

**RI Agricultural Partnership 5-Year Strategic Plan**  
**4/15/10 Listening Session**  
**St. Barnabas Church—Portsmouth**

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All written comments transcribed verbatim

✓ Indicates “dittos” and degree of support/agreement on topic during discussion

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**SERVICES AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT TO FARMERS**

*What's Working*

- Division of Agriculture ✓✓
- private suppliers—just ask Brown—Brown University buys local
- RI Farm Bureau ✓✓
- NRCS/USDA Rural Development
- UVM for animal husbandry ✓
- UMass
- multiplicity of service providers—unique model—state, federal, private, etc
- GAP Project ✓
- URI—clone Kristen ✓
- use of web—online resources
- out of state extension/land grant universities
- networking among commodity groups
- new farms, young blood
- our one extension agent
- feed stores
- crop production supplies
- conservation districts provide info and where to get assistance
- get more young people involved
- NRCS high tunnel program
- state Division of Agriculture
- Farm Bureau
- Economic Development
- RI Farm Bureau—very supportive
- CT Ag Station generously (Rich Cowles) provides tech support to RI Christmas Tree Growers
- DEM—access to staff, agents, etc is well organized and accessible
- Dept of Ag—unique model
- private companies
- exp product
- RI Farm Bureau
- USDA—connecting with community grants
- the web
- RI Ag Partnership
- SUDA
- RI Dept of Ag – Ken Ayars
- Ag trusts

- URI—Kristen
- RI Farm Bureau
- web research
- out of state resources
- extension
- Division of Ag
- independent internet research
- the reborn RI Ag coordinator
- DEM
- Pesticide trainings
- universities in other states
- USDA funds as long as money is there
- information and meetings, events, training, networking via URI extension
- good will of Tom Sandham who freely shares knowledge re: ag practices, policies, etc even though he no longer has official NRCD responsibilities
- water quality info on septic system engineering
- water shed watch program
- the web

#### What More is Needed / Challenges

- information especially via web—create a website to compile resources—SWAP site ✓
- more support for Division of Ag and extension
- something to unify us to address fragmentation—critical mass, sweet spot
- urban agriculture support—possible niche for URI
- more funding for applied research
- true costs of services
- reduce redundancy
- URI extension/research should find a research specialty—such as turf or urban agriculture—don't duplicate other specialties ✓
- better understanding of services, who is providing what services, what is available
- identify the true cost of services
- cheese making support—education, cheese making courses, cheese caves, etc—safety, pasteurization, rules need to support—regulation reform
- incentives for large animal vets to RI ✓
- small farmer / start-up farmer support
- new farmers to be supported by officials
- we need slaughter house store for farmers to take their animals and sell locally
- expand URI extension services, more agents
- more local support of local suppliers—how can they compete with online and mail orders
- more support for farmers on land
- more support
- website is a great idea—help to support farmers and connect them with each other

- what about a network for renting or sharing equipments—small farms may not be able to afford all their own equipment, but connecting with other farms in the area they could rent, borrow, share, etc
- also a network of farm services—we need someone who can hay our fields, but are new to farming and don't know who to contact
- veterinary services
- local equipment dealer
- conservation support
- technical support and tax incentives for energy conservation and production—e.g. methane gas production to electricity
- no technical experts (designated as such) available in RI
- urban agriculture
- URI training
- understanding services and cost
- cheese making
- stonewall restoration
- reinvent land grant university involvement
- a comprehensive guide to what is available from state, private and federal sources—I don't know what's out there now
- large animal vets
- support from state for URI extension and plant sciences department
- a stronger, better staffed Division of Ag
- large animal vets
- small goat dairy production systems
- more diverse help from universities systems
- URI—no support for nursery or Christmas trees
- outreach—insect and disease information—current fact sheet not just what URI is interested in—but all insect and disease issue
- UMass has the best program—why not support it and not reinvent the wheel by doing the same at URI or have a specialty of URI that UMass or UConn doesn't do well or isn't strong in
- can we ever expect a public institution to be on the cutting edge—it will take years for cooperative extension to “catch-up”
- more access and cooperation with other state resources
- more financial support toward rotating crops
- technical assistance and staff—on a regular basis at Tiverton/LC/etc office—a point person for Eastern RI farmers
- more support for cooperative extension—more technical support that is research based and adapted for application—access to the technical support staff who can help farmers apply the research—fact sheets are great, but not enough
- farmers sometimes need to see a piece of paper vs. email
- formal learning opportunities, seminars, farm tours, case studies—e.g. invasive removals, erosion control, pest control—all sponsored for free and at convenient times for farmers
- annual snapshot of the state of agriculture in RI

## **BUSINESS SUPPORT**

### What's Working

- outside income
- state sales tax exemption
- WIC, SFMNP, other coupon programs
- SNAP at farmers markets and farm stands
- Farm Credit East—purchase shares as you go ✓✓
- sales tax exemptions
- RICAPE
- Farm Family Insurance
- WIC program/coupons
- state sales tax exemption
- using food stamps
- Farm Credit East
- Farm Credit
- state tax exemption
- Farm Credit East
- EDC recognition
- tax exempt
- using food stamps at farmers markets
- Farm Credit East
- Farm Family Ins
- RI Rural Development
- private accountants, consultants
- some farmers are willing to help each other out—local stores, restaurants that want local produce
- SBDL has been helpful
- thanks to RI Center
- Chamber of Commerce also very supportive

### What More is Needed / Challenges

- business planning support
- farm credit—access
- agricultural loans
- repeal estate tax ✓
- expand sales tax exemption
- expand WIC to farm stands—info on new WIC programs—accept all three coupons at farmers markets and farm stands
- EDC recognition
- tap into small business support
- increase coordination with Chambers of Commerce
- keep H2A intact, make easier—more info on farm labor
- can't get good labor ✓✓
- can't keep great Jamaican labor

- make it desirable to work on a farm
- college student/school mentoring program
- marketing, money, machinery
- link/directory of providers
- health insurance pool for farmers
- labor, labor, labor ✓
- improve attitude—make farm jobs attractive
- more recognition for farmers
- recycling materials—make available to farmers—make municipal machinery and federal surplus available to farmers, especially beginning farmers and have a central clearinghouse for this information
- estate tax relief
- FSA office overhaul
- less taxes
- lower percentage rates on loans
- health insurance
- would be great to have a directory of professionals (attorneys, accountants, real estate agents, and insurance agents) who work with farms and farmers
- health insurance pool of farmers
- community support
- access to credit
- apply sales tax exemption to nursery—needs to be expanded (taxed less)
- directory of services
- H2A employment program intact
- local recognition of farm, ag business
- labor
- recycling of construction grad materials for farm maintenance
- directory of ag
- health insurance
- subsidized water
- equipment sharing coop
- better information about what is available—where to go for support
- a clearinghouse for help with business plans, business practices for farmers
- better education sessions for farmers
- estate tax issues
- assistance with organizational structure of farm operations when there are several partners on one (family) farm—farm is in transition from one generation to the next
- communication
- group health insurance
- labor—good help
- I don't know how to do a business plan, project sales, etc
- greater awareness that farms are businesses
- agricultural business planning assistance

## MARKETING AND PRODUCT DISTRIBUTION

### What's Working

- Farm Fresh RI ✓
- RI Fresh—marketing agriculture, not just products ✓
- Rhody Fresh ✓
- Division of Agriculture ✓
- RICAPE
- farmers markets
- get fresh, buy local – bumper stickers, Farm Fresh restaurants, RIRLA ✓
- marketing of health food to schools, etc, nutrition connection
- food, farm and community ✓
- RI royal potatoes
- more edible communities
- farmers markets
- retail sales
- farmers markets
- increase number of farmers markets—from 14 to 43
- RIRLA is starting to solve this problem
- Farm Fresh RI is a good resource connecting farmers to consumers
- Rhody Fresh
- Rhode Island Raised
- Grow RI
- Buy Rhody Fresh campaign is great—visible, memorable
- state has a nice Buy Local marketing effort and website
- Farm Fresh RI
- RICAPE
- following the trends with “natural” “fresh” “home-grown”—people are more and more interested with where their food comes from
- public demand for local food
- chef's collaborative
- word of mouth
- the web
- Farm Fresh RI
- DEM—Division of Ag
- RICAPE
- New England Farmways
- networking
- buy local
- trade shows
- Rhody Fresh
- RI Farm Fresh
- DEM
- buy local
- RIRLA
- farm stands

- retail establishments
- Food Forum at Brown University has really promoted farming business, local foods in schools, restaurants—excellent awareness
- doing a follow up call a few days later—here is a sample, cook it up and try it—here is a number to the farm, let me know
- local florists
- restaurants
- the Newport County CVB is extremely effective

### What More is Needed / Challenges

- federal milk marketing order has to be changed ✓
- support for weaker farmers markets so they thrive
- fair trade for RI farm products
- ensure production of highest quality—important for local, word of mouth ✓
- state procurement—not just on the basis of cost—look at local economic impact ✓
- signage—on-highway—state and town—allow more signs on local roads ✓
- source of insurance for raw milk retail sales
- ag marketing mechanism—statewide
- infrastructure for farmers markets
- event hosting for public
- state “sustainable farming” branding or some kind of environmental quality certification other than organic
- more local food in stores
- hay marketing coop
- more local milk in schools
- RI logo branding of RI raised livestock
- assistance connecting new farmers and customers (through direct sales, on-farm/farmstand, farmers markets, CSA, retail or wholesale)
- some farmers markets are busy, are “full”—it is difficult as a new farm to get into these markets, meanwhile there are markets that are slow with space for new farmers, but it’s often not worth the farmer’s time to go to these slow markets—how can we increase the popularity of these other markets—maybe work with the individual market organizers to make them more successful
- need emphasis on supporting local farms and farm products
- expand Buy Rhody Fresh to all ag products—emphasize not just produce/dairy, but all products
- more recognition—signage
- state procurement—econ
- fair trade
- state marketing
- high tide raises all ships
- state of RI has no ag marketing mechanism—no money
- vocal on media—news, local tv, radio, billboards—urban visible presence
- high profile projects—roof-top gardens, kids slow, urban space food production
- RIRLA

- more promotion and participation in farmers markets and other ag related promotions—farms, 4-H
- transport of veggies
- more public service announcements
- more signage
- it frustrates me that the RI farmer needs marketing help—the farms work—local markets work, local grocery stores work, farmers markets work—need more advertising, marketing, billboards, newspapers, radio, television, hand radio—anything that gets the word out
- totally working together for all markets—don't let farmers compete against each other—there is a market for everyone
- more opportunities for meat, wool, fish in direct markets
- support the value-added or processed products
- more connection with consumer and end users
- continued support
- pricing/communication is needed—better between what some wholesalers want
- accessibility to markets so that markets aren't taken over by a few people for their exclusive benefit
- better knowledge and accessibility to local market sources
- no good at marketing, I need help
- state and federal program
- market advice

## **AGRICULTURAL POLICY AND REGULATIONS**

### *What's Working*

- Farm Bureau defense/advocacy against over-regulation ✓
- buy local language in contracts
- right to farm
- Tom Sandham
- water rights—good advocacy/rights now
- Ken Ayars and Scott Marshall are obviously working extremely hard to move this proves forward
- state Comprehensive Plan is good
- town Comprehensive Plan
- RI Farm Bureau taking the position for farmers at state house
- Farm Bureau defense
- hearts in right places—e.g. people want to help farmers
- RIRLA is helping
- right to farm has seemed to work well as problems arise
- Ken Ayars
- right to farm act – and assistance of Tom Sandham who educated local officials about the act, otherwise we would have been required to move a full barn of hay out into the weather so the floor of a newly built barn could be inspected—it was just as easily inspected from the lower floor looking up

- state DEM appears very supportive, but limited in size
- legislative communication
- towns are supportive of farmers and farming
- DEM and Key Ayars

### What More is Needed / Challenges

- stop takings by eminent domain ✓
- highest and best use should be agriculture, but usually its not
- enforcement and expansion of buy local preference in contracts—expand to hospitals and other institutions
- fire codes—recognize needs of agriculture—state fire code interpreted at local level—need changes to state code—make reasonable/sensible for agricultural buildings, multiple use buildings, etc
- state tax credit for purchases of locally grown products (for institutions, etc)
- right to farm can be strengthened ✓
- stabilize water rights as state becomes more urban
- PAC in addition to Farm Bureau
  - o elect people who support agriculture
  - o litmus test for politicians
- farmers need to get politically involved
- economic impact and benefits of agriculture study (this is happening)
- review and assessment of all town zoning, plans, etc as relates to agriculture
- address zoning as it relates to gardens
- right to farm act protection
- H2A and immigration reform
- ability to sell non-frozen meat at farmers markets or from the farm
- state working on Comprehensive Plan—town zoning ordinances need to be aligned with Comp Plan
- comprehensive zoning and planning regulations that support agriculture and that have some semblance of continuity across town lines
- dairy—federal marketing order
- sensible fire codes
- PAC—political action committee
- tax credit for businesses buying local
- more comprehensive zoning detailing farm activities
- insurance of raw milk
- comprehensive overview of current pertinent regulations in force
- identify every acre for food production
- fair evaluation for estate tax purposes or better yet a repeal of the estate tax
- stop eminent domain
- protection of water rights
- more Ken Ayars
- redefining right to farm and zoning uses of land
- advocates who know existing laws in positions of authority
- advocates for enlightened policies
- communication

- more tax advantages at town and state level—e.g. exclusion or reduction of real estate tax on farm building, state income tax deduction on first \$10,000 of income
- all RI state and municipal contracts that have to do with providing food and/or nursery/landscape products should require a percentage (maybe 25%) of the food or products to be purchased from RI farmers/RI processors using RI grown and raised foods
- ensure restrictions don't limit or stop farming activities in the growing suburbanization
- fire codes that work for agriculture
- town's support is not in writing
- agricultural boards in each town that will represent farmers to town boards
- legal help dealing with town boards
- farm legal action fund

## **EDUCATION**

### *What's Working*

- college student mentoring on dairy goat farm
- Kids First ✓
- chef's collaborative
- Brown University Food Forum
- regionalization of land grant schools
- Louis Escobar—community education
- 8 schools with FFA programs
- pesticide training
- master gardener
- 4-H volunteers
- public education through marketing
- RICAPE
- NE vegetable growers
- RIRLA
- RI Nursery Landscape trade shows
- community lectures about values of agriculture and farmland
- on-farm education for community
- land trusts getting involved in education
- GAP ✓
- new ag school
- 4-H volunteers
- URI
- state Division of Ag
- RICAPE
- Kids First
- regional ag specialists at state universities
- RICAPE
- open farm day

- FFA programs
- commodity group conferences
- community lecture series by local land trusts
- state house agricultural day
- going to college

What More is Needed / Challenges

- apprentice/mentoring
- increase education in schools ✓
- experiences
- increase agriculture at the Spring Garden Show
- an Ag Day for the public—not just legislators
- victory gardens for all
- increase part-time farming as a lifestyle/second job
- access to land
- your farmer and rancher programs
  - o mentoring
  - o leadership
  - o work-study
- 4-H could use more support ✓
- gardens in every school ✓
- agriculture as a life skill campaign
  - o grow local
  - o grow your own
  - o ag day for the public
- agricultural schools
- funds for 4-H
- 4-H volunteers need support and recognition and any program to give large numbers of youth some ag experience and some knowledge of contributing to community and self support
- restore 4-H programs based at URI
- other youth programs which could certify youth to work on farms without owner liability
- youth education—they need to know where food comes from
- schools to teach more on agriculture
- ag school is needed
- more agricultural programs in high schools / vocational schools
- increase support from URI and higher education systems
- coordinate apprenticeship opportunities statewide
- URI
- community based education
- education needed for the general public in terms of what a complex business farming can be
- educate public on growing their own food—helps grow local campaign
- accessibility
- experience/mentoring

- middle and high school courses—hands on
- much more school age exposure—support and leadership of on school grounds agriculture—veggie, fruit and husbandry
- educate government officials, public, non-profits about value of farms
- mentoring programs
- there is no education
- an organized effort to educate everyone
- “no farms, no food”
- take the promotion ideas and combine with open farm days—have a theme each year on a five year plan—5 main subjects—at the end of 5 years you will have a better educated public
- more collaboration of groups to bring resources together to address topics
- more informational seminars/classes to educate not only us but our neighbors of the importance of local farms
- public needs to be more educated
- requirement for food and agriculture course work/curriculum in all RI schools—requirement for nutrition and foods course for all med students, nursing students and teachers in training
- universities, colleges, and school urged/required to buy food and nursery products raised in RI
- young farmer program
- more

## **AGRICULTURAL LAND AVAILABILITY, PROTECTION AND REGULATIONS**

### *What's Working*

- conservation by land trusts
- purchase of development rights
- if you've got it, it's working
- ag land preservation—PDR—TDR
- local open space committees are helping
- Portsmouth—example of building support for agricultural land
- open space bonds and funding
- good partnership with landlords
- Farm, Forest and Open Space—tax land on ag use
- land trust
- Portsmouth town trust plan—need education on this for the rest of residents
- programs such as Agricultural Land Trust
- local open space committees
- transfer development
- public support at town level
- word of mouth
- land trust development control
- ag land preservation commissions

- local open space committees
- local TDR and PDR
- Farm, Forest, and Open Space tax policy
- conservation easements by land trusts
- in Portsmouth we have an open space committee which has purchased the development rights on farms
- ALPC—RI
- Nature Conservancy
- land trusts
- Farm, Forest and Open Space
- local ag land trusts like in Little Compton
- transfer tax
- some aspects of farm and ag tax reduction are working

### What More is Needed / Challenges

- expand Farm, Forest and Open Space
  - o include more types of agriculture
  - o reduce tax rates
  - o guidance over local/town control of rates
  - o need for uniformity of rates ✓
- long wait for PDR program
- need to get authorized bond money spent
- dedicate tax stamp money to PDR—some enabling legislation now—need more towns to enact
- problems addressing issues from lease agreements—lessee damage to rented land
- affordability/availability, especially for new farmers
- land trusts—connect farmers to available land—SEMAP land link
- model lease agreements ✓
- funding for stone wall restoration
- line item in annual budget that requires state to live up to its obligations (to revive federal match)
- affirmative language in easements to keep land in active agriculture—affordability provisions
- lease to buy—maybe tied to land link, but next step
- more money for PDR—long waiting list
- Governor won't spend authorized funding for PDR
- check-off on income tax return for PDR
- open space bond money
- more open space money for land conservation
- lower taxes for farmers
- work on ag land values to recommend to assessors—require it
- farmland
- less taxes
- make sure that people are allowed to farm on small plots of land—less than 2 acres, for example
- priority for farms not using chemical fertilizers, pesticides, etc

- less soccer fields, more land available for agricultural use
- better tax exemptions—farm, forest, open space on federal level, or larger on state level—all municipalities equal rates
- funding
- PDR
- lease agreements
- public education regarding modern best management practices
- active identification of unused farmland and quick re-occupancy by farm coop— young and experienced farmer
- land link—MA
- opening state owned land
- better stewardship programs
- land link programs
- protection of private property rights
- farm land tax rates in Portsmouth need to be brought in line with RI state law/regulations
- farms need good prices for their land
- put the “stamp” money into open space funds
- development rights need some revision—the point is to save farms (with farmers working) not leave the land idle
- money
- flexibility in programs
- defining of open space as farmland
- more tax incentives to keep land productive and in use
- tax reform on farmland in Middletown—as it is in Portsmouth
- more incentive to keep land open for farming
- available agricultural land inventory
- more funds for PDR
- currently percent of crop must be donated to the RI community food bank—it would be great if small percent could be donated to schools so we raise children who get experience with local food in school—all children
- some aspects of farm and ag tax reduction are working, but Portsmouth makes it difficult for small growers like myself to use these benefits
- tax and land value issues limit expansion and encourage people to sell out or convert to non-farm use
- I am not sure that it is clear where to find land for farming—especially where land is very expensive
- it is a race between developers and farmers

## **FOOD SAFTEY AND SECURITY**

### What's Working

- safest food in world
- COOL
- GAP

- trust between farmers and customers ✓
- Homeland Security / USDA program which is identifying refrigeration—interest by Homeland Security in local food production
- local stands
- USDA and State Dept of Health
- trust
- local certification—organic
- GAP works—free of charge
- training from the university has been helpful
- Division of Ag
- luck
- good practices
- basically self-policing and concern for customers and own product name

What More is Needed / Challenges

- PETA and others providing mis-information creates belief products are not safe
- education of consumers
- outreach to media
- protect public trust
- develop coordinated campaigns to focus on food safety and security in media with money behind it ✓
- transfer wealth of info on web
- risk management—educate the public “there’s risk to being alive” living is hazardous to your health ✓✓✓
- “the best consumer is an educated consumer”
- promotion of farm kitchens/cottage industry—skills—provide education, training, supervisor
- rapid response to issues that occur
- neighbors to understand farming
- better food in schools
- better identification system of livestock through USDA certified processing plans—difficult at this point to follow an animal from dropping it off to picking it up after processing
- encourage people to garden (even raise chickens) on their suburban home lots—build in resilience
- education that we are the safest food supply—if something happens here with our supply
- more trust
- need more locally grown food supply
- New England regional health certificate/no boarders
- need to get GAP information out to the public
- more flexibility for specialized commodities
- education of Dept of Health
- protect us in lawsuits if procedures are followed
- more small farm focus on safety practices—one standard
- continue and grow GAP

- keep restrictions to minimum especially for documentation and sales—for small sale one doesn't have the time and resources to get involved, keep records, etc for regulatory issues and controls

## **SUSTAINABLE LOCALLY PRODUCED FOOD SYSTEM**

### What's Working

- available land for young/new farmer if address issues with land damage
- RI dairy coop—Rhody Fresh—good model for others—inspirational
- identification of product thru distributors, labeled
- Jan and Richard's operations that become destinations ✓
- RI Envirothon
- starting to see more schools connecting with and supporting the “eat local” movement
- more restaurants are buying direct from farmers
- Rhody Fresh
- RI Grown
- Rhode Island Raised
- reduction in chemicals has helped
- progress in leaps and bounds in the past few years
- CSAs
- momentum of localvores who are demanding a product that we can produce
- efforts to extend seasons—and others are starting or have hoop houses or equivalent—take advantage of waste heat and materials

### What More is Needed / Challenges

- need help cleaning up land
- identification of local products—through distribution chain
- advertising
- some farmers markets not robust—possibly too many
- education of community—value of land/farm—need of local food
- subsidized water and transportation to compete with other states
- educate communities about reality of farming and what happened when we lose our farms
- composting of food scraps at state institutions
- identify every acre of land in RI where food can be produced and create a mechanism to get it into food production
- increase availability of slaughterhouse facilities
- more restaurants are buying direct from farmers—but we could use even more buyers
- composting of food scraps at state institutions
- we need to educate the public about the difference between sustainability and no chemicals—reducing is better than nothing
- define sustainable
- define local

- incentives—e.g. tax benefits for purchase of locally grown products by restaurants, large and small food markets, institutions, etc
- more local consumption, advertising and encouragement
- more customers