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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **“RHODY FEEDING RHODY ALLIANCE” GETS THE GREENLIGHT FROM USDA Rhode Island Food Policy Council awarded \$498K grant to fortify RI’s emergency food network while supporting local farms and fisheries**

**PROVIDENCE, RI, OCTOBER 19, 2022** -- The Rhode Island Food Policy Council has been awarded a \$498K grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP) to launch the “*Serving the Food Insecure Market: Connecting Rhode Island Farmers and Fishermen with Our Emergency Feeding Network*” project. Implementation partners include Farm Fresh RI, Southside Community Land Trust, and the Commercial Fisheries Center of RI. The Rhody Feeding Rhody Alliance will work with emergency food providers to build sustainable market channels between local farmers and fishers and Rhode Island residents in need of fresh, local, culturally-appropriate food.

This project was strongly supported by Rhode Island’s Congressional Delegation. A joint letter of support was signed by U.S. Senators Jack Reed and Sheldon Whitehouse and Rep. Jim Langevin and Rep. David Cicilline.

"This federal funding will help feed the hungry and expand opportunities for local food producers and businesses. Rhode Island has amazing food and this collaborative effort will help the Rhode Island Food Policy Council and their partners find new ways to improve marketing, transportation, and distribution of local food and strengthen supply chains for food businesses," said Senator Reed.

“I’m pleased to have helped secure the funding to stand up the Rhody Feeding Rhody Alliance, an innovative partnership that will connect fresh food from local

farmers and fishermen to Rhode Islanders facing food insecurity,” said Whitehouse. “This initiative will strengthen our food supply chain, boost the market for local agriculture and seafood businesses, and provide healthy food to our neighbors in need.”

“All Rhode Islanders deserve access to safe and nutritious food, which is why I’m so happy to deliver these crucial federal dollars to launch the ‘Rhody Feeding Rhody’ Alliance,” said Rep. Jim Langevin. “This new partnership will establish a critical connection between Rhode Island’s underserved communities and our best-in-class farmers and fishers, so that families experiencing food insecurity can enjoy the fresh produce and seafood produced right here at home.”

“Congratulations to the Rhode Island Food Policy Council and all of the tremendous local organizations who will be partnering for the Rhody Feeding Rhody Alliance,” said Congressman Cicilline. “I was thrilled to advocate to USDA for this innovative project. This effort will build a more resilient food system that not only addresses food insecurity but also supports our local producers and growers. It’s a win for our farmers and fishers and helps our vulnerable neighbors.”

Eva Agudelo, Farm Fresh RI’s Hope’s Harvest Executive Director, notes “This funding strengthens the work Farm Fresh RI does to bring millions of servings of locally grown and caught products into the emergency food market. “USDA programs like LFPP help us put our trucks, coolers, and dedicated staff in service to meeting the needs of Rhode Island farmers and our neighbors who struggle with food insecurity.”

“Add up the costs of healthy food, housing, child care, utilities - everything families need to succeed. It’s all too expensive relative to income levels. Until this problem is fixed, SCLT will work through this program with USDA and our local partners to help hundreds of families in need serve up fresh produce grown right here by 40 small scale, sustainable urban and rural farmers.” says Margaret DeVos, Executive Director, Southside Community Land Trust

“This project will help to build on unique initiatives to connect local products to the emergency food system during a time of increasing need.” says Fred Mattera, Executive Director of Commercial Fisheries Center of RI, “For the Commercial Fisheries Center, this funding allows us to greatly expand and streamline access to nutritious local seafood among communities in need while helping to support our vibrant fishing industry.”

“Local seafood is an abundant resource in Rhode Island, an important part of a healthy diet, and is also a fundamental part of our culinary traditions for so many people in our community and yet still many people don’t have access to it.” says Kate

Masury, Executive Director of Eating with the Ecosystem, “This funding will help Eating with the Ecosystem and the Commercial Fisheries Center of Rhode Island support seafood businesses in providing local seafood to the emergency food system and sharing this delicious and healthy resource with people in need.”

“Access to safe and healthy food is a key determinant of health at the individual level and the community level. This grant will be critical to the Rhode Island Food Policy Council’s work to ensure this access for Rhode Islanders in every ZIP code throughout the state,” said Utpala Bandy, MD, MPH, Interim Director of the Rhode Island Department of Health. “We thank the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s Local Food Promotion Program for their partnership, and we look forward to the vital collaborations with our community partners that these funds will support for years to come.”

“Both Rhode Island’s emergency feeding network and local food producers experienced massive disruptions and challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Rhody Feeding Rhody initiative will deepen supply chain connections between these stakeholders, helping to build the kind of resilient and regional food system we envision in our state food plan “Relish Rhody” says Juli Stelmaszyk, RI State Director of Food Strategy

RIFPC’s project builds on a successful planning grant awarded by USDA in 2020 which piloted connections between 25 RI farmers and fishers. Now, 80 RI farmers and fishers (at least 9 of whom are from historically underserved communities).

The new, 3-year grant will enable RIFPC and partners to build information exchanges, infrastructure, and ordering systems that will benefit these local businesses and RI emergency food providers alike. Mutually-agreed upon product, price and delivery specifications will build greater confidence and offer lower risk to food producers and harvesters.

The Rhody Feeding Rhody Alliance will identify pathways to financial viability, enhancing and growing the wholesale market for 50+ locally-grown agricultural products as well as growing wholesale markets for 30+ locally-harvested, wild-caught seafood in the emergency food system. The Council will measure and evaluate project impacts, using findings to continually improve program operations and advocate for sustainable funding. As a result, the local emergency feeding system will become a larger, more reliable wholesale market for local producers and harvesters while also becoming more resilient to supply chain shocks from public health emergencies and climate-related disasters.

To learn more about the Rhody Feeding Rhody Alliance, email [info@rifoodcouncil.org](mailto:info@rifoodcouncil.org).

### **ABOUT RIFPC**

The Rhode Island Food Policy Council is building a more equitable, accessible, economically vibrant, and environmentally sustainable food system in Rhode Island. RIFPC is a statewide collaboration of diverse, committed and engaged stakeholders from all sectors of the food system. We create partnerships, develop policies, and advocate for improvements to the local food system to increase and expand its capacity, viability, and sustainability.

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