



**2023 ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT**

**Shifting power for  
transformative change**

**RI FOOD  
POLICY  
COUNCIL**



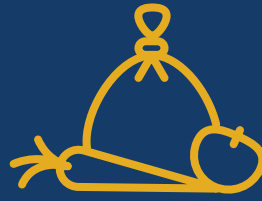
# RHODE ISLAND FOOD SYSTEM HIGHLIGHTS



**\$12B**

OF ECONOMIC OUTPUT ANNUALLY

8,300 businesses in the state's food sector host 15% of all RI jobs, employing over 75,000 people.



**\$5M**

PAID IN TIPPING FEES ASSOCIATED WITH WASTED FOOD ANNUALLY

100,000 tons of valuable food and seafood shells go into RI's near-capacity landfill every year, representing about 1/3 of the state's total solid waste.



**\$17.5K**

PER ACRE FOR THE MOST EXPENSIVE FARMLAND IN THE COUNTRY

1,054 farms operate across 59,100 acres yielding an average net income of \$22,969. RI has the highest percentage of beginning farmers in the US.



**\$93M**

OF SEAFOOD IS LANDED ANNUALLY

Less than 5% of seafood landed in RI by 84 aquaculture farms and 720 commercial fisheries operations is consumed in-state.



**142,000**

RHODE ISLANDERS RECEIVE SNAP BENEFITS

Hispanic and Black Rhode Islanders were much more likely to receive SNAP benefits than White Rhode Islanders, supplementing food purchases for 36.3% of Hispanic households, 28.3% of Black households enrolled, and 10.1% of White households



**137,896**

STUDENTS ARE PROVIDED FREE OR REDUCED-PRICE SCHOOL MEALS ANNUALLY

38% of RI households with children are food insecure.

# LETTER FROM THE NETWORK DIRECTOR

**“WE HAVE MET THE ENEMY AND HE IS US.” — WALT KELLY**

**“WE ARE THE ONES WE HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR.” — ALICE WALKER**



How can we hold two opposing thoughts together in our minds, one that presents humans as the problem and the other that holds that we are the solution? It's a challenge! It's also a necessity: on the individual or organizational level, both of these beliefs are true. We turn the heat up when winter comes. We grab a one-use plastic fork and drop it into the trash when we're done. We buy out-of-season strawberries (and regret it when they taste like crunchy nuggets of nothing). We also shop at our local farmers market every weekend and get to know our amazing farmers, fishers, and food entrepreneurs. We head out to farm fields to glean surplus produce for distribution at food pantries. We set up backyard composting bins and hire local companies to recycle our food waste so it is turned into nourishing compost.

As we moved through the 365 days of 2023, we faced incredible challenges. These included strong storms, high rates of food insecurity, and high land prices for farmers. We saw many local restaurants and food businesses disappear. We saw hundreds of thousands of pounds of food waste generating greenhouse gasses that were released into our atmosphere.

Big threats to a just and resilient food system call for a powerful response, and the members of the RI Food Policy Council stepped up to come together to achieve a number of hard-won victories. One of the biggest changes we made this year was a change in our own structure. In May 2023, the Council voted to alter its structure to be more aligned with its deep commitment to equity. As opposed to its old structure – and the structures of most food policy councils across the country – RIFPC now welcomes ALL people who

want to work together to support our mission to be Council members. As long as you agree to abide by our Meeting Agreements and participate in one of our Work Groups, you are in! Council members carry the power of the network with them when they go into the State House, and our new structure allows this power to be distributed more evenly across our state, laying the groundwork for progress toward justice and resilience.

Throughout this report you will learn more about our victories, meet some of our amazing members, and get a look at our ambitious plans for 2024. In 2023, we:

- Fought for our state's critical farmland protection programs, leveraging \$2.5 million for them in partnership with legislative champions
- Maintained an increase in state support for the Rhode Island Local Agriculture and Seafood Act Grant Program which provides small grants that support our beginning farmers and fishers
- Joined forces with partners like the RI Community Food Bank and the RI Healthy Schools Coalition to advance legislation to bring free healthy school meals to all public school students
- Launched our groundbreaking Food System Metrics Dashboard and refreshed our Municipal Food Systems Factsheets and created a new accompanying Toolkit for municipalities

- Helped scores of farms, fishers, and food businesses to apply for state and Federal funding, which in turn resulted in hundreds of thousands of dollars flowing into this critical economic sector
- Supported the state in updating its food strategy, which, when published next year, will set out a vision and a detailed plan of action for improving the state's food system by 2030

These victories benefit all Rhode Islanders, and they help make our state a national leader in supporting small and beginning farmers and fishers, cultivating underserved food entrepreneurs, and integrating food systems priorities into long-range climate policy and state plans.

Sometimes we are our own worst enemies. RIFPC is here to make sure that we can be our own local food superheroes as well. Our network has proven time and time again that real change is possible, and in fact inevitable, when we believe in ourselves, stay open to understanding the perspectives of others, and work together toward the common goal of a just and resilient food system. Thank you all for your ongoing support of RIFPC!

Sincerely,



**Nessa Richman**  
Network Director

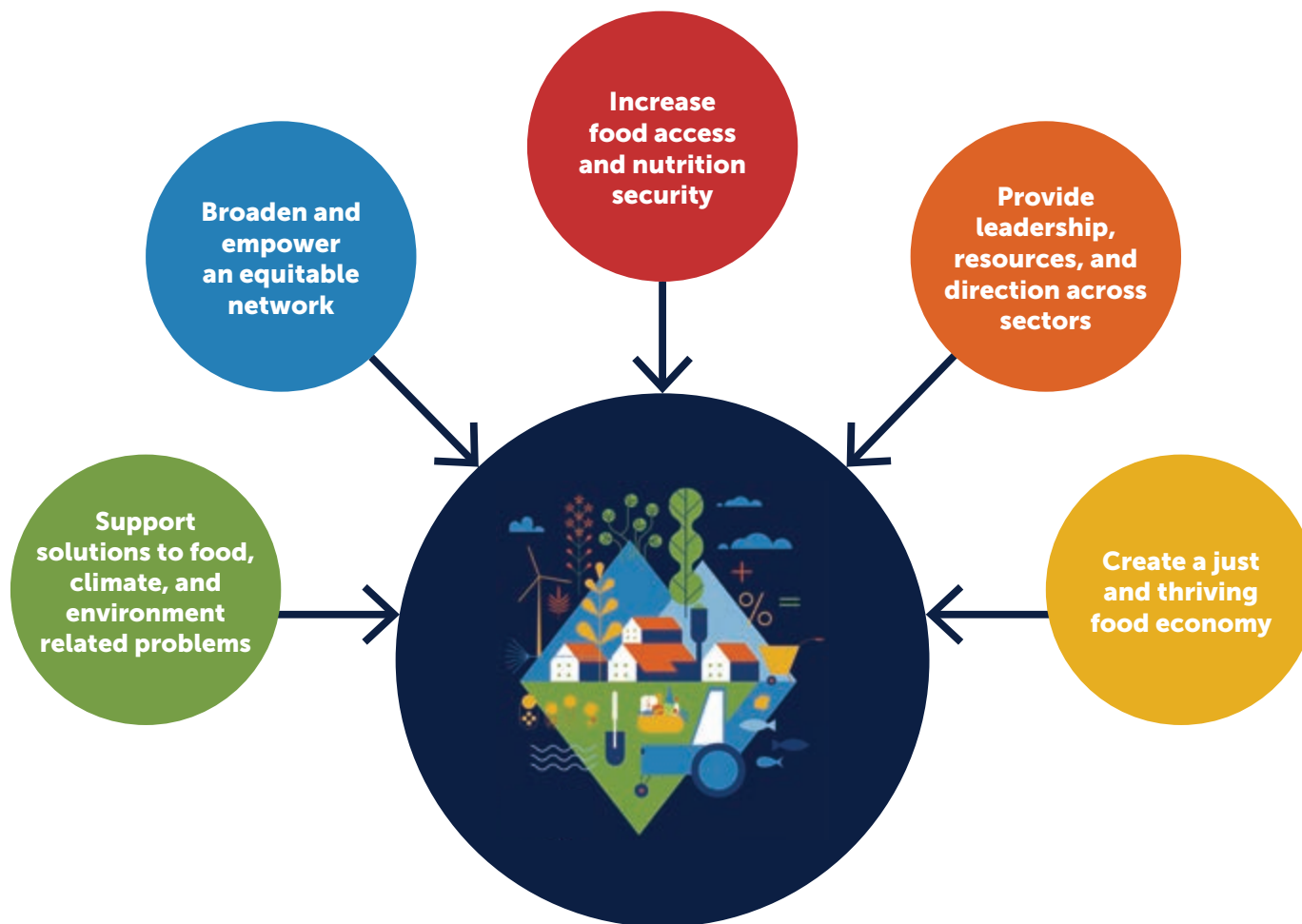
# WE'RE GROWING FOR CHANGE

In May 2023, the Council voted to change its structure to better serve our state and our commitment to equity. The reasons for this change are embedded in our collaboratively developed three-year Strategic Objectives.

Now, anyone with expertise or experience who wants to collaborate on advancing the Council's priorities and commits to upholding our shared values can participate as a Council member. No applications, screenings, or professional credentials are required.



# RIFPC'S STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES 2023-2025



**Increase food access, security, justice, and sovereignty** for marginalized Rhode Islanders by coordinating and advocating for changes that enable all people to eat healthy, nutritious, culturally and religiously appropriate food of their own choice, regardless of zip code.

**Support the economic strength** and resilience of RI food businesses, especially those that have been historically underserved and/or under-resourced.

**Create, contribute to, and advocate** for policy that integrates climate, justice, environment, and food recovery in a way that centers social responsibility and economic equity at the municipal, state and Federal levels.

**Provide leadership, resources, and direction** to state food system planning and policymaking in alignment with RIFPC's commitment to equity.

**Empower the network** – current Council, Council alumni, and the broader network – to build community power and affect positive change in alignment with our mission.



**Supporting and advocating for food producers**



**Responding to the call for more advocacy learning**



**Joining forces to raise more voices**



**Serving as a food system resource for state leaders**



# SUPPORTING AND ADVOCATING FOR FOOD PRODUCERS



This year we:

- Convened a coalition that influenced legislators to include \$2.5 million (as opposed to \$0) in the state's Green Bond for farmland preservation
- Connected with and supported an unprecedented number of urban growers through community partners to better understand policy needs, and started a new Urban Farmer Support work group
- Maintained an increase in state support for the Rhode Island Local Agriculture and Seafood Act (LASA) Grant Program
- Provided comprehensive support to farmers, fishers, and food business entrepreneurs in applying for state and Federal funding, bringing hundreds of thousands of dollars to the food sector.
- Successfully rallied for the passing legislation in support of Cottage Food law, making food entrepreneurship more equitable and accessible statewide.

“Thank you to the entire RI Food Policy Council team for the effective and persistent advocacy for LASA and other related food system programs. The budget recommendation of \$700K for LASA is no doubt an outcome of such.”

— **Ken Ayars**

Chief, Division of Agriculture and Forest Environment  
Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

“It is vital that we cultivate, train, and educate the next generation of natural resource professionals who will be charged with stewarding, protecting and responding to a changing environment and feeding our community.”

— **Shannon Brawley**

Executive Director of the RI Nursery and Landscape Association

# RESPONDING TO THE CALL FOR MORE ADVOCACY LEARNING



This year we:

- Developed and launched an innovative Food Leaders Lab pilot with a group of six network members who honed their ability to lead transformative food systems change, and gained a clearer understanding how to engage in public policy advocacy.
- Partnered with the Rhode Island Nursery & Landscape Association in developing, recruiting for, and launching a new 2-year Environment, Sustainability, and Management Associate Degree program at the Community College of Rhode Island, creating career pathways to living wage jobs in Agriculture and Food systems.
- Doubled the number of offerings in our Policy for the People virtual learning series to six free one-hour, interactive webinars: Data & Resources to Uplift your Food System, Farm Bill 101, Food Systems Advocacy 101, RI Legislative Session Review, State of the State's Food System.

# JOINING FORCES TO RAISE MORE VOICES



This year we:

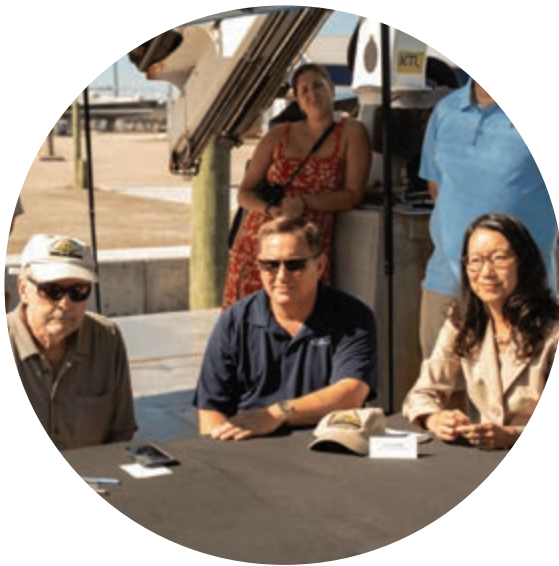
- Deepened and diversified partnerships with intention to ensure equitable inclusion in the update process of RI's food strategy, a detailed plan of action for improving the state's food system by 2030 (due to be published in 2024).
- Advanced critical food access and nutrition security-related policies through leadership roles in the RI Farm to School Network and the Healthy School Meals for All Coalition.
- Helped launch the Rhody Feeding Rhody Alliance, a statewide initiative that creates market channels for farms and fisheries businesses into the emergency food system.
- Continued to serve as the state's convener for the 140+ member Rhode Island Hunger Elimination Task Force, and implemented a new RI Food Access Bulletin monthly newsletter, boasting 473 subscribers and a 41% open rate.
- Co-published the New England Food Vision report as well as a Regional Approach to Food System Resilience report, as part of the New England Food Systems Planners Partnership in support of the 30x2030 goal to have 30% of the food produced in the region consumed in the region by 2030.

“Rhode Island’s model of cross-agency communication, planning, and coordination, as well as robust engagement through RIFPC (and other nonprofit and community-based organizations) offers a model for the other New England states as they think about strategically driving investment and policies that strengthen their local food economies. Rhode Island is uniquely positioned to support the regionwide 30×30 goal due to its statewide food system plan, Relish Rhody, its network of food system, agriculture and seafood partners, impactful agricultural lands that produce crops which are primarily consumed in the state, and an emergency food system that has successfully incorporated local food into its distribution.”

— **Leah Rovner**

Director, New England Food System Planners Partnership

# SERVING AS A FOOD SYSTEM RESOURCE FOR STATE LEADERS



This year we:

- Had more direct communication with legislators than ever before, including meetings with each member of Rhode Island's Congressional delegation.
- Brought RIFPC Farm Bill priorities directly to Washington, D.C., when Executive Director Nessa Richman met with staff from the offices of Senator Jack Reed and Sheldon Whitehouse in July.
- Presented Senator Louis DiPalma & State Representative Carol McEntee with the first annual Food Systems Changemaker Awards for outstanding legislative leadership for Rhode Island's food system.
- Were the 2023 feature for the Rhode Island Foundation's The Future of Food: Creating a sustainable food system report, and featured in several widely circulated media pieces.



**Congressman Seth Magaziner** ✓

@Rep\_Magaziner



We've got to work with local farmers, fishermen, & businesses to reduce hunger and cut down on food waste.

I was glad to meet with @RIFoodCouncil leaders to discuss expanding access to food to ensure that all RI families have access to healthy, nutritious food.

3:43 PM · Mar 14, 2023 · 1,360 Views

3 Retweets 2 Quotes 12 Likes



## **KNOW US BY THE NUMBERS**

2023 saw record participation and engagement, and according to our most recent Council survey, the vast majority of our network agrees we're actively cultivating a sense of community and mutual caring, and are committed to dismantling oppression.

We continue to explore ways to integrate and operationalize that commitment, and further pursue racial and social equity, led largely by our Equity Work Group and a new Communications & Outreach Work Group, who are designing for equitable access, fostering a celebratory culture of diversity, and connecting as individuals through shared values.





## NETWORK ENGAGEMENT

**272**

engaged network  
members

**9**

active work groups

**326**

participants in events



## POLICY & ADVOCACY

**14**

meetings with elected  
officials and municipal  
leaders

**6**

letters of testimony  
submitted

**176**

food systems-related bills  
tracked



## EDUCATION & PROGRAMS

**10**

free advocacy-based  
learning opportunities

**150**

hours of direct 1:1  
technical assistance for  
grant applicants

**105**

participants supported  
by technical assistance  
programs



## COMMUNICATIONS METRICS

**1.1K**

website visitors

**5,713**

social media followers

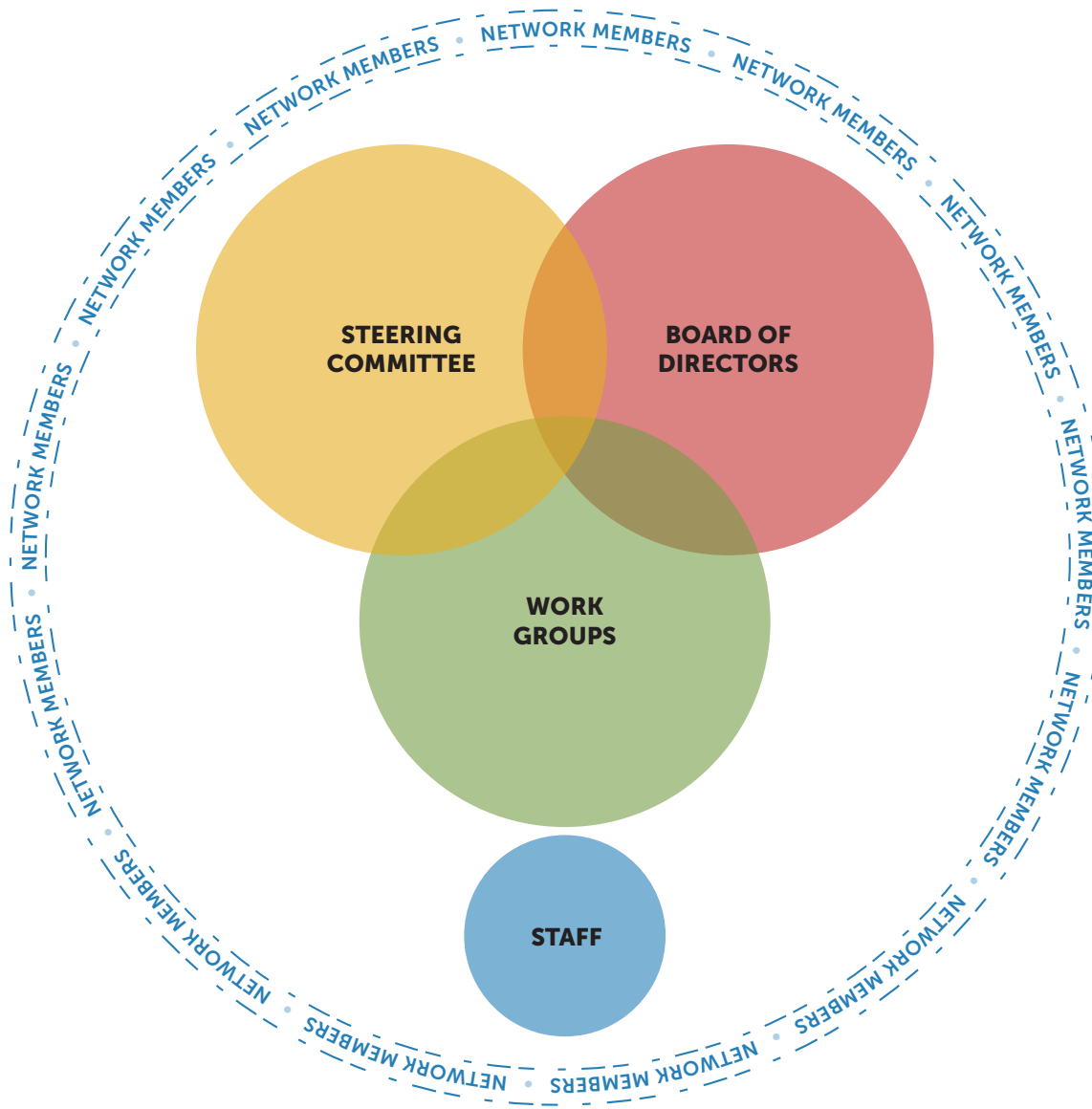
**2,752**

newsletter subscribers

## EQUITY AROUND THE TABLE

“I think of movements as intentional worlds, or perhaps more accurately as worlds designed by and for intentional people, those who are able to feel the world not as an unfolding accident of random occurrences, but rather as a massive weaving of intention. you can be tossed about, you can follow someone else’s pattern, or you can intentionally begin to weave and shape existence.”

— **Adrienne Maree Brown**



With our new structure format, work group activity remains the heartbeat, and a newly formed peer-elected Steering Committee has taken the wheel to guide the Council forward. Our Board of Directors has also continued to grow, settling in to their first full calendar year of leadership.

## 2023 STEERING COMMITTEE

Steven J. Arthurs

Rachel Averitt

Margaret DeVos

Tess Feigenbaum

Gemma Gorham

Ella Kilpatrick Kotner

Maggie Longo

Amelia Lopez

Diane Lynch

Vernon Martin II

Andrew Morley

Natalie Morris

Jeanette Nessett

Kelsey Rogers

Dana Siles

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Diane Lynch, President

Steven J. Arthurs

Courtney Bourns

Amber Jackson

Thea Upham

## STAFF

**Nessa Richman,**  
Executive Director

**Josh Daly,**  
Associate Director

**Rachel Newman Greene,**  
Food Access & Nutrition Security,  
Program Director

**Max De Faria,**  
Food Access & Nutrition Security Program,  
Senior Program Associate

**Rachel Newman Greene,**  
Food Access & Nutrition Security,  
Program Director

**Allison Montagnon,**  
Communications Manager

## INTERNS

Joleen Owusu-Sekyere

Madeleine Lee

Olivia Capriotti

# FINANCIALS

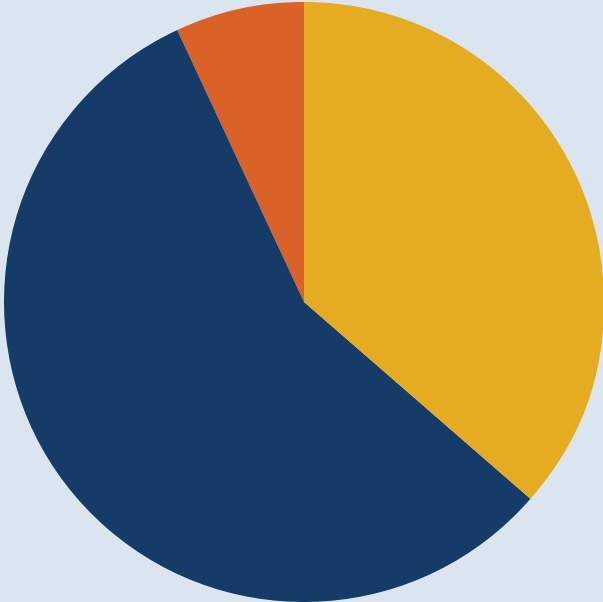
FY2023: 1/1/2023-12/31/2023

### REVENUE



- Government Grants — \$251,865
  - Private Foundations — \$287,143
  - Contracts — \$216,146
- TOTAL — \$755,154**

### EXPENSES



- Contracts — \$270,585
  - Personnel — \$417,813
  - Program & Admin — \$50,991
- TOTAL — \$739,389**

# FUNDING PARTNERS

Our funding partners are critical to our success. We are grateful for their ongoing support, which allows us to leverage innovative, inclusive ideas that create solutions to complex challenges, and foster a healthier, more prosperous food system in Rhode Island, as well as the Northeast region.

11th Hour Racing Foundation

Angell Foundation

Center for Mediation and Collaboration  
(Land & Sea Together)

Henry P. Kendall Foundation

Island Foundation

Point32Health Foundation

Rhode Island Department of  
Environmental Management

Rhode Island Foundation

Rhode Island Department of Health

University of Vermont, Food Systems  
Research Center (ASPIRES)

UNFI Foundation

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service

USDA National Institute of Food  
& Agriculture

USDA Rural Development

Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund



**RI FOOD  
POLICY  
COUNCIL**



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