

RI Agricultural Partnership 5-Year Strategic Plan
Outreach Interviews
John Nunes, Newport Vineyards
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1. SERVICES AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT TO FARMERS

What's working:

DEM, all service providers; despite budget cuts, they are very responsive. NRCS and Extension are also great.

What more is needed:

RI does not have a grape expert at Extension, so grape growers rely on out-of-state experts—Cornell, New Jersey, and UMass. Possibly help these growers offset the travel costs to visit Extension offices in other states for trainings, etc.

2. BUSINESS SUPPORT

What's working:

Farm Credit for both technical assistance and loans. A large portion of the work has been mechanized, so there is not a strong need for labor. When needed and seasonally, growers rely on temp agencies.

What more is needed:

Financial or technical assistance on the production side; listing of all opportunities, grants, funding, etc in one location.

3. MARKETING AND PRODUCT DISTRIBUTION

What's working:

Buy local efforts are great.

What more is needed:

- Funding for state tourism department—tourism is vital for wineries as approximately half of the sales are to out of state customers.
- Ensure that wine is included in buy local campaigns.
- Education focusing on the great climate in coastal RI for growing wine grapes.
- Ability to see wine at farmers markets.
- RI wine / buy local wine campaign with PR support.

4. AGRICULTURAL POLICY AND REGULATIONS

What more is needed:

--Flexibility and changes to local zoning to support agri-tourism and on-farm events; these are vital to the viability of vineyards.

- Allow locally grown farm distilleries.
- Ensure that vineyards are treated as agriculture—in some cases they are viewed as manufacturing businesses.
- General need for flexibility/support for processing of farm products, especially at the artisan level; not necessarily allowed by right, but also not over-burdensome. Perhaps something at the state level which allows a baseline processing of agricultural products.

5. EDUCATION

What more is needed:

Technical skills: a pool of technically capable young people who can drive tractors, do small scale welding, operate farm equipment, fix/repair equipment, etc.
Consumer education.

6. AGRICULTURAL LAND AVAILABILITY, PROTECTION AND REGULATIONS

What's working:

80-90% of the land farmed by Newport Vineyards is protected.

What more is needed:

Land is a challenge—vineyards need to be close to the coast because of weather, but land is very expensive. In terms of land protection, not all land is equal for growing grapes.

7. FOOD SAFETY AND SECURITY

What's working:

Wineries are under AFT and this is working.

8. SUSTAINABLE LOCALLY PRODUCED FOOD SYSTEM

What more is needed:

Important to remember that wine is food—it is an economic winner, why buy from out of state, lots of benefits to the state when purchasing local wine.

Make sure that wine is part of state buy local efforts.