



About RIFPC

The [Rhode Island Food Policy Council \(RIFPC\)](https://rifoodcouncil.org) is a statewide, nonpartisan network working to build a more just, equitable, and resilient food system for all Rhode Islanders. We convene, educate, and foster community-based advocacy that drives good food policy forward in order to achieve a just and resilient food system for all Rhode Islanders. We coordinate a statewide network of diverse food system stakeholders who catalyze high-impact partnerships, projects, and programs that address systemic and structural inequities. Our work supports civic engagement, a critical component of a healthy democracy.

Together we envision a Rhode Island food system that provides routes to economic success for all food businesses and their employees, responds to pressing climate change and other environmental issues, and ensures access to fresh, nutritious, community-grown and culturally-preferred food for all.

About the Gubernatorial Questionnaire

In 2026, Rhode Islanders will elect their next governor. The Democratic and Republican primaries will take place on September 9, 2026, with three candidates running in each primary. The general election will follow on November 3, 2026.

As the RI Food Policy Council, we wanted to better understand how each candidate would govern and support Rhode Island's local food system. RIFPC sought to develop a questionnaire that reflects the breadth of issues affecting Rhode Island's food system and the perspectives of the communities engaged in this work.

To inform the questionnaire, members of the Rhode Island Food Policy Council Network were invited to submit policy questions they believed should be addressed by candidates for Governor. Submitted questions spanned a range of topics, including food access and nutrition, agriculture and land use, commercial fisheries and seafood, food business and economic development, and food, climate, and environmental sustainability.

RIFPC staff reviewed all submitted questions and synthesized them into a final questionnaire designed to be comprehensive, representative, and concise.

The final questionnaire was distributed to all declared gubernatorial candidates in early July, regardless of political party affiliation, with the same instructions, submission timeline, and opportunity to respond. Participation was voluntary. We received responses from Helena Foulkes (Democrat) and Ken Block (Independent).

We hope this questionnaire serves as a resource for Rhode Islanders seeking to better understand where candidates stand on issues affecting our food system. We also hope it encourages

thoughtful dialogue about the policies, investments, and partnerships needed to create a food system that is healthy, economically vibrant, environmentally sustainable, and accessible to all.

Responses

1. The school meal program in Rhode Island feeds over 65,000 children a day and represents the largest "restaurant" in the state. Will your administration support Healthy School Meals for All, so every RI student can access the nutrition they need to learn and thrive free of charge? Why or why not?

Helena Foulkes:

"Yes, and I specifically laid out why in my healthcare plan: "Rhode Island dropped behind every other New England state in terms of children's well-being in 2025, and was barely in the top 20 states nationwide, in large part due to financial instability, as well as other challenges. Rhode Island should fund universal school breakfast and lunch for all children regardless of income, so that all of our kids have access to healthy food on a daily basis." Providing free healthy meals at schools ensures our kids can stay healthy, focused, and thrive academically. Every child in Rhode Island deserves that, and I'm going to be a governor who fights to make it happen.

As governor, I'd also push to make school meals more nutritious and more culturally relevant. I want to not only ensure that every child attending one of our public schools has access to nutritious meals, but also expand opportunities for local farmers, food producers, and small businesses to provide healthy meal options in our schools whenever possible."

Ken Block:

"Yes. Children should not go hungry due to the circumstances of the family. If we expect children to perform in school, they must be fed. If there is no, or little food at home, the state should provide breakfast and lunch to all."

2. What specific strategies will your administration implement to ensure that all Rhode Islanders; especially low-income households, seniors, and communities of color — have consistent access to fresh, nutritious, locally grown food?

Helena Foulkes:

"What the Trump Administration is doing to SNAP is unconscionable, and the next governor must be prepared to deal with the food insecurity that will come as these cuts are fully implemented. Rhode Island can't print money like the federal deficit, and this governor has left us with a structural deficit, so we're facing incredibly tough choices. We need a holistic approach that ensures we identify and help any eligible Rhode Islander get access to food stamps and work with our congressional delegation to restore the cuts after the midterms and dare Trump to veto it.

We also need to make sure low-income households, seniors, and communities of color have access to fresh, nutritious, and locally grown food that is culturally relevant. We're a small state — we can and should be a place where everyone has access to healthy, affordable food. That means partnering with local farmers, food producers, and small businesses to increase access to healthy food regardless of zip code.

One thing I've been really focused on is how we can meet people where they are and bring resources directly into communities. As governor, my administration would be present in communities and partnering with trusted organizations like churches and other NGOs to make sure Rhode Islanders have access to the food assistance and other support they need when they need them."

Ken Block:

"Beyond school breakfast and lunch, I support a program within RI DEM's Agriculture Division that encourages community gardens and regional greenhouses.

Urban children can visit a regional greenhouse as part of a school field trip and see the wonder of a farm, hopefully igniting a passion that they can take back to a community garden on city lands. Children who plant a seed will not only eat but learn how to care for their garden.

On a larger scale, imagine planting a small 'orchard' on a vacant parcel and harvesting pears and apples. Community gardens are only limited by our support, as an apple can lead to a program that teaches how to bake an apple pie."

3. Agriculture, seafood and food businesses are a large part of our economic sector. How will you make them a priority in your administration and increase consumption of Rhode Island grown and caught food?

Helena Foulkes:

"My jobs plan makes the ocean economy the centerpiece of Rhode Island's growth — a \$150 million Ocean Economy Investment Fund covering ports, aquaculture, and marine trades, plus support for fishermen's cooperatives so the people who catch our seafood share in the value it creates. Food businesses will have a business navigator — one point of contact in state government — from day one. As previously mentioned, I believe there is a real opportunity to engage local farmers and agriculture producers in our statewide strategy.

That means making sure we are supporting and partnering with our local farmers, creating new purchasing opportunities, and better integrating their products into our collective efforts to expand access to healthy and nutritious meals for every Rhode Islander.

And the state should eat what we grow and catch: I'll use state purchasing power, starting with school meals, to expand institutional buying of Rhode Island food."

Ken Block:

"The main reason Rhode Island has limited aquaculture businesses is the cost of electricity. Maintaining a constant water temperature of 70-72 degrees is cost prohibited. I support legislation for an agricultural electric rate that promotes my commitment to farms and aquaculture.

There is a tremendous market for seabass and tilapia that we could target but only if we can reduce the cost to the businesses. My vision is a farm that uses geo-thermal heating to get a baseline of 52 degrees for the water, then a new electric rate to heat the water to 70-72

degrees.

Hydroponics can be harvested above the aquaculture tanks, and the fish byproducts would then be spread on the fields as fertilizer for the crops grown there.

We need to consider a more holistic approach to food security and business opportunities.”

4. Rhode Island has the most expensive farmland in the nation. How will you support new and existing farmers to ensure that Rhode Island's food can continue to be grown locally despite the high cost of farmland?

Helena Foulkes:

“Rhode Island is the smallest state, and we have some of the highest land prices, so our farmers are always fighting to survive. There is no one size fits all solution, but I will always fight for Rhode Island's small businesses. One thing I'd love to do, as previously mentioned, is better integrate and expand opportunities for local farmers, food producers, and small businesses within our schools, state government, and overall statewide strategy by meeting people where they are. By increasing opportunities for farmers to sell directly to Rhode Islanders, we can help grow and support their industry while connecting people with healthy and nutritious food grown locally.

I also think there are creative ways that government can work with our farmers and help remove barriers within their industry. That includes looking at ways to preserve farmland and make it easier for new and existing farmers to start and grow their businesses in Rhode Island. I've often said, under my administration Rhode Island will be open for business, and that sentiment extends to our farmers.”

Ken Block:

“Farmlands are disappearing for many reasons, including some caused by state policies.

Commercial solar projects have taken thousands of acres of land from the market, including many farms. I will pivot our Green Economy to incentivizing solar to be built over parking lots not over prime agricultural lands.

Farmers need additional revenues to support the farm. I support expanding the Right to Farm Act to include agritourism and agribusiness uses such as the Town of Exeter adopted last year: from commercial kitchens, and farm-to-table cafes..”

5. How will you make sure excess food goes to people who need it, and food waste is composted rather than ending up in the landfill?

Helena Foulkes:

“No one wants to waste food, but the incentives aren't properly aligned to make sure that food doesn't become waste but instead helps the most vulnerable. I'll strengthen the pipeline from surplus to table by supporting food banks and recovery organizations with the logistics and cold-chain capacity they need, ensure food-waste requirements on large generators are

actually enforced and paired with realistic composting options, and grow composting infrastructure.”

Ken Block:

“It is unsettling that the prior questions describe hungry children and then we need to discuss disposing of excess food.

I will meet with stakeholders and listen to their ideas as I find it quite disturbing to think of hungry children while wasting large amounts of food.

I support composting (my household composts) and diverting excess food from the landfill but need assistance in the proper methods to avoid large scale rodent issues.”

6. Will you commit to publishing and advancing implementation of the [RI Food Strategy developed by Commerce RI](#) with input from hundreds of Rhode Islanders?

Helena Foulkes:

“Absolutely!”

Ken Block:

“It is unfortunate that we currently do not have a FoodWorks type plan as we have shelves of plans for everything else.

Yes, conceptually I support the concept of a State Guide for 2040 (2030 is unrealistic by the time it is adopted) but temper that with the proviso that I seek a plan that focuses on food insecurity, the food economy and our hungry, not a plan that enriches a few corporations, vendors or individuals who are hungry for profits.”