Improve Food Security

FOOD INSECURITY SNAPSHOT
- COVID-19 dramatically increased food insecurity rates across the state, from less than 10% in 2019 to over 25% in 2020.
- Impacts of food insecurity disproportionately impact Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color. In 2020, while 21% of White households lacked adequate food, 36% of Black households and 40% of Latinx households were food insecure.
- When local products are purchased for distribution, local people eat fresh, healthful food and local farm, fish, and food businesses increase sales.

HIGHLIGHTS OF FOOD ACCESS INFRASTRUCTURE
- Over 60 organizations, meal sites, and pantries OUTSIDE of the RI Community Food Bank network provide food to residents in need in their communities.
  - Elisha Project distributed over 350,000 pounds of food and 145 deliveries the week of June 7, 2021 to over 40 sites across 5 cities, reaching 15,000 families.
  - Providence Rescue Mission distributes approximately 16,000 pounds of food each month.
  - We Share Hope’s food rescue operations have served over 75 non-profits in the state. Project Hand Up has grown from serving 7,115 families in 2019 to 25,372 in 2020, and in 2021, they continue to serve about 300 families weekly.

$300K is needed for food pantry infrastructure.

HIGHLIGHTS OF HOPE’S HARVEST ACTION
- Volunteers harvest fruits and vegetables from farms, either contracting with local growers, paying for surplus produce, or taking donations - all for distribution to hunger relief agencies throughout RI.
- Programming supports healthy food access and food security for all Rhode Islanders, economic opportunities for local farm businesses, and improved community resilience by increasing the amount of locally grown produce consumed in RI.
- A proven model that produces tangible, beneficial, and cost effective results for Rhode Islanders in need.

PROJECTED IMPACTS FOR INCREASED FUNDING TO HOPE’S HARVEST
- Significantly increase fresh food access for food insecure households in RI.
- Deliver nearly 1.2 million pounds of local, fresh produce to the RI Food Bank (equivalent to over 4 million servings) at an average cost of $1.31/pound.
- Invest over $628,000 in RI farmers.

HIGHLIGHTS OF SEAFOOD FOR ALL PROGRAM
- Meets the needs of the commercial fishing industry and immigrant and Indigenous communities.
- Fishers are getting a fair and stable price despite market fluctuations, specifically for seafood with limited markets or that is thrown away as bycatch.
- Seafood is distributed directly to communities in need.
- By the end of July 2021, ~100,000 pounds of fresh local seafood was distributed to food-insecure households (approximately equal to 66,660 meals).

PROJECTED IMPACTS FOR INCREASED FUNDING TO THE SEAFOOD FOR ALL PROGRAM
- Greater efficiency and less labor for weekly statewide deliveries and distribution.
- Increased purchases from fishers.

Citations for the information shared on this sheet are available upon request. Please contact info@rificouncil.org with questions.
• Continued and emerging partnerships with multiple community-based organizations
• Creates larger opportunities of cultural exchange, job training and entrepreneurial opportunities, and community building

$2.7M is needed to purchase local farm and seafood products for food insecure residents

HIGHLIGHTS OF SNAP INCENTIVES AT FARMERS MARKETS
• Expands on USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits by matching funds for nutritious, locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables, doubling the value of SNAP dollars to make nutritious choices more affordable. Since 2009, Farm Fresh RI has relied on foundation and competitive federal grants to fund the Bonus Bucks program
• Creates healthy food access points in neighborhoods with limited high quality produce — Offered at local farmers markets, CSAs, farm stands, and delivery programs across Rhode Island. All funds return directly to the local agricultural economy and incentivize use of federal SNAP funds with local small businesses
• In 2020 alone, the Bonus Bucks program impacted sales at 108 farms and 117 locally owned and operated food producers. Rhode Island shoppers spent over $199,000 in SNAP at these outlets, and that spending was matched dollar-for-dollar in Bonus Bucks, resulting in a total economic impact of $400,000 in the local food economy in 2020.

PROJECTED IMPACTS OF SNAP INCENTIVES
• Positive economic, health and food security impacts
• A large portion of farms benefiting from the Bonus Bucks program are small and mid-sized
• Many farms are owned by people of color and first-generation immigrants -- communities who have been historically excluded from economic opportunities
  – The three farmers with the highest Bonus Bucks redemption in 2020 are growers with the African Alliance of RI and Southside Community Land Trust.

HIGHLIGHTS OF SNAP DELIVERY TO HOMEBOUND RESIDENTS
• CartwheelRI, a certified SNAP retailer, is nonprofit grocery service that uses a mobile SNAP EBT POS capability, allowing customers to swipe their EBT card upon home delivery

Free delivery is available through CartwheelRI. Currently only large retailers are participating in the SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot and have delivery costs, which can be cost-prohibitive and cannot be paid with SNAP benefits.
• Technological barriers play a role for some SNAP shoppers. Cartwheel RI’s model accommodates both online and phone delivery

PROJECTED IMPACTS OF SNAP DELIVERY TO HOMEBOUND RESIDENTS
• Cartwheel RI could serve a total of 120 low-income individuals/families per week, comfortably scaling to two delivery days per week (60 households per day):
  – Providence (out of the Sankofa Initiative’s community space)
  – Newport (potentially using the MLK Center as a delivery hub)
• Cartwheel RI shops at various Providence-based locations including Market Mobile and Urban Greens. Broadening their reach would circulate more dollars back into RI’s greater food economy

$1.5M will support SNAP farmers market produce incentives and food delivery services

We are urging the legislature and administration to commit $4.7M over three years these priority areas.

OUTCOMES
+ rural & urban farms with increased revenues
+ residents with better food security and healthy food access
+ seafood businesses with increased revenues

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