



MEETING SUMMARY & NOTES:

RI Hunger Elimination Task Force Q2 Meeting

May 2, 2023 | 2:00 - 3:30 pm

Theme: *Recovering food for donation: barriers and opportunities.*

[Click Here to Watch the Meeting Recording!](#)

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OBJECTIVES

- *Learn about the policy landscape impacting food recovery for donation.*
- *Hear from 2 RI food rescue organizations about their experience of barriers, challenges, and opportunities for food recovery.*
- *Discuss ongoing challenges and opportunities to provide home delivery for individuals experience nutrition insecurity*

PRE-READING

- WATCH: [*The fight to keep a third of Rhode Island's food from going to waste*](#)

MEETING SUMMARY

The second Hunger Elimination Task Force (HETF) Meeting of 2023 was attended by over 65 participants. Our state's Director of Food Strategy, Juli Stelmaszyk shared that our statewide food strategy, *Relish Rhody*, will be updated this year and invited everyone to participate in the process. The Rhode Island Food Policy Council's Senior Food Access & Nutrition Security Program Associate, Max De Faria, provided a policy landscape overview, providing background on food recovery for donation legislation. A panel discussion followed and focused on operations to divert food from the waste stream and to donate that recovered food to organizations serving food insecure Rhode Islanders. Featured panelists included: Dana Siles from Rescuing Leftover Cuisine RI and Eva Agudelo from Hope's Harvest at Farm Fresh RI. All participants went into breakout rooms where they discussed the limitations on current food recovery efforts and identified opportune areas for investment and education.

MEETING PARTICIPANTS

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AGENDA

- 2:00 pm** **Welcome and Introductions**
- 2:05 pm** **Relish Rhody 2.0 Updates**
- 2:15 pm** **Policy Update: Food Donations Laws & Tax Incentives**
- Federal & State Liability Protections
 - Federal & State Tax Credits
 - Status on Proposed Food Donation Tax Credit Bill
- 2:25 pm** **Panel: What is Food Recovery, and How Can It Support Food Access?**
- Rescuing Leftover Cuisine
 - Hope's Harvest
- 2:45 pm** **Audience Q+A**
- 2:55 pm** **Breakout Session**
- 3:15 pm** **Breakout Session Report Out**
- 3:25 pm** **Final Meeting Announcements**

NOTES

- 2:00 pm** **Welcome and Introductions**
(Facilitated by Nessa Richman, RI Food Policy Council)
- The Hunger Elimination Task Force is a statewide network of food access, nutrition, and public health champions that work to reduce hunger and increase access to healthy, culturally-appropriate food for all RI residents. This task force is owned by the RI State Agencies involved in food system work and is facilitated by the RI Food Policy Council.
 - The goal of the Hunger Elimination Task Force is to reduce hunger and increase access to healthy, culturally-appropriate food for all Rhode Island residents.
 - Today we are hearing important updates about revisions to our state's food strategy, *Rhelsy Rhody* and the policy landscape associated with food recovery for donation. Then, we will have a panel featuring food

rescue organizations in Rhode Island, before breaking out into discussion groups to reflect on food recovery for donation.

2:05 pm

**Relish Rhody 2.0 Updates
(Overview by Julianne Stelmaszyk, CommerceRI)**

- The first iteration of Relish Rhody was launched in 2017 under the Raimondo administration and it outlined 5 integrated focus areas.
 - Preserve & Grow Agriculture, Fisheries Industries in Rhode Island
 - Enhance the Climate for Food & Beverage Businesses
 - Sustain & Create Markets for Rhode Island Food, Beverage Products
 - Minimize Food Waste & Divert it from the Waste Stream
 - Ensure Food Security for All Rhode Islanders, in fact the Hunger Elimination Task Force was an initiative that was born out of the 2017 food strategy

- A Steering Committee has been established including the following members:
 - Director of Food Strategy, RI Commerce - Julianne Stelmaszyk
 - RI Commerce - Daniela Fairchild
 - RI Executive Office of Health & Human Services - Chris Ausura
 - RI Department of Health - Randi Belhumer
 - RI Department of Environmental Management - Ken Ayars
 - RI Food Policy Council - Diane Lynch

- There will also be an advisory board of 15-20 RI food system stakeholders, leaders, and representatives. The Interagency Food & Nutrition Policy Advisory Council will also provide input and feedback on this process.

- The timeline for these updates are as such:
 - Spring 2023 (Five-Year “Look Back” 2016-2022 Food Strategy 1.0”)
 - Summer/Fall 2023 (Stakeholder engagement - focus groups, issue briefs, statewide gathering)
 - Winter/Spring 2024 (Final report launch)

- There is an open call to join the Relish Rhody 2.0 Advisory Board!

2:15 pm

**Policy Update: Food Donations Laws & Tax Incentives
(Overview by Max De Faria, RI Food Policy Council)**

- RI Cannot Afford to Waste Food.
 - RI Community Food Bank Reports that 31% of Rhode Islanders experience food insecurity. Those numbers rise to 43.2% for Black households and 46.6% for Latino Households/ Obviously,

people need food now.

- The Central Landfill is running out of space. Current projections say it will be full by 2040. We need a plan. 2040 is only 17 years away. But we can extend that timeline if we remove food from the waste stream.
- We also avoid negative environmental impacts of continuing to feed the landfill with food that could otherwise be recovered.
- RI Needs Comprehensive Solutions.
 - The EPA has produced a Food Recovery Hierarchy that displays from top to bottom the best ways to reduce food waste. Second from the top after reducing the volume of surplus food generated is donating food to feed people.
 - Once that food is no longer viable for human consumption, we can move that food down the other parts of the hierarchy that can dispose of it in an environmentally friendly way.
- Current Liability Laws:
 - So when we think about recovering this surplus food, the donating organizations will primarily ask two questions – what is my liability if something goes wrong and is there a way to offset the costs of donating?
 - The modern food donation liability protections came into being in 1996 when Congress ensured civil and criminal liability protections when donating apparently wholesome products to a nonprofit for distribution to food insecure individuals. Earlier this year, Congress extended those protections to include qualified direct donors and donations at zero cost or at a Good Samaritan Reduced Price.
 - In 2019, the RI General Assembly led the charge passing legislation that covered direct donations and covers food that is past the best-by date if determined by the distributor to be wholesome.
- Current Tax Credit Laws:
 - In 2015, Congress passed the PATH Act that incentivized businesses to donate eligible food products using enhanced tax credits. However, it is difficult for many local businesses and especially cumbersome for small local businesses to access these credits.
 - As of today, RI does not offer state level tax incentives for food donation. However, there is legislation in both chambers of the General Assembly to change this.
- RI Proposed Tax Credit Law:
 - Senate Bill 517 introduced by Sen. Alana DiMario and House Bill

5803 introduced by Rep. Carol Hagan McEntee would both provide tax credits for donations by qualified taxpayers to nonprofit organizations. Senate Bill 517 has not yet been heard before the Senate Finance Committee.

- The House Finance Committee heard testimony on House Bill 5803 last Thursday, where the Committee held the measure for further study.
- Two months remain in this legislative session for the General Assembly to take further action on these two bills. To stay up to date on what is happening with these and other food systems bills, check out the Food Policy Council's bill tracker on our webpage.

2:25 pm

**Panel: What is Food Recovery, and How Can It Support Food Access?
(Moderated by Randi Belhumer, RI Department of Health)**

- **Dana Siles, Partnerships Director, [Rescuing Leftover Cuisine RI](#)**
 - Rescuing Leftover Cuisine is a national nonprofit organization with branches operating in Massachusetts and Rhode Island that organizes the collection and redistribution of leftover food from events and businesses for donation to nonprofit partners.
 - Transportation and logistics are the key components that can encourage or prevent food donation from events, cafeterias, and other spaces featuring food. We streamline logistics using technology and crowdsource volunteers from the community for food transportation. We do not have a minimum amount requirement or maximum amount limit.
 - On the back end, we match food to need based on specific criteria such as geography, schedule, and storage capacity. We also aim to match food according to religious, cultural, and nutritional needs and preferences. We then create calendar events that our volunteers sign up for to transport the food with no stops in between from the donor to our nonprofit partner.
- **Eva Agudelo, Director of [Hope's Harvest, Farm Fresh RI](#)**
 - Hope's Harvest is a project of Farm Fresh RI. Our work began in gleaning, where we would coordinate volunteers to collect unharvested food on Rhode Island farms and then donate that food to hunger relief agencies. We have since expanded our operations into surplus purchasing, contracting, Farm to Food Pantry, and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program.
 - There is a lot of food being wasted in Rhode Island. We have rescued 852,000lbs of fresh, healthy, local produce from over 48

farms across Rhode Island and southeastern Massachusetts. Our donated produce has been distributed to 48 hunger relief agencies, serving over 35,000 individuals per month. We have recruited over 350+ volunteers, spending more than 6,000+ hours rescuing produce.

- We hear from farmers when they have produce available. We serve as an intermediary between the farmers, volunteers, and the agencies to bring everyone together. This requires physical infrastructure (e.g. trucks, cold storage, technology) and staff to collect and pack boxes of food for distribution.

- **Panel Discussion**

- (Randi Belhumer) Question: For Rescuing Leftover Cuisine, are we able to look at gaps by geography and need?
 - *(Dana Siles) Answer: Rhode Island is known for our restaurants and hospitality, and it's in the very areas that we have the most food that we see need. The biggest areas of needs are Providence County, near Woonsocket, and Aquidneck Island.*
- (Randi Belhumer) Question: Can you talk about barriers that still exist to logistics and recoveries?
 - *(Dana Siles) Answer: Statewide we see a need for better policies, incentivization, and increased engagement including education. In terms of policy, we need to develop clear date labeling laws, refining liability laws, and strengthening our organic waste bans. There are many other policy areas that also deserve attention in this area. We need to incentivize businesses to make this major change. Engagement and education includes having our organizations come to educate on the importance of food recovery for donation. We can feed more people by rescuing more food. For our organization specifically, our largest barrier is limited funding and needing more donors.*
 - *(Eva Agudelo) Answer: Everything Dana said is accurate for our work as well. The costs associated with rescuing food are expensive. Funding also needs to cover the cost of staff, because without dedicated staff, our operations would not be smooth. In order to grow, we need more resources. There is also an education bias with some growers that are not aware of the entirety of the hunger relief landscape right now. Our work is also impacted by climate change, which is important to recognize.*

- (Randi Belhumer) Question: The pre-reading included an interview with you, Eva. In that video, the students at Johnson & Wales University were using all parts of the beet, including leaves, not just the beet. This makes me wonder, how do you see Hope's Harvest collaborating with Harvest Kitchen in the future?
 - *(Eva Agudelo) Answer: We did a survey with hunger relief agencies to understand what kind of processed products they would be interested in for their guests. We know that Rhode Island produces a lot of butternut squash, potatoes, and apples. We want to make it possible for agencies to access this local product year round. Responses showed a big interest in stewed tomatoes. We are thinking about that for sure.*
- **Panel Q+A**
 - (Vernon R Martin II) Question: How do you see RI's Cottage Food law impacting equity for new food producers?
 - *(Eva Agudelo) Answer: It is a great opportunity for people to start small businesses and provide consumers with the opportunity to support local growers and food entrepreneurs.*
 - (Rachel Newman Greene) Question: Dana, are there conversations from your food donors about food service workers as a food insecure population?
 - *(Dana Siles) Answer: Nationally, one of the largest groups of SNAP recipients are people that work in the food service industry. The Emerson Act did not provide civil and criminal liability protections when donors donated directly to individuals. The Food Donation Improvement Act expanded these protections to include donations directly to individuals, including their workers. There are growing opportunities to provide more food directly to people. These conversations are not happening enough. Now, we need to educate and raise awareness.*
 - (Rachel Newman Greene) Question: Has there been any conversation here in Rhode Island about bycatch as a wasted food source?
 - *(Diane Lynch) Answer: The Commercial Fisheries Center of Rhode Island has invested in a program they call, Seafood for All. They are incorporating bycatch as best as they can. They are paying a market rate. The largest barrier is the limitations of consumers, since they don't know what to do with that fish.*

- (Kim Gans) Question: Has there been any conversation around the nutritional integrity of the food that you are collecting and donating?
 - *(Eva Agudelo) Answer: Since we are harvesting fresh fruits and vegetables, there is no question regarding the nutritional value of the food we are donating.*
 - *(Dana Siles) Answer: We pay close attention to this very concern in our work. The majority of the food that we redistribute has a 24-48 hours shelf life and needs to be distributed and consumed/frozen within that time. We need more donors here in Rhode Island that can provide more rich and culturally diverse foods.*

- (Blaise Rein) Question: Is there any work being done with different school vendors to rescue food going to waste at schools?
 - *(Dana Siles) Answer: There is the RI School Recycling Club program. Their work is great. Teaching children to do the right thing with this food in the beginning will help us to address these issues in the future. Rescuing Leftover Cuisine only picks up from institutions or businesses.*
 - *(Eva Agudelo) Answer: One of the challenges in this space is that if the energy that motivates a volunteer group to start a program to address these issues, then if that person moves or the energy dies out, it gets lost. We need to institutionalize these solutions and build these programs.*
 - *(Jessica Patroliia) Answer: The issue of momentum and resources is the main challenge with these programs. Schools are asked to meet regulatory requirements on tight budgets. Investing in healthy school meals for all would bring dollars to the schools to invest in equipment and sustainability coordinators.*

2:45 pm Breakout Session

3:15 pm Breakout Session Report Out

- **Please see Breakout Session Takeaways.**

3:25 pm Final Meeting Announcements

- Thank you all for joining us today!

- The Rhode Island Food Policy Council network survey will be released soon.

Our next meeting will be May 2, 2023 2-3:30pm!