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Rhode Island Foodways Alliance Calls on State Leaders to Invest Urgently in Local-Food Infrastructure

August 18, 2026 [PROVIDENCE, R.I.]— The Rhode Island Foodways Alliance, a new coalition of leaders dedicated to the resilience and success of the state's food system, today is calling upon state leaders to support a set of critical investments that will fundamentally reshape how Rhode Island grows, produces, and consumes food. These investments also help strengthen hunger-relief efforts at a time when nearly 40 percent of Rhode Island households don't have enough to eat.

The Alliance, representing organizations that support a cross-section of farmers, fishers, and food entrepreneurs, is focused on significantly increasing the amount of food grown, produced, and processed in Rhode Island that is actively consumed by Rhode Islanders.

"We are coming together because the current landscape requires a collective, systems-level approach," says Nessa Richman, Executive Director of the Rhode Island Food Policy Council. "By aligning our efforts, we aren't just advocating for individual programs; we are calling for Rhode Island to make common-sense, reasonable investments to support its food producers and secure its food future."

To achieve this, the Alliance is calling on state leaders to champion five high-priority strategies:

- **Unified Food Policy:** Draft and execute a comprehensive Rhode Island Food Agenda, with a Director of Food Strategy position created and maintained within the Governor's Office.
- **Economic Development Policy:** Establish a dedicated \$5 million annual fund for grants and loans to support food businesses and equitable food access.
- **Regional Co-Operative Distribution:** Develop a scaled distribution network that connects local producers to wholesale and retail buyers efficiently.
- **Institutional Processing Infrastructure:** Direct \$20 million in state financing to build produce, seafood, and other food processing facilities that increase Rhode Island's

capacity to process locally grown and produced food at scale and serve public institutions such as schools and hospitals.

- Standardized Support: Develop a "common application" for food businesses to streamline access to capital, technical assistance, and market opportunities.

"Our small food businesses and entrepreneurs are an important part of Rhode Island's economy, but they are competing in a marketplace built to favor scale," says Lisa Raiola of Hope & Main. "State government has an important role to play in helping them access the infrastructure, capital, and markets they need to compete with national brands and build strong, sustainable businesses here in Rhode Island."

"We have to support our farmers and fishers and get local products into the hands of more community members, including in K-12 schools and food pantries," notes Janet Coit of Farm Fresh Rhode Island. "Our proposal calls for infrastructure development and funding to make that goal a reality."

"When local people control the assets of the food system, we make sure our communities are fed," says Margaret Devos of the Southside Community Land Trust. "Our agenda prioritizes investments that benefit our people, our small farms and our local businesses rather than global food investors."

"Building stronger connections between local farmers, makers, and consumers is vital," says Rose Jones of Aquidneck Community Table. "It supports healthier people, places, and economies. By working collaboratively across government, business, and community, we can create a food system that supports all Rhode Islanders – especially those with greatest need – and positions our state to lead."

The Alliance is presenting its agenda to all Gubernatorial candidates and seeking formal commitments to implement the recommendations. In 2024, Alliance members, along with other community organizations, worked with State government partners to develop a 2030 Rhode Island Food Strategy. Despite numerous requests by Alliance members, a final version of the Strategy has yet to be shared with participating organizations – nor published – by the State.

About the RI Foodways Alliance: *The Rhode Island Foodways Alliance is a diverse coalition of farmers, fishers, food entrepreneurs, and community advocates working to create a resilient, just, and economically viable food system for all Rhode Islanders.*

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