164

food systems-related bills tracked



EDUCATION METRICS

16

presentations by staff and Council

35

educational meetings/trainings organized

196

people attending RIFPC events



COMMUNICATION METRICS

14,036

website visitors

4,160

social media followers

1,509

newsletter subscribers

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

Azure 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

Cathryn Kennedy

Wright's Dairy Farm and Bakery

Bevan Linsley

Aquidneck Community Table

Caitlin Mandel

Hope & Main

Adena "Bean" Marcelino

Black Beans PVD

Katie Murphy

Groundworks RI

Jules Opton-Himmel

Walrus and Carpenter Oyster Company

Jair Perez

Trap Box PVD

Deborah Perry

YWCA

V. Raffini

Southside Community Land Trust

Jamie Samons

Narragansett Bay Commission

Bridget Sweet

Johnson & Wales University

2021 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Diane Lynch

President

Steven J. Arthurs

Joshua Daly

Thea Upham

2021 STAFF

Nessa Richman

Network Director

Allison Montagnon

Communications Manager

Rodney Solomon

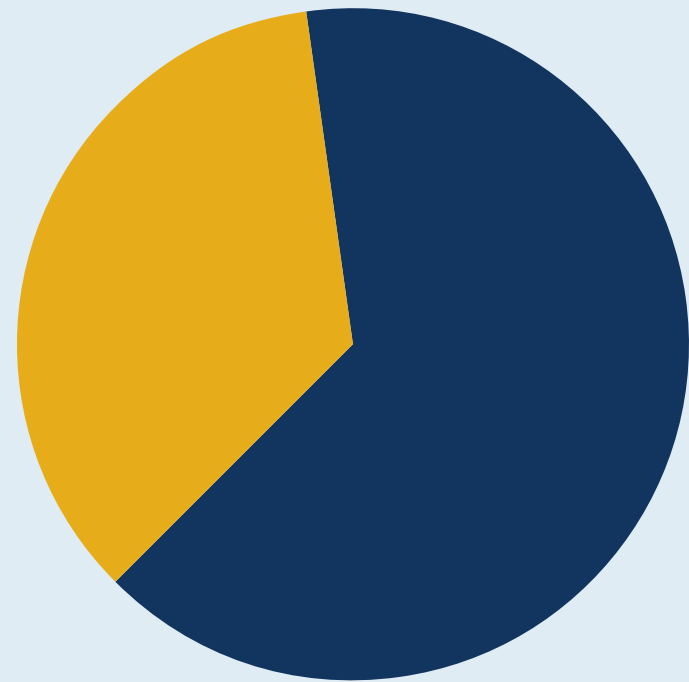
Director of Workforce Initiatives

Nina Wolff-Landau

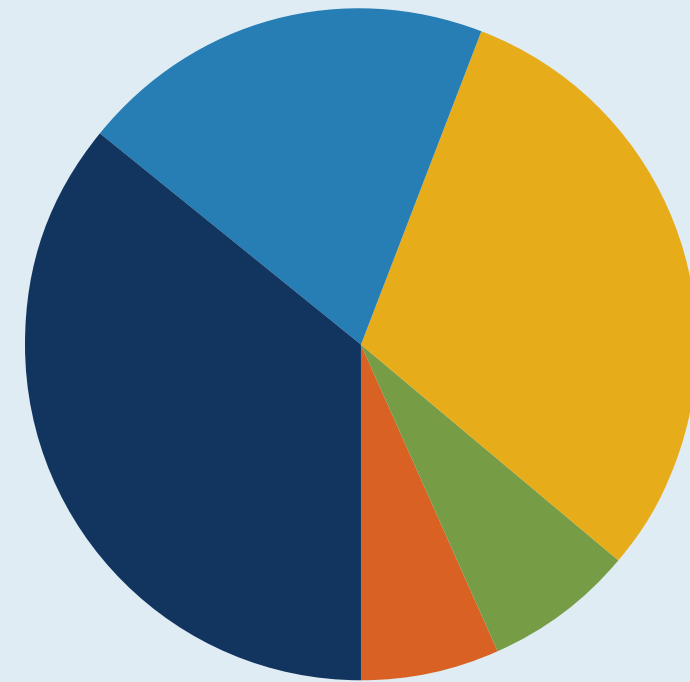
Program Associate for Research, Evaluation, and Operations

FINANCIALS

FY2021: 1/1/2021-12/31/2021



- Private foundations — \$281,775
- Government Revenue — \$511,251



- Personnel — \$293,801
- Contract — \$163,289
- Re-grants (LASA) — \$250,000
- Program & Admin — \$58,110
- Indirect Costs — \$53,303

FUNDING PARTNERS

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

**RI FOOD
POLICY
COUNCIL**



10 Davol Square, Suite #100
Providence, RI 02903
www.rifoodcouncil.org

