



# Presentation to Maine Dept of Ag on Rhode Island's Food Strategy

Thursday March 21, 2024  
Julianne Stelmaszyk, Director of Food Strategy

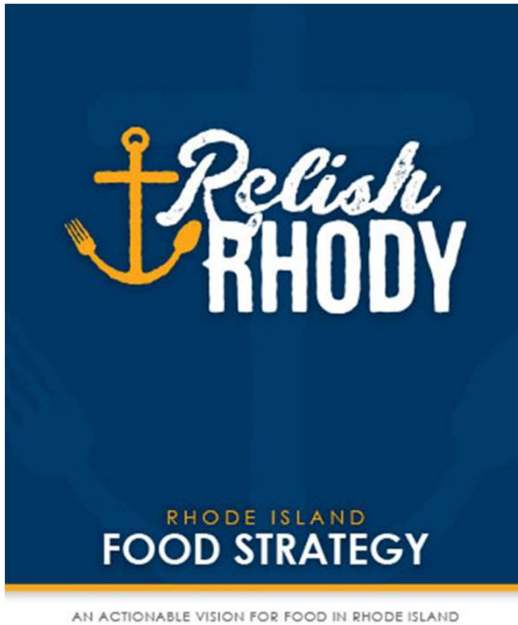


# Rhode Island's path to a statewide food systems plan

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- What is your relationship to the RI state food plan?
- When did RI implement a food plan?
- What was the impetus for the plan?
- How was the creation of the plan funded and staffed?
- What general categories were included?
- How did you hear from diverse stakeholders?
- What has having a state food plan enabled RI to do?

# Background on RI's Food Strategy 1.0 "Relish Rhody"



## INTEGRATED FOCUS AREAS

1. PRESERVE & GROW AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES INDUSTRIES
2. ENHANCE THE CLIMATE FOR FOOD & BEVERAGE BUSINESSES
3. SUSTAIN & CREATE MARKETS FOR RI FOOD PRODUCTS
4. ENSURE FOOD SECURITY FOR ALL
5. MINIMIZE & DIVERT WASTED FOOD



*Led by the Director of Food Strategy  
through an  
inter-agency partnership*





# A Brief History of Relish Rhody

**In 2016 efforts were made under former Governor Raimondo's administration to establish a State food strategy, creating a five-year vision for a more resilient, sustainable and equitable local food system.**

## 2016:

- Brooking's Institute report includes economic opportunities for food & beverage sector in Rhode Island
- Public-private partnership with support from RI Foundation, Kendall Foundation, Merck Foundation helps fund development of **first statewide Food Strategy** and **first Director of Food Strategy**, to be based at the Governor's Office

## 2017:

- Innovative **Local Ag & Seafood Grant (LASA) program** is funded at \$250,000 through State and philanthropic funding to invest in local food system
- **Relish Rhody**, a comprehensive food strategy for the State, is published
- **First RI Food System Summit** is hosted at URI

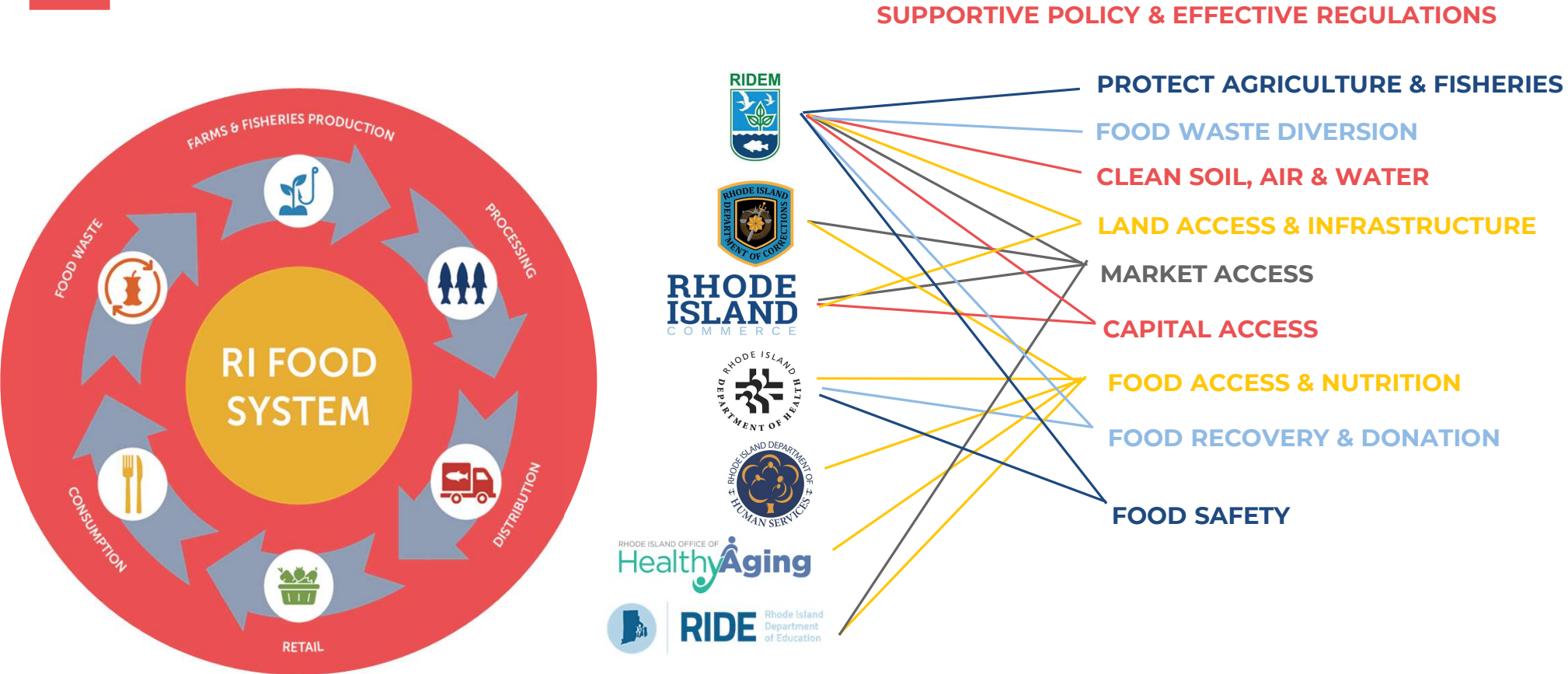
## 2018:

- **Hunger Elimination Task Force (HETF)** is established to implement short and long term strategies to reduce food insecurity in RI
- Director of Food Strategy relocates from RIDEM to RI Commerce

**2021:** 2nd Director of Food Strategy is hired at RI Commerce

**2022:** LASA grant program funding is tripled to \$700,000 thanks to Governor McKee and the General Assembly

# Interagency Food System Issues Map



Source: Graphic by RI Food Policy Council



# Key Findings of Five Year Impact of Relish Rhody Retrospective (2017 – 2022)

Link to retrospective report [here](#)

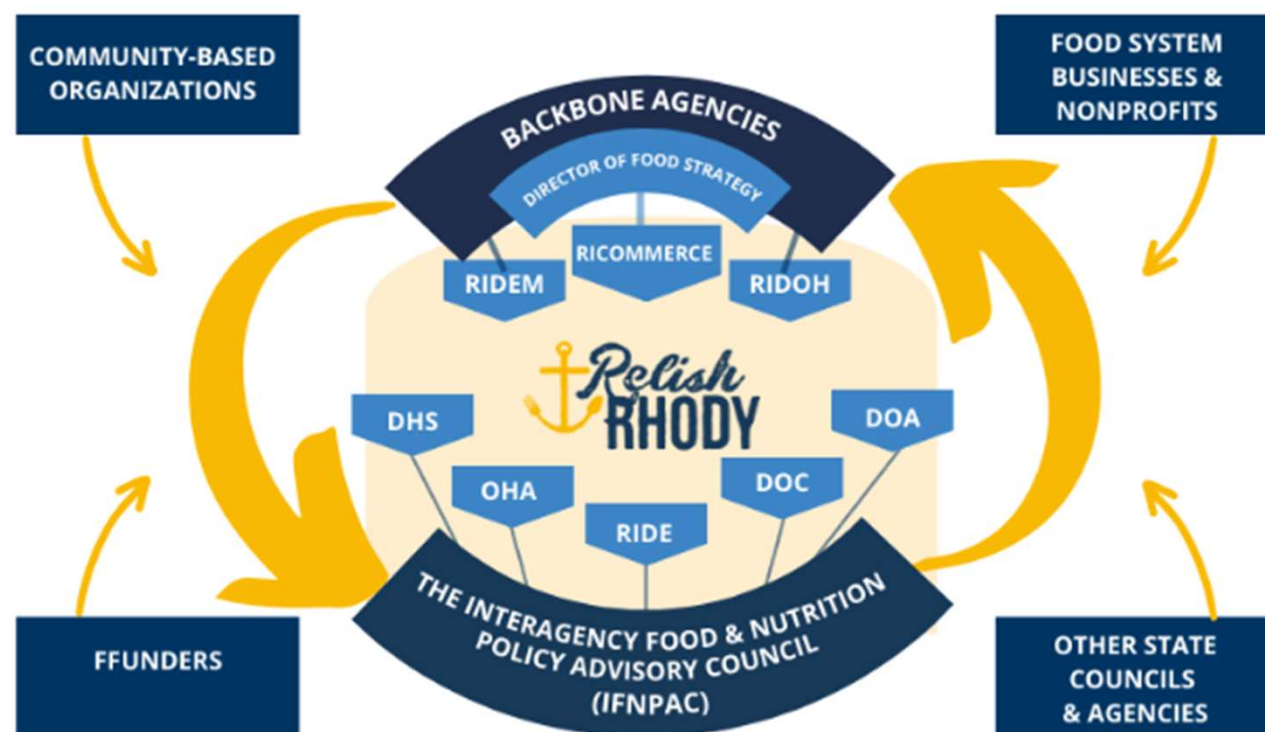
**RETROSPECTIVE** |   
Rhode Island State Food Strategy 5 Year Report | 2017-2022

**RHODE  
ISLAND**

# Key Findings: 5 Year Retrospective



## Participation & Implementation Partners



This map illustrates the interconnectedness and roles that State agencies play in addressing food system issues, policies and programs.

# Why do we need a state food systems plan?



- connect siloed efforts across agriculture, fisheries, public health, food safety, food waste management and economic development
- Part of regional resiliency planning that anticipates system shocks like climate change, geopolitical conflict, health crises and market fluctuations

- 1 IDENTIFY COMMON GOALS AND CONNECT PARTNERS FOR COLLECTIVE IMPACT
- 2 ESTABLISH SHARED METRICS FOR STRATEGIC ACTION AND GREATER IMPACT
- 3 INFORM POLICYMAKERS OF STATEWIDE AND LOCAL PRIORITIES
- 4 CATALYZE COLLECTIVE ACTION ACROSS THE FOOD SYSTEM



# Making progress...

- STRONGER COLLABORATION
- REGULATORY & POLICY CHANGES
- CATALYTIC INVESTMENTS IN LOCAL FOOD ECONOMY



Farm Fresh RI Providence Food Hub



Southside Community Land Trust's Farm to Market Center



Launched a new RI Farm to School Network



Launched new campaign of RI Seafood to Rhode Islanders

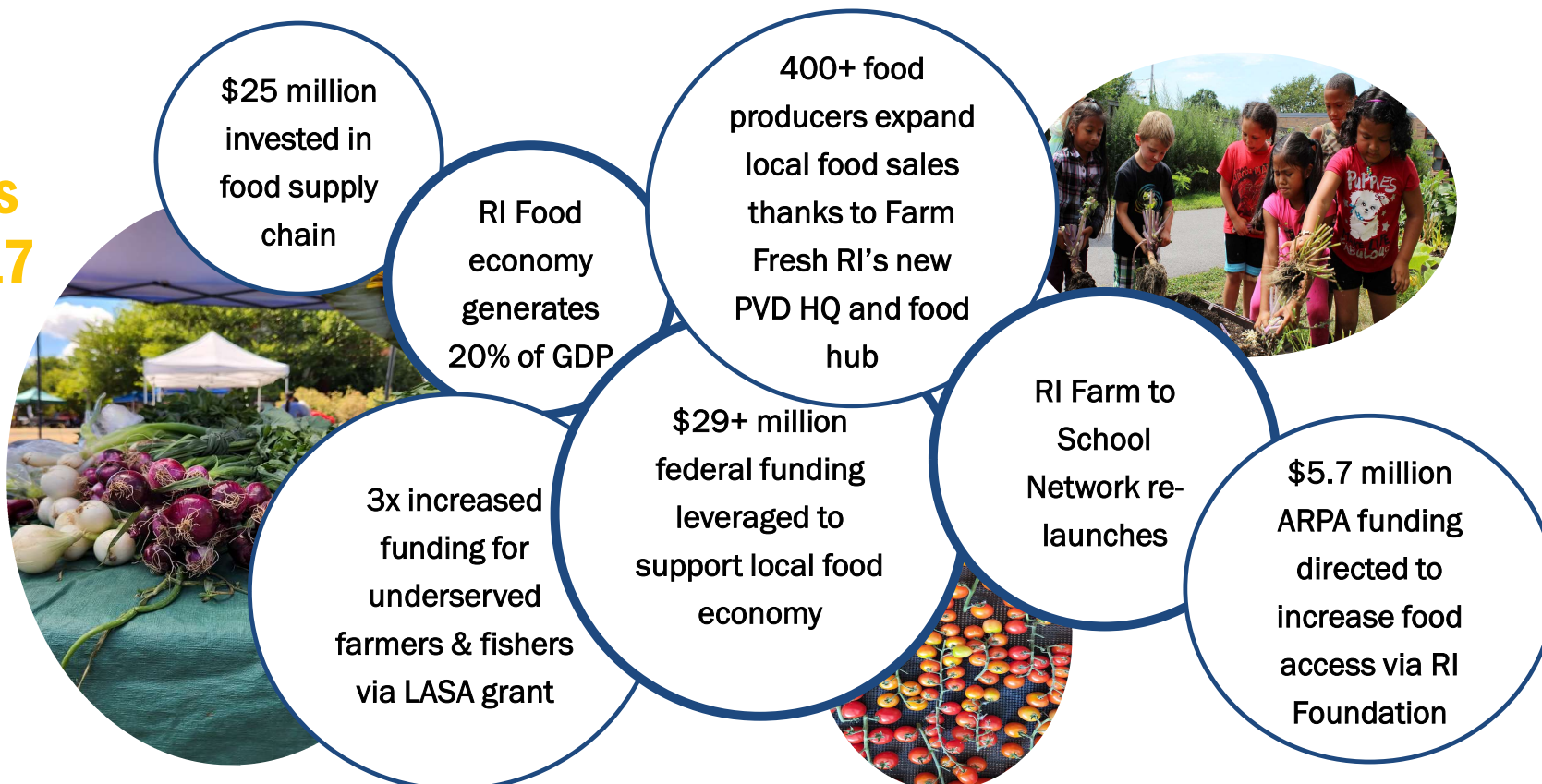


More than doubled funding for LASA grants to farmers and fishers

# Key Findings: 5 Year Retrospective

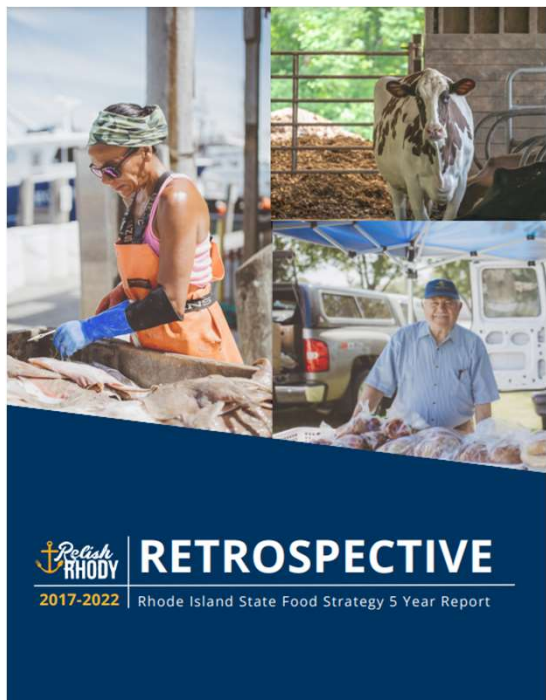


## Noteworthy Developments since the 2017 launch



# RI Food Systems 5 Year Report

*A huge thank you to Holly from Northbound Ventures for her work!*



## Themes and focuses for the 2030 Planning Process

- Prioritize Nutrition Security & Climate Change
- Invest in Middle of the Supply Chain Infrastructure
- Promote and Encourage Conditions for Community Food Sovereignty
- Leverage Shared Regional Assets and Efforts
- Support Targeted Policy & Incentives to Achieve Goals
- Grow More Food, Affordably and Sustainably
- Center Equity and Inclusion in the Food System
- Strengthen Collaboration across Government and Private Sector

**Rhode Island's food system has made progress in three key areas:**

- 1. Catalytic investments**
- 2. Policy and Regulatory progress**
- 3. Increased coordination and collaboration**



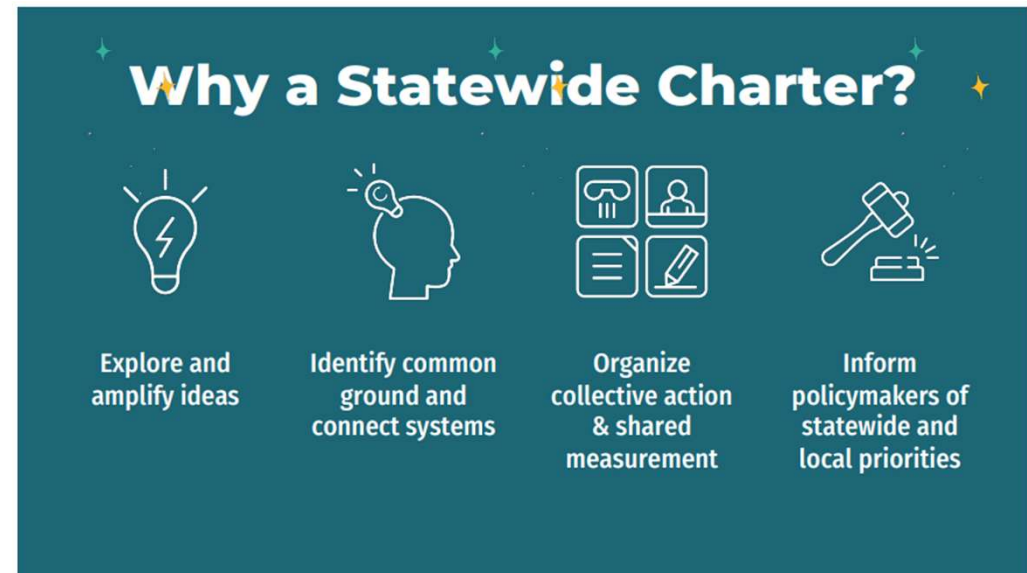
# Rhode Island Food Strategy 2.0

## Developing a renewed food vision for Rhode Island towards 2030

Urban Edge Farm, Cranston (photo credit: RI Food Policy Council)

# Why now?

- Lessons from the pandemic are fresh
- Focus areas have shifted since 2017, time to set new priorities and targets
- Moment to reflect on last 5-6 years of impact and build momentum towards collective impact in 2030
- Strong interest among stakeholders who rely on Relish Rhody to assess impact and develop a new roadmap for collective impact
- **Aligns with parallel planning initiatives:**
  - RI Climate Strategy 2025
  - RI Farm to School Network Action Planning
  - Governor's 'RI 2030 Plan'
  - New England Feeding New England 30% x 2030 Goal
  - RIDOH's Health Eating & Active Living Program



## Who supports planning & implementation?

### CORE STEERING COMMITTEE – 13 members

*guides project design, fundraising, and accountability*

- Director of Food Strategy
- Backbone State Agencies
- Narragansett Indian Tribe
- JEDI (Justice Diversity Equity & Inclusion) Committee
- Community Partners

### ADVISORY BOARD – 30 members

*Co-creation, provide expertise, connection to stakeholders, advisory support and inform priorities, strategies, metrics and outcomes*

### IFNPAC

- 9 State Agencies that examine food system issues and recommend policy solutions to General Assembly.
- New strategy will set priorities for the Council in 2024 and beyond

### CONSULTANTS

- Northbound Ventures, lead consultant for strategic planning
- DEI consultant for support



**Interagency Food  
Nutrition & Policy  
Advisory Council  
(IFNPAC)**

**Food System industry,  
academic, non-profit and  
community-based  
organizations**

### Project Funders:

RI Commerce  
Henry P. Kendall Foundation  
Rhode Island Foundation

# Accountability Structure & Implementation Partners

## PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE

### State Agencies

RI Commerce  
RIDOH  
RIDEM

### Narragansett Tribe

### Community Representatives

## SUPPORT TEAM

Strategic planning  
consultant  
DEI consultant  
Project manager

## FUNDERS

Henry P. Kendall  
Foundation  
Rhode Island  
Foundation  
RI Commerce

## INTERAGENCY FOOD NUTRITION & POLICY ADVISORY COUNCIL

## ADVISORY BOARD (30 members)

industry/business partners, academia, policy,  
public planning healthcare, state government,  
community organizations, regional organizations,  
urban agriculture, education, philanthropy, etc.

## STAKEHOLDERS

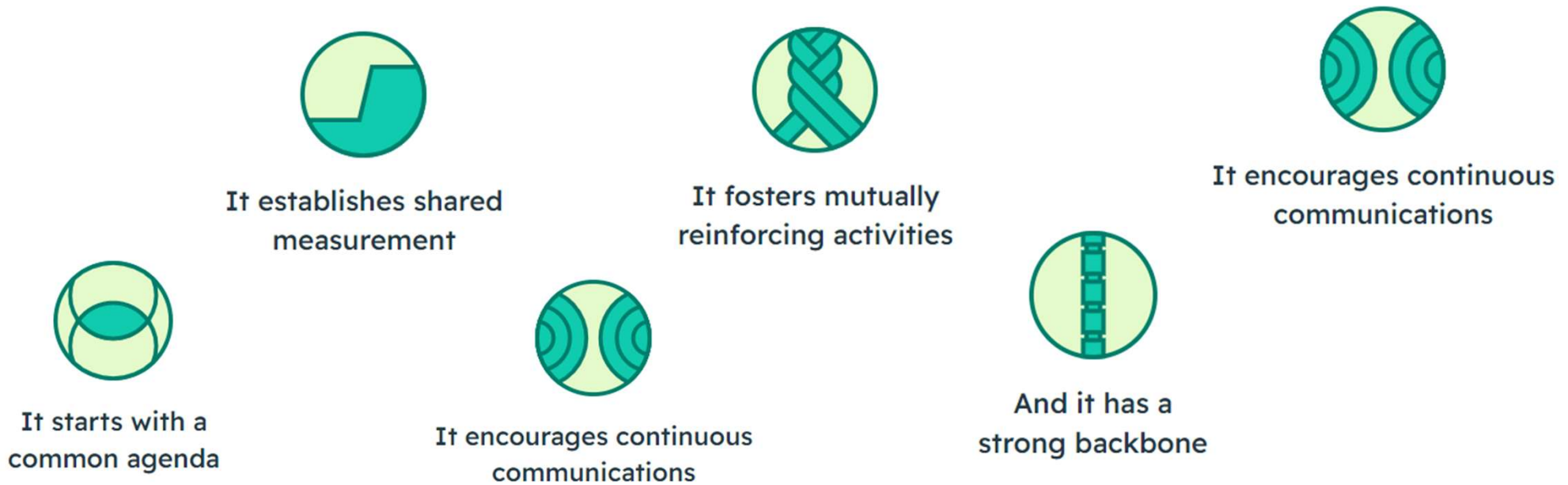
### 25+ Food System Brief Authors

Farmers, Fishers, and Food Producers  
Federally Recognized Narragansett Indian Tribe  
Communities of Color.  
Subject Matter Experts in food system issues  
Regional food system networks (NEFNE)  
Community/grassroots organizations  
Others TBD

# What is collective impact?

## Collective impact brings people together in a structured way to achieve social change

A network of community members, organizations, and institutions who advance equity by learning together, aligning, and integrating their actions to achieve population and systems level change.





# Guiding Principles

## REGIONALITY

Rhode Island's food system can be supported and strengthened through regional collaboration.

HF0

## EQUITY

The negative impacts of environmental, economic and public health outcomes of our food system disproportionately impact communities of color and low-income communities. We must build a food system that works for all.

HF2

## ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

The food system contributes 30% of global greenhouse gas emissions and our ability to harvest and produce food is already impacted by more severe storms, droughts, floods, warming waters, species migration, etc.

HF4

## COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Effective implementation and enduring success is dependent upon cooperation across a broad and inclusive network of stakeholders.

HF1



## Slide 17

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**HF0** I added this  
Holly Fowler, 2024-03-11T16:04:54.717

**HF1** I added this  
Holly Fowler, 2024-03-11T16:05:06.310

**HF2** Everyone? All people? Where do you want to include species? I am making a suggestion under the next bullet.  
Holly Fowler, 2024-03-11T16:07:05.966

**HF3** Added  
Holly Fowler, 2024-03-11T16:07:22.654

**HF4** Added these specific "environmental disruptions"  
Holly Fowler, 2024-03-11T16:08:51.498

# Our Approach to Strategic Planning



**Strategies used to develop plans**



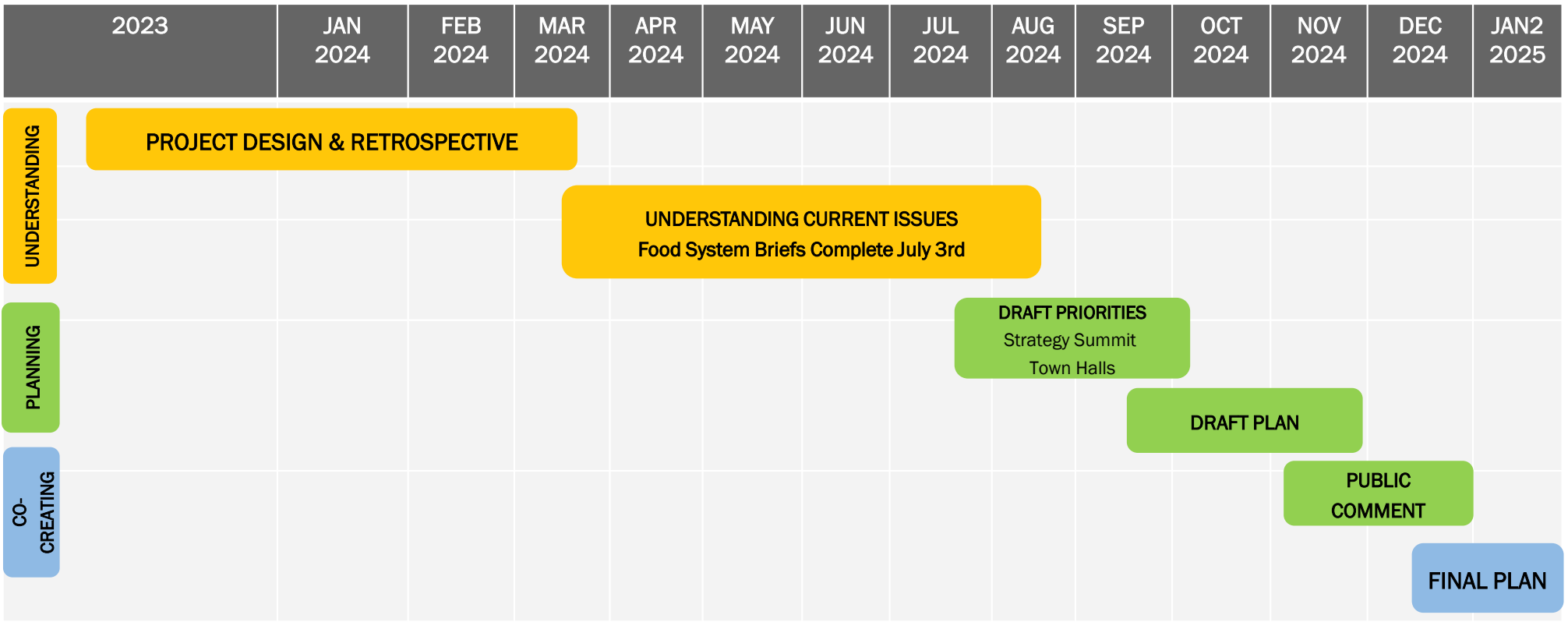
## Slide 18

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**HF0** This is a good place to emphasize engagement "early, often and in different environments".  
Holly Fowler, 2024-03-11T15:52:02.467

# Project Timeline

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS --- DESIGN REFLECT RESEARCH PLAN ENGAGE IMPLEMENT EVALUATE



**HF0** "Engage" should be continuous throughout the process rather than a stand alone "phase". Implement and Evaluate don't really have a place on the page given where the timeline ends. I would remove this header and just speak to these phases.

Holly Fowler, 2024-03-11T15:54:15.233

# RI Food System Briefs

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**RHODE  
ISLAND**

# Brief Process Development

Inspired by VT Farm to Plate 2.0 which developed 54 Product, Market and Issue Briefs to inform strategic priorities, metrics and goals

Lead Authors  
Contributing Authors

EXAMPLE →  
Farmland Conservation



**VERMONT FOOD SYSTEM PLAN ISSUE BRIEF**

**ISSUE:**  
Farmland Conservation

**farm to plate** VERMONT  
AGENCY OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD & MARKETS  
www.Agriculture.Vermont.gov

### What's At Stake?

Over the past 40 years, Vermont made substantial investment and progress in farmland conservation, permanently conserving 15-20% of the state's farmland.<sup>1</sup> Farmers have greatly benefited from ongoing, coordinated conservation efforts, yet threats to farm viability in the state continue to loom large. At least 3,000 Vermont farms and many more acres of high-quality agricultural soils are not conserved.<sup>2</sup> Over the next five years, as many as 300 Vermont farms (conserved and not-conserved) may change hands as existing farmers retire. If managed strategically, these transfers could lead to the next generation of vital farms and strengthen Vermont's rural economies. If not, land farmed for generations could sit fallow, become less productive, or be lost to development. The COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on the urgency of securing our agricultural land base in order to support a more localized food supply.

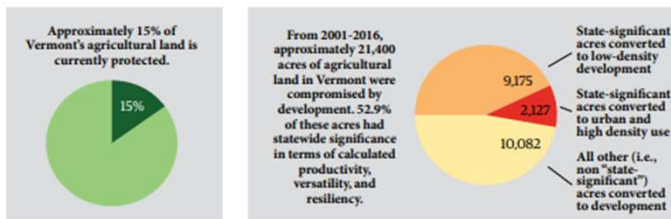
### Current Conditions

Farmland conservation is one of the best ways to protect Vermont farmland from development, keep it in production, ensure localized food production capacity in case of emergencies, and maintain an economically viable agricultural sector.

Land is conserved with a legal document called a conservation easement (typically held by a land trust) which permanently limits development, restricts subdivision, and protects natural resources. This is also known as "sale of development rights," as landowners are usually compensated for the loss of the potential income from development (though some donate or partially donate this value). Conservation easements generally reduce the land's appraised value and can impact a future sale price. In Vermont, the Option to Purchase at Agricultural Value (OPAV) tool is typically part of the conservation easement, to keep land affordable for farmers with commercial agricultural operations and discourage conversion of good farmland into estate-type properties.

Selling development rights is a critical economic tool for Vermont farmers, allowing them to sell a legal asset while still retaining ownership of the land, and use sale proceeds to expand, diversify, invest in new infrastructure, buy more land, and/or facilitate a family transfer. Despite its social, agricultural, and economic benefits, land conservation is also challenging. Not all farmers want or are able to conserve their land. The demand for funding to purchase development rights far exceeds the supply, despite years of relatively stable federal and state funding for farm easements.

Permanent farmland protection plays a critical role in the economic transformation and ownership transitions that Vermont agriculture is facing, but conservation alone will not ensure the survival of Vermont's agriculture sector. Fortunately, Vermont's farmers, land trusts, agricultural lenders, and service providers are well-coordinated, and share key goals around the successful transition of Vermont's agricultural economy to the next generation, responsible land stewardship, and the importance of farm viability.





## Conservation of Farmland

### Current Conditions

Funders and land trusts use established criteria to assess a land parcel's resources (e.g., soils, water, special ecological attributes), development threat, and proximity to other conserved parcels, as well as the plans for the farm operation. The land is appraised to determine the current value with full development rights and the value after conservation with limited development rights. The easement value, and financial compensation to the landowner, is the difference between the two.

- For the past several years, the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board (Vermont's primary funder of farm easements) has typically funded 20 to 22 farm projects each year, protecting about 3,000 acres.
- \$2.7 million in state funding each year (on average) leverages \$3 million in federal dollars through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and \$1 million per year in philanthropic and local funds, as well as landowner bargain sales.
- VHCB's current conservation pipeline has 40 projects waiting to be funded with a value of over \$9 million of easement funding.

### Bottlenecks & Gaps

- An easement's value may not offer sufficient financial return for certain landowners.
- Criteria from funders does not always match the available land.
- Easement restrictions may not accommodate a landowner's plans.
- The volume of land that could transfer over the next five years will create bottlenecks for scarce resources and staff capacity at Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB), land trusts, and agricultural service providers.

### Opportunities

- Securing more land for food production through farmland conservation can be an effective strategy to address threats posed by climate change and global pandemics.
- The Vermont conservation community is coordinated and skilled at working together (see [Business and Technical Assistance brief](#)).
- Vermont farmers continue to have a strong interest in selling development rights, and understand the importance of securing their land base.

## Summary

Vermont has a long and successful track record of protecting farmland. Although Vermont ranks in the top 25% of American Farmland Trust's Agricultural Land Protection Scorecard of States,<sup>9</sup> more resources and new tools are needed to keep up with the current and anticipated demand, and to ensure that conserved farms stay in active agriculture and remain economically viable. As the pace of farm transitions intensifies, new opportunities and tools are emerging to help farmers access land. Vermont needs well-funded, coordinated programs, including land conservation, to support the transition of farmland and farm businesses in Vermont. Ultimately, successful farmland conservation strengthens both community vitality and farm viability.

## Recommendations

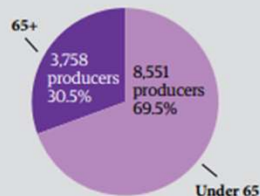
- Support the development of additional tools that can be applied to already-conserved properties to ensure affordability and access for the next generation. Some examples include performance mortgages, shared equity models, ground leases, and more. To support this, create a lending vehicle specifically set up to provide low-cost capital to alternative ownership models that may be challenging to finance through traditional farm loan programs.
- Fully fund the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board through the Property Transfer Tax Fund. This funding is essential in order to capture the opportunity to protect farmland now as successions accelerate and the risk of losing farmland increases.
- Allocate \$3 million annually to VHCB's Farm & Forest Viability program in order to expand their capacity to provide critical business and technical assistance services to farms and forest products businesses of all types across Vermont. (see [Business and Technical Assistance brief](#))
- Appropriate \$3 million of flexible, low-cost financing to a Community Development Financial Institution or other lender, to support new farmers in purchasing farmland. This could be leveraged by VLT's \$15 million Farmland Futures Fund. These funds would be used in coordination with VHCB's Farm and Forest Viability Program as well as the Working Lands Enterprise Fund.
- Enhance equitable access to farmland, as VLT has done with the Pine Island Community Farm in Colchester. Partner with and support organizations that assist Black, Indigenous, and People of Color farmers gain access to viable farmland.

## Conservation and Land Transfers

### Current Conditions

The amount of farmland expected to transfer creates a tremendous opportunity to conserve more acres, add ecological protections and affordability options to already-conserved land, help new or beginning farmers gain access to the transferring land, or expand existing businesses. Conservation during a sale process can be a powerful tool to make land more affordable for a new owner, and if the property is already conserved, it may be more affordable than non-conserved parcels.

30.5% of Vermont's producers in 2017 were 65 years of age or older



Farm to Plate is Vermont's food system plan being implemented statewide to increase economic development and jobs in the farm and food sector and improve access to healthy local food for all Vermonters.

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAF) facilitates, supports, and encourages the growth and viability of agriculture in Vermont while protecting the working landscape, human health, animal health, plant health, consumers, and the environment.

This brief was prepared by:

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