

**RI Agricultural Partnership 5-Year Strategic Plan
4/28/10 Listening Session
North Smithfield Heritage Association—Slatersville**

All written comments transcribed verbatim

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

SERVICES AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT TO FARMERS

What's Working

- RI Farm Bureau
- RI Fruit Growers Association for education
- Blackstone Valley Tourism
- URI for assistance to growers
- Heather
- Farm Bureau
- new support by URI in sustainable ag
- dedication of URI resources to support farms as the farming/local ag paradigm evolves
- new staff in Coop Extension supporting farms in RI
- we have a lot of people willing to work for food
- USDA NRCS
- the increase in the number of NGOs and other agencies interested in farm issues
- NRCS
- Division of Agriculture
- Kristen at URI
- workshops, networking sessions, guest speakers—sharing experiences
- NRCS
- USDA NRCS
- workshops
- 3 Frost—free hydrants courtesy USDA after 30 years of hoses and buckets from the house—a blessing
- fencing for perimeter this year—USDA
- wiring in place for plugs on hydrants (water warmers in winter) and for 2 light posts
- other farmers
- Ken Ayars
- NRCS funding
- URI Coop Extension
- NRCS
- RC&D
- Division of Ag
- North RI Conservation District
- NRCS
- Division of Ag
- URI—Kristen

- limited availability of start-up education for would-be farmers—e.g. Exploring the Small Farm Dream
- Kristen at URI ✓✓
- Division of Ag
- Other farmers—network ✓✓
- Farm Bureau
- NRCS ✓✓
- RC&D
- Ag community is cohesive and communicates well—results in 1-stop shopping for resources, grants, etc
- listening sessions
- Southside Community Land Trust—many people going into agriculture from their small plots/mentoring
- RI is a small state—many opportunities to coordinate

What More is Needed / Challenges

- tax exempt for farms that produce more revenue in other products and services other than agriculture—I have to file separately
- so many organizations—so little time to keep track of it all
- more extension staff
- community
- grant writing
- knowing where opportunities are
- funding URI and ag support
- large animal vet
- federal funding to support “formula programs” like Coop Ext and the Ag Exp stations
 - o state match to meet the federal match requirements for a 1:1—Fed: 3-party match
- re-establish the trust of the ag community with its Land Grant Inst
- business class for farm (employee relations, financial planning, etc)
- more support for research done by organic farmers to develop better organic production methods and spread existing practices that are better scale appropriate
- support for organic farmers who want to reduce tillage
- equipment for organic no-till
- education on good no-till organic production systems
- the relative decline of the Cooperative Extension and Agricultural Experiment Station in dealing with farm problems needs to be addressed—this is an issue of direct importance to the state’s economy
- a strengthening of the Division of Agriculture as a one-stop center for agricultural issues similar to the role of the aquaculture coordinator who is housed at the CRMC—simple coordination of many agencies is instrumental in fostering approx 10% annual growth in aquaculture industry in RI
- help with grants
- need more large animal vets
- need more farm equipment dealers

- grant writing
- additional informative sessions
- streamline services
- more volunteers to help with our programs
- grant writing
- URI had an interest in parasites in sheep, but the request for information was just too much to supply—too detailed
- multi-cultural / multi-lingual support with starting growing in this climate at high yield
- working in partnership to strengthen the overall food system
- more support for Ken Ayars at the state level (DEM)—staff
- connection between urban and rural growers
- things need to move more quickly—operates at a snail’s pace
- programs should be custom fit—not a one size fits all deal
- large animal vets
- large animal vets
- better programs to support ag at URI
- increased funding for URI/NRCS and other ag related programs
- more funds for URI and agriculture
- meetings like this
- significantly increase funding of the extension service
- study and exploration as to how to lengthen the season—for example low cost greenhouses
- limited availability of start-up education for would-be farmers—e.g. Exploring the Small Farm Dream—a large percentage of people in attendance have been farming for over 30 years—we need to support next, coming generation(s)
- need a more comprehensive, much more intensive program teaching business skills (finance, management, marketing) e.g. Tilling the Soil—this probably needs to be subsidized to keep tuition low
- Division of ag—more funding/money
- more funding for URI—rebuild coop ext—permanent funding for agent ✓✓
- more funding for research specialists and extension specialists
- collaboration between regional extension providers
- “library” collecting info/research from around region
- website
- large animal vets
- finding info on reducing tillage on small organic farms
- streamline the agriculture alphabet soup and services
- more listening sessions—1-2 times per year

BUSINESS SUPPORT

What’s Working

- RI Farmways
- state support of agritourism

- Farm Credit
- Little City Growers Co-op
- some local banks and credit unions who understand farm issues
- sales tax exemption
- loans
- Farm Service Agency
- grants
- tax exempt equipment
- Farm Fresh.org market mobile program
- RI Raised Livestock Assoc
- grants for farmers markets
- grants for alternative products
- ag loans
- sales tax exemption for purchasing supplies
- limited individual business counseling
- sales tax exemption
- Small Business Development Center—business planning
- RI Farm Ways—support of agritourism
- Division of Ag—support of agritourism
- Farm Credit ✓✓
- FSA—loans
- Chamber of Commerce
- visitor's centers
- RI SBDC—Doug
- USDA/Rural Development Council
- farmers bulk buying—seeds, etc
- RI Sustainable Business Network
- Exploring Your Small Farm Dream Program

What More is Needed / Challenges

- allowing farms to compete—as zoning laws have changed so has competition—allow farms to diversify
- business training outreach
- elevate stature of ag in eyes of EDC
- need it to be easier for CSAs to accept EBT/SNAP
- help doing taxes
- more vendors for feed, seed, fertilizer, etc
- greater interest on the part of the RI Economic Development Corporation on farms as a major economic engine and treating the industry as a multimillion dollar enterprise that it is
- money
- less paperwork
- business training
- funding
- bulk buying
- agricultural classes at URI

- comprehensive informational classes for new farmers
- legal and financial assistance
- capacity to increase our state's share of federal and foundation support for agriculture
- more business training outreach to farmers
- need RI Econ Dev Corp to acknowledge and incorporate importance of ag in state's economy
- increase opportunities for business trainings for farmers
- smaller loans for anything needed for farm—example: we need a well and cement floor in our barn, we can't get money for that—if you do something wrong on your farm you can't get money—no reward for doing things right
- tax credit or relief for legal farms on yearly basis
- more support for the farm to stay in existence
- broaden the sales tax exemption
- expand individual business counseling
- broaden exemption of sales tax exemption—problems now as separate filings are required due to multiple revenues
- more outreach about business training opportunities
- grant writing assistance ✓✓
- knowing where funding sources are
- simplification/consolidation for accessing regulatory forms/license renewals, etc—perhaps create one-stop shopping/online checklist
- RI Economic Development appreciating contribution of agriculture ✓✓
- in-state vendors—equipment, supplies, etc
- more bulk/communal buying
- state to be more friendly to small businesses
- sustainable business network of RI—more awareness
- tax help
- comprehensive course for new farmers
- capital—easy terms for small, high-risk ag businesses
- university classes directed at farm businesses—financial planning, employee relations (HR management, leadership education) ✓✓
- manager to connect farmers and suppliers (professional “dating service”) ✓✓

MARKETING AND PRODUCT DISTRIBUTION

What's Working

- the push to buy local—the grants to promote it, but lack promoting individual farms
- promoting “local” food
local farmers markets
- Rhody Fresh and similar initiatives
- markets are great—its easy to sell veggies
- great market for CSAs
- CSAs are great

- restaurants are supportive
- Farm Fresh
- Farm Fresh
- the direct marketing programs in the state are exemplary
- farmers markets
- local harvest
- Farm Fresh
- RI Farm to School Program—Kids First
- Visit New England.com
- Market Mobile
- Farm Fresh
- Farmways
- RC&D support in finding and working out solutions for the sale of RI wool
- Rhody Raised Livestock—retail meat products
- Rhody Warm Blankets—sale of wool
- RI Sheep Co-op
- trucking spring lambs to North Hampton Auction
- marketing of culled animals through Northampton coop in Whately, MA
- marketing of wool through Rhody Warm
- marketing fleeces at fairs
- handspun wool in small quantities at craft fairs
- Burrellville farmers market for Rhody Warm blankets and yarn
- Farm Fresh RI's mobile market and website—linking eaters, buyers and producers
- farmers market
- direct marketing at local farmers markets—local demand is very good
- direct market my products
- direct marketing on farm and at farmers markets
- Farm Fresh RI
- farmers market seminars and any info and suggestions for farmers markets
- farmers market
- farmers market
- farmers market
- farmers market
- grants for farmers market promotion—USDA and state
- visitor center
- Farm Fresh RI—Market Mobile—connecting farmers to restaurants, institutions, etc.
- Local Harvest.org
- RICAPE
- RI Farm to School—Kids First RI ✓✓
- Visit New Englang.com
- RC&D—blankets
- supply chain/distribution channels
- WIC, FMNP, other stamp programs
- RICAPE—Stu

What More is Needed / Challenges

- clear definition to “local”—advertising “local” when it is not, consumers think RI farms
- need to let public know where farms are located, not just promoting
- farmer markets
- farmers markets need to offer more products, decent process, so that public does not get the wrong impression that buying from farms is more expensive
- larger markets
- agriculture=health
- more local farmers markets
- better distribution system for larger farms so that they aren’t competing with smaller farms
- a different seafood distribution system making it easier for fishermen to sell directly to customers
- consumer education
- more USDA facilities such as processors—kill house
- greater expansion of commodity programs such as the milk cooperative
- promotion of product
- promotion around quality RI products
- consumer educator
- state signage
- an organized center for spring lamb (live) sales
- eastern market to connect producers with buyers
- summer markets are not advantageous for wool blankets
- might like to market meat locally, but don’t want to find my own customers
- more year round markets for farmers to sell at
- internet sales should be legal
- fresh meat sales should be legal and easy
- more social equity—re: access to local, healthy food
- there is a lack of distribution channels for local meat due to lack of economic viability
- support and development of local ag infrastructure
- connecting partners to coordinate production, packing, transport, etc—marketing channels
- infrastructure for collaborating and adding value along the production chain
- more/streamlined “market mobile” concepts
- education of distributors/large end users to increase appreciation of local produce
✓✓
- more marketing support to keep local food affordable to all
- more small farmers markets
- state-managed farmers markets should only allow produce grown by RI farmers
✓

AGRICULTURAL POLICY AND REGULATIONS

What’s Working

- continuation of federal formula funding
- creation of the National Institute for Food and Agriculture
- lack of regulations
- lack of regulations for veggie growers
- Division of Agriculture
- as far as they are allowed, the Division of Agriculture acts as a facilitators in mediating in regulation disputes
- right to farm laws
- Division of Ag
- NIFA
- right to farm bylaw
- Division of Ag
- am surrounded by houses—only 3 acres—lowest point on side road—adequate water so far
- the Providence Urban Agriculture Task Force’s input into the city’s comprehensive plan
- wish I knew
- right to farm
- RI water rights
- online access to rules/regulations/statutes—esp as relates to taxes
- right to farm (state)
- Division of Ag ✓✓
- National Institute for Food & Agriculture (NIFA)—created in last farm bill

What More is Needed / Challenges

- hunting on property not permitted allows wildlife to be problem
- in local towns—each town allows farms to sell different services and products, however not all are allowed to do the same things—i.e. weddings, bed and breakfast, entertainment
- residential property closer to farms—more complaints from neighbors about PYO or people in orchard too close to neighbor’s property
- escalation of agriculture to as an important issue as national security
- more folks like Ken Ayars
- appropriate on-farm composting regs
- scale appropriate rules for on-farm composting
- need to change the rule that says that you have to have farmed for four years before composting
- better regulations for small dairy producers
- zoning allowing in-ground greenhouses with out building permits
- more overall support from town and state
- more education of municipal planning boards about farm practices
- Division of Ag needs support
- farm signage
- NIFA
- allow more signage—including seasonal signs on roads

- chem lawn and other products used on lawns up hill—over 1,000 feet away, but drainage—I perceive as threat from chemicals in small pasture area
- ordinances specific to fostering urban agriculture—e.g. bees, chickens, hand tended farms, community gardens
- permits for compost facilities
- a statewide food council—is in the works
- raw milk sales are illegal—under XX amount of gallons per day should be exempt from regulations
- need more financial support for Division of Ag
- agriculture in statewide comprehensive plan
- reduce corporate tax for farmers
- agriculture signage
- more signs on major highways listing farms in area
- legislation keeping money brought in by Division of Ag in the Division of Ag—\$3 million in fees collected, but much smaller budget
- signage—a statewide, consistent law/regulation allowing seasonal product availability—make it clear so towns can't misunderstand
- guidelines for labels such as “RI-raised”
- address regs disallowing state-of-origin labeling
- what is “fresh”, “green”, etc
- legalization of and insurance for raw milk sales
- big state signs for farms
- farmers need to be more politically active ✓✓

EDUCATION

What's Working

- working with UMass
- educating abutters (neighbors)—they too often want to control how/when we farm
- student and faculty enthusiasm
- land and facilities
- in development: an undergraduate program in sustainable agriculture
- commitment of the College of the Environment and Life Sciences and the Land Grant programs to sustainable agriculture
- Urban Edge Farm
- the CRAFT program
- visiting other farms
- internet research
- dedication of URI and vocational agriculture instructors in the state
- education to the public on why we need local farms
- Kids First
- young folks
- 4-H clubs
- good news about URIs new sustainable agriculture focus
- local conservation districts help

- URI Coop Extension
- Rural Conservation Districts
- 4-H
- Kids First
- student and faculty excited about food production major at URI
- student interest in agriculture

What More is Needed / Challenges

- more research
- more facilities and instructors
- expertise in ag-economics and farm business
- mentoring and apprentice programs
- more consumer education
- greater support for the traditional land grant programs
- more funding for ag education in schools
- more gardens in classrooms
- funding locally grown foods for schools
- more education to public on why we need local farms
- more education and financing education—4-H
- get young folks interested in farming for the future
- more farmland and farmers in schools to show kids how to grow their own food—most can't and never will learn
- increased/larger/stronger ag programs at URI
- public education on benefits of local farms/local food
- local schools to purchase more local food including local meat
- more farming classes in elementary schools (through high school)
- less computers for kids—more hands on growing skills
- state on public awareness on environmental issues
- greatly expand curriculum in the public schools to demonstrate the importance of local farms and teaching/exposing kids to this potential career path—provide greater support
- more funding for 4-H
- 4-H age into agriculture—URI support for youth ag education
- education of students, community, etc of farming—funding
- gardens in classrooms
- funding to subsidize schools' purchase of local produce
- ability to hire “ag” faculty—funding
- recognize the diversity of our future farmers
- central clearing house for public education
- basic ag for all students

AGRICULTURAL LAND AVAILABILITY, PROTECTION AND REGULATIONS

What's Working

- land trusts actively interested in farming
- Urban Edge Farm—run by the Southside Community Land Trust
- not much
- farms starting to be recognized in some towns as important in maintaining local character
- land trust purchases to keep rural and protect existing farms from surrounding developments
- partnership with agencies and individuals who are offering land for growing food
- purchase of development rights
- Urban Edge Farm—state owned land managed by Southside Community Land Trust and leased to farmers ✓
- land link system in existence, but needs to be put in action
- land trusts becoming pro-farm/farmer
- FRPP funding, but need local match

What More is Needed / Challenges

- loans to be able to purchase farms/land
- many farms have higher price tags and loans are not offered through farm agencies for these larger farms
- better protection for state-owned farmland
- connections between land owners and would-be farmers
- more places like Urban Edge Farm
- cheaper farmland closer to Providence
- property tax relief for very small farms (5 acres or less) as long as they can provide that they are earning \$10,000/acre on product sales
- cheaper farmland
- affordable land
- incentive for people to lease land in ag
- education about relative lack of municipal services required by farms as “working open space”
- better laws to facilitate transfer without excessive transfer or estate taxes to next generation
- reduction in land taxes for farmers
- no inheritance tax
- incentive for keeping farmland as farmland
- education of land trusts
- land affordability
- lower taxes for farmland
- convince Governor to fund purchase of development rights program
- consciousness of value of small farms among town politicians
- contamination from chemicals
- help with purchase/leasing land
- more land
- less property taxes
- farmland property tax needs a lot of work
- too little land or protection and too many regulations to list

- inheritance tax on farmland should be eliminated
- property tax on farmland should be reduced—my farm probably won't go another generation
- ability for new or established farmers to rent/lease conservation property
- agricultural production land should be tax exempt from local taxation providing it is maintained as a productive agriculture enterprise—the criteria for production land would have to be defined
- stop inheritance tax so farms are not lost due to finances
- establish a land bank
- expand community farming sites
- using land preserved for ag as ag land
- land linking process
- education of land trusts of ag perspectives
- education of neighbors as to the value of farms (vs. houses, etc)
- affordable ag land
- farmland access counseling
- reduce property and inheritance taxes
- incentives (through taxes?) to rent/lease/sell land as farms
- funding for purchase of development rights
- vehicle mandating that land that sells development rights must remain farmed
- property tax relief for very small farms
- state-wide farmland taxation policy
- ability to ID sources of matching funds for FRPP
- encourage Governor to execute bond issue
- assistance for farmers returning land to production

FOOD SAFETY AND SECURITY

What's Working

- GAP programs
- GAP programs
- CSAs
- farmers markets
- we don't have any CAFOs here
- USDA permitting
- public health is being protected—no major incidents with RI farm products
- RI livestock assoc
- RI Dept of Health being willing to be flexible on permitting
- I think its already over done
- CSI/traceability of produce—good in case of food safety issues
- DEM streamlined permitting for on-farm sales
- RIRLA
- GAP certification

What More is Needed / Challenges

- grants to update food processing equipment
- continuation of GAP programs—widespread adoption
- local produce in grocery stores, schools, hospitals
- better ways of protecting irrigation water quality
- regulations for small plants
- greater effort by the RI DOH to understand differences between retail and other commercial food handling and farm practices
- more attention to goal of public health protection as opposed to blind adherence to a one-size-fits-all strategy
- GAP training
- GAP training
- allowance for cross raising of products—vegetables and livestock
- at this point, marketing meat from our farm is not an option
- less regulations for local sales would make farms more profitable
- USDA inspection to sell meat is a joke
- we spend as a county less on food and more on health care than any other nation—poor quality food=poor health—just like animals on a farm
- New England bio-security region for transport of animals
- less restrictions on what you can sell
- more GAP certification is needed
- more GAP trainings and certification—central locations, alternative times, etc
- food safety/trace-back education and compliance
- competition for USDA slaughter/processing ✓✓
- GAP protocol for mixed animal/produce farms
- scale-appropriate regulations

SUSTAINABLE LOCALLY PRODUCED FOOD SYSTEM

What's Working

- lots of community support
- Edible Rhody
- CSA
- farmers markets
- food production and agricultural program at URI
- farmers markets
- local food movement—local is the sensible choice
- local farms in RI can't supply local demand
- RI Raised Livestock Association

What More is Needed / Challenges

- definition of “local”
- increase visibility and access to local produced food stuffs
- more land in farms
- grain production
- cheaper farmland

- affordable food for all
- more land
- more farmers
- less regulations
- recruit more and diversity of young farmers