



Rhode Island LFPA: Growing Resilient Supply Chains from Farm to Fork and Dock to Dish

Rhode Island is a small state – a total population of just around 1.09 million – but its food and agriculture community has tremendous reach and impact. The local food industry – from farms to fishing boats – supports over 75,000 jobs in the state and contributes nearly \$12 billion to the state economy annually. Rhode Island is also home to the highest percentage of new farmers nationally.

At the same time, the state suffers from high rates of food insecurity. According to the Rhode Island Food Policy Council's Data Dashboard, an average of 11.7% (over 35,000 households) of Rhode Island households were food insecure from 2001 to 2022, and over 25% of Rhode Island households with at least one child under 18 were food insecure in 2021. This increased to 41.1% in 2022.

Looking to grow the state's sustainable, resilient farm-to-fork and dock-to-dish food supply chain while feeding neighbors in need, the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) signed a Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The agreement awarded RIDEM \$1.75 million to reach the state's most vulnerable citizens with fresh, healthy, culturally relevant foods.

To implement the program, RIDEM subcontracted with Farm Fresh Rhode Island (FFRI), a nationally recognized non-profit organization that has been growing and strengthening the Rhode Island food system since 2004.

By the Numbers

\$1.75 million total LFPA allocation to support a more resilient local food system in Rhode Island

More than **\$732,000** in purchases through March 2024— over half with socially disadvantaged farmers and fishers

95 local producers have provided nutritious, local food to over 35,000 Rhode Islanders

As the lead partner in the LFPA cooperative agreement, Farm Fresh supports other key food systems partners who are equally committed to connecting local farmers and fishers with consumers, specifically serving socially disadvantaged communities.

With long-standing relationships and operations in the state, these partners—Southside Community Land Trust, the African Alliance of Rhode Island, the Commercial Fisheries Center of RI, and Farm Fresh Rhode Island—used the dedicated funds to purchase fresh seafood, fruits, and vegetables from 95 local producers and distributed that nutritious, local food to over 35,000 Rhode Islanders.

“The LFPA program has enabled Rhode Island fishermen to get fair and above market value for their catch by directing product into the emerging market channel within the state’s emergency food system. A range of Rhode Island fishermen and seafood businesses have benefited directly from this program. A diversity of RI-caught underappreciated seafood species has been distributed among community members who typically would not have access to fresh, local, and sustainable seafood. Participating fishermen are enthusiastic with the results of this program both in terms of the economic aspect and knowing their product is serving Rhode Islanders experiencing food insecurity.”
 - Shaye Rooney, Commercial Fisheries Center of Rhode Island

Powerful Partnership Covers the State

The successful implementation of the Rhode Island LFPA relies on core partners to forward collective goals. To kick off the partnership, participating organizations aligned around a common set of objectives and principles, including a commitment to sharing information and resources and contributing to joint advocacy.

Rhode Island LFPA Program Objectives

- Support economic opportunities for socially disadvantaged farmers, producers, and fishers.
- Facilitate linkages between local farmers and fishers and underserved communities.
- Capture impact data to inform long-term sustainability and best practices.
- Strengthen, formalize, and nurture new and existing networks across the food supply chain.

Each core partner has a clearly defined role that enables them to focus on what they do best. Farm Fresh is the lead partner with RIDEM, and subcontracts with other key food systems partners to fulfill the implementation of the LFPA award, including:

- **Farm Fresh Rhode Island (FFRI)** ensures that food pantries statewide have the financial resources and access to order food directly from farmers. This encourages pantries to develop year-round and forward purchasing agreements with local producers. FFRI works with farmers on forward planning, online ordering, aggregation, distribution, and customer service to hunger relief agencies.
- **Southside Community Land Trust (SCLT)** works predominantly with farmers of color who grow on SCLT land through its Produce Aggregation Program and distributes the produce to people in their immediate community through partners and hunger relief agencies in Providence, Pawtucket, and Central Falls. This includes key VeggieRx partnerships with entities like Clinica Esperanza, a partnership with Providence Parks to distribute to eleven recreation centers, and a partnership with Providence Public Schools.
- **African Alliance of Rhode Island (AARI)** sources food from farmers of color, many of whom are recent immigrants and refugees, and distributes it to community-based organizations in Providence. AARI is also focused on access to land for farmers in the African community in RI. It works to bridge the gaps in culturally relevant health and food access for African immigrants and refugees.
- **Commercial Fisheries Center of Rhode Island (CFCRI)** sources and aggregates locally harvested and cultivated seafood – including scup, butterfish, mackerel, bluefish, tuna, Jonah crabs, clams, mussels, monkfish, flounder, whiting, and squid— from a network of fishers and then distributes it to partners across Providence.
- **The RI Food Policy Council (RIFPC)** monitors and evaluates the program’s impact and leads implementation partners in developing best practices. RIFPC is also helping to secure sustainable Federal and state funding that will support LFPA core partners and expand the market for farmers and producers to connect to hunger relief markets through the Rhody Feeding Rhody Alliance.



Photo Credit: Senator Reed’s Office, Sen. Reed Tour Open Farm Retreat with Andraly Horn in Cumberland RI

Consistent communication across these partners is essential. To ensure the program centers farmers, producers, and communities in need, Farm Fresh conducts individual check-ins with each partner and hosts a quarterly check-in to understand what is working and what is not. RIDEM, as the administrator of the cooperative agreement, meets with an advisory committee quarterly to review progress and any issues or questions that come up.

“One of the biggest ways I've seen the LFPA's impact is through the security we can provide our partner farmers. Contracting to grow creates a secure, consistent market for growers, and it's sparked so many RI farmers' interest in growing specifically for local hunger relief agencies. Our growers want their local community members to have access to the nutritious produce that they're growing, and because of the LFPA program, we're able to offer a feasible way for them to do so.”
- Shannon Hickey, Farm Fresh Rhode Island



Connecting Rhode Island's Farmer & Fishers to Hunger Relief Efforts

A distinctive feature of the Rhode Island LFPA program is the effort partners put into ensuring that the farmers, fishermen, and producers know that their products are helping to address hunger in the state. A 2023 survey of participating producers and fishers performed by RIFPC found that 69% knew that their products were being distributed to hunger relief efforts, and 100% of participants said they would continue providing food to this market. The producers could also use LFPA funds to expand what they were growing or making and provide more culturally relevant foods and healthier options. Among new or enhanced offerings are:

- With LFPA funding, SCLT has significantly increased the fresh produce it buys from 27 farmers and provided it free to roughly 7,650 of the state's most vulnerable children, adults, and seniors in 2023.
- Farmers selling through AARI provide culturally relevant produce, including bitterball, okra, sweet potato greens, and more.
- The CFCRI provides many community groups access to fresh, whole fish, as they prefer whole fish to processed fish.

Many of the relationships built because of LFPA are new - and these connections represent possibilities for future collaboration.

“I'm excited to start receiving the vegetables again this year. Last year I learned about so many vegetables I didn't know about before. I learned how to prepare them and properly store them. My health definitely took a turn because I started feeling better physically and even lost weight. After the program ended for the season I started buying more veggies from the store.”
-VeggieRX Participant, Southside Community Land Trust



Rhody Feeding Rhody Initiative

Building on the initial success of the LFPA program in Rhode Island, the partners formed the Rhody Feeding Rhody Alliance (RFRA). The RI Food Policy Council leads RFRA's work and creates sustainable connections for local farmers and fishers with food pantries, food rescue organizations, food distributors, and other partners so that Rhode Islanders needing fresh, local, culturally important food have better and more consistent access to it.

Membership in the Alliance is open to farmers, fishers, food manufacturers, and emergency food access providers. Together, they aim to build on the work started with LFPA funds to ensure that the local emergency feeding system in Rhode Island serves as a reliable wholesale market for local producers and harvesters while also becoming more resilient to supply chain shocks from public health emergencies and climate-related disasters.



"The Rhode Island LFPA Program has been an instrumental catalyst for collaboration and innovation for Rhode Island farmers, fishers, and consumers. By supporting new market opportunities for BIPOC producers and the seafood industry, we have provided fresh local foods to thousands of Rhode Islanders via hunger relief agencies across the state. LFPA is connecting Rhode Islanders to healthy, local, and culturally relevant produce and seafood, showcasing the power of partnership in fostering a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable food system for all." - Jack Sisson, RI Department of Environmental Management



Additional Resources

To learn more about Rhode Island's LFPA partnership visit <https://rhodyfeedingrhody.org/>

About LFPA

The USDA Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement (LFPA) is a transformative federal initiative that empowers state agencies, tribal governments, and their community partners to collaboratively source and distribute food, benefiting local socially disadvantaged producers and underserved communities. With a budget of \$900M, LFPA, led by the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service's Commodity Procurement Program, aims to strengthen regional food systems, support local and regional farms, and address hunger and food insecurity through partnerships with food assistance programs. This groundbreaking program has demonstrated its potential as a powerful investment in farms and communities in a short time since its inception in 2021.