

**RI Agricultural Partnership 5-Year Strategic Plan
Outreach Interviews
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Southside Community Land Trust

Overall mission is to help people of all ages and nationalities grow food, with a focus on those with limited resources. Manage a 50 acre parcel which is owned by the state; 7 farm businesses on the site. 750 Providence families have parcels at community gardens within a city-wide Network managed by SCLT. SCLT also manages school gardens, and a ¾-acre city demonstration farm. They specialize in urban agriculture with an urban ag calendar of events and seminars and support for the urban agriculture task force. Many previous interns and volunteers are now farmers in RI.

1. SERVICES AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT TO FARMERS

What's working:

- Ken Ayars
- Kristen at URI
- Federal support for urban agriculture at food production and consumer end
- Federal legislators in RI willing to support ag/urban ag in RI

What more is needed:

- More DEM support to Div of Ag—Ken and staff are stretched very thin—important to ensure strong state support.
- Funding for collaborative arrangements between URI extension agents and SCLT, Farm Fresh, Kids First, and other non-profits that support farmers
- More support for urban agriculture—SCLT provides a lot of technical assistance, but on soft money

2. BUSINESS SUPPORT

What's working:

- Young people/next generation interested in urban agriculture, small scale, high value agriculture—provides a great pool of labor
- Diversity in urban agriculture—immigrants and minorities
- USDA funding through grants and NRCS contracts
- Limited resource farmers teach each other / foster collaborative marketing

What more is needed:

- Small loans: SCLT is working with Equity Trust and the Urban Agriculture Task Force to explore a micro loan program with a potential focus on small plots and dollars to match NRCS and other funding programs.

--Most of the small business workshops offered by the state's economic development efforts are not tailored to farmers' needs in terms of content or scheduling that fits with the farming season.

3. MARKETING AND PRODUCT DISTRIBUTION

What's working:

--Farm Fresh – deserve the credit on marketing, market management, the website; some SCLT farmers selling through Market Mobile, which is also working.

--Kids First's farm-to-school linkages

--CSA model and farmers being creative with this model

--SCLT's collaborative models for small-scale farmers to pool their produce (e.g. Little City Growers' Co-op, Growers Collaborative, and Four Friends CSA).

--WIC, Seniors, and EBT Farmers Market coupon initiatives

What more is needed:

--Media coverage/support to encourage people to support local food system

--Many organizations providing marketing and other support need funding—mainly dependent upon grants

--support for collaborative marketing initiatives like Market Mobile and SCLT's efforts to pool produce and energy

--support for Farm Fresh RI's and other market managers to offer more WIC, Seniors, and EBT Farmers Market coupon initiatives

4. AGRICULTURAL POLICY AND REGULATIONS

What's working:

--Many assets in RI—constituents, organizations and people working together

--Van Buren—very interested in supporting long-term solutions, such as the Ag Partnership

--The Greater Providence Urban Ag Task Force—formed in 2004, 55 members ranging from affordable housing, schools, restaurants, parks department, etc. focused on ordinances, Comprehensive Plan, and other policies (e.g. chicken ordinance) and initiatives (e.g. compost initiative) to support urban agriculture.

--RI Land Trust Council

--Grow Smart RI

--KidsFirst / Dorothy Brayley's policies re: farm-to-school purchasing agreements

--Ken Ayars

--A new Food Council—SCLT is helping to facilitate a broad base of stakeholders

What more is needed:

--support for the Food Council to begin and the Ag Partnership to continue

--support for farmland preservation (including urban lands)

5. EDUCATION

What's working:

- SCLT: many interns, 600 volunteers, high school apprentices, 1,500 kids between field trips and gardens
- The Urban Agriculture Task Force's free community education workshops
- URI new sustainable agriculture program
- Informal education of farmers – farmer to farmer collaboration/partnerships

What more is needed:

- More farmer to farmer education/collaboration and funding to support these efforts
- More support for garden-based youth education

6. AGRICULTURAL LAND AVAILABILITY, PROTECTION AND REGULATIONS

What's working:

- EPA helpful with urban land remediation
- EPA/USDA funding composting and TA

What more is needed:

- City and state inventory of land—what land could be used for agriculture—RI land trusts are working on this topic
- Need funding to transform idle land to working land and to finance storage, equipment, etc to support farming of the land
- Long-term leases—why is the state not allowing long-term leases of state-owned land?

7. FOOD SAFETY AND SECURITY

What's working:

- SCLT's food system approach fosters collaborative partnerships across production, distribution, marketing, consumption, and recycling through sharing grant funding and offering meeting facilitation
- the URI Extension's department of food safety
- New Food Council will be helping to coordinate statewide initiatives to strengthen community food security and address access issues

What more is needed:

8. SUSTAINABLE LOCALLY PRODUCED FOOD SYSTEM

What's working:

What more is needed:

- Support for urban agriculture
- Understanding of the partnership between rural and urban
- Bring more cohesion between “real” and urban farmers/agriculture