

In 2017, the Center for EcoTechnology (CET) engaged stakeholders in Rhode Island's wasted food sector, in cooperation with Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RI DEM) and the Director of Food Strategy at the State of Rhode Island. With \$15,000 in support from United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), CET connected with over 50 industry members to build working relationships with them and to better understand the key drivers that are working well and those that would benefit from future marketplace development in Rhode Island.

The Food System is a priority for the state and wasted food is one of the five integrated focus areas of the Governor's Food Strategy. There is a clear baseline of activity and growing interest in creative solutions to address wasted food which will support the overall food system. CET has identified key areas of existing success, challenges to overcome, and opportunities to make a significant impact.

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## FOOD RECOVERY AND WASTE PREVENTION

### HIGHLIGHTS OF EXISTING SUCCESSES

- Phood LLC is working with the state of Rhode Island to offer their services to more universities in the state.
- Organizations such as Rhode Island Food Bank and We Share Hope continue to support businesses interested in donating their surplus food.
- MEANS is collaborating with the Rhode to End Hunger program to implement food safety training on their database.
- The General Assembly's Food Waste Commission was created to study wasted food in Rhode Island and make recommendations for next steps to incentivize and reduce barriers to food recovery and donations.

### CHALLENGES

- Rhode Island food rescue organizations and food waste prevention tool companies are encountering concerns about liability and food safety when speaking to food service establishments.
- Transportation is a barrier for food donation and food rescue programs.

### OPPORTUNITIES

Rhode Island is not alone in the liability and transportation issues observed. These are beginning to receive national attention and efforts are underway to address them. Solutions that could help Rhode Island are likely to evolve in the future, and could be adopted locally as appropriate.

# COMPOSTING AND ANAEROBIC DIGESTION

## HIGHLIGHTS OF EXISTING SUCCESSES

- Rhode Island has two operating commercial scale food waste processing facilities: Earth Care Farm (compost) and My Blue Heaven Farm (animal feed).
- Schools and institutions are implementing food waste diversion programs. For example, My Blue Heaven Farm works with nearby schools to feed their food scraps to the farm's pigs.
- There is widespread interest in implementing pilot composting programs and growing to commercial scale.

## CHALLENGES

- The Food Waste Recycling Law is driving some activity within the regulatory radius, but not outside that radius. Rhode Island and Connecticut are experiencing similar market reactions to this food waste ban structure.
- Organizations operating at small community scale, such as Aquidneck Community Table (ACT), lack the support and resources to expand to commercial scale.
- Cities across the state are interested in piloting programs for their restaurant sectors, but an affordable solution is not always accessible. There are a number of businesses sending food waste a considerable distance out of state.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Engaging food waste generators in the short term will help the anaerobic digestion facility under construction, and the Compost Plant's proposed compost site, to have needed feedstock for successful startup.
- The Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation (RIRRC) Board of Commissioner's approval to increase tip fees at the landfill should provide improved financial incentives for businesses to compost or anaerobically digest their food waste.



*Earth Care Farm, Charlestown, RI*



*Aquidneck Community Table , Food-Scraps-to-Compost program*

# INDUSTRY KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE

## HIGHLIGHTS OF EXISTING SUCCESSES

- Rhode Island businesses are actively seeking information about food waste diversion. For example, several have contacted the RecyclingWorks in MA hotline to find outlets for their food waste.
- The “Relish Rhody: Rhode Island Food Strategy,” highlights the goals and objectives of the state, including growing the Food Economy to create jobs, addressing environmental concerns, and providing adequate waste processing capacity into the future. These ideas are further elaborated and highlighted in conferences throughout the year.
- The Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic developed legal fact sheets on Food Donation for Rhode Island.

## CHALLENGES

- CET found examples of businesses and cities “reinventing the wheel,” and not using other success stories as examples.
- Many stakeholders are lacking relevant experience and there is no centralized place to find information and technical assistance on local solutions.

## OPPORTUNITIES

New information is being created by state agencies such as the Department of Public Health, and private entities, such as Phood LLC and MEANS, which will address key niche areas.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### RELISH RHODY RHODE ISLAND FOOD STRATEGY

**A strong food system supports Rhode Island's economy, culture, and people.**

As part of her efforts to grow Rhode Island's economy and support healthy families and communities, in spring 2016, Governor Gina M. Raimondo announced the hiring of the State's (and nation's) first director of food strategy to lead the development of Rhode Island's first comprehensive Food Strategy. With the support of many partners, this actionable vision was created, which builds on the state's momentum in growing its local food economy in a way that benefits all Rhode Islanders, enhances Rhode Island's environment, and celebrates the state's unique food cultures and landscape.

Rhode Island stands at an exceptional moment in time to release this Food Strategy. In addition to State-level leadership, there is a robust network of partners across business, government, and community who are engaged in and energized by this effort. Designed to be a five-year action plan, the Strategy takes a holistic view of the state's food system and is organized around three core themes: Health & Access, Economic Development, and Environmental Sustainability & Resiliency. It is further broken out into five integrated focus areas:

- INTEGRATED FOCUS AREAS:**
- Preserve & Grow Agriculture, Fisheries Industries in Rhode Island
- Enhance the Climate for Food & Beverage Businesses
- Sustain & Create Markets for Rhode Island Food, Beverage Products
- Ensure Food Security for All Rhode Islanders
- Minimize Food Waste & Divert it from the Waste Stream

To learn more, visit [relishrhody.com](http://relishrhody.com)

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

...strategy envisions a sustainable, it is uniquely Rhode Island; tions, strengths, and history tion and supporting the nt of the food eaten in id in the region by 2060.

**FOCUS AREAS HAS THE ACTION STEPS:**

- ...ance the Climate for Food & Beverage Businesses
- Identify, prioritize, and tackle regulatory challenges for food enterprises
- Issue and implement communications and engagement best practices for processes and regulators
- Activate funding gaps and communicate funding opportunities
- Recognize and celebrate food-system partners
- Support key agencies and staff in fostering innovation

**Ensure Food Security for Rhode Islanders**

- Create a statewide hunger hotline to local efforts to reduce food insecurity in Rhode Island to below 10 percent by 2020
- Increase participation in federal meal programs
- Reduce transportation barriers to food access
- Reduce the price and increase access to fresh food across the state
- Support development of community gardens
- Continue to promote high levels of health and nutrition in public schools and daycare facilities
- Expand partnerships with public health advocates
- Encourage health workplaces

**To learn more**

Contact Sue Anderball, RI Director of Food Strategy [Sue.Anderball@governor.ri.gov](mailto:Sue.Anderball@governor.ri.gov) 401-222-4700 ext. 2022  
Learn, engage, and discuss at [relishrhody.com](http://relishrhody.com)

*Goal five of the “Relish Rhody: Rhode Island Food Strategy” is to minimize food waste and divert it from the waste stream.*



# COLLABORATION

## HIGHLIGHTS OF EXISTING SUCCESSES

- Institutions are excited to collaborate to reduce costs and barriers to implement food waste diversion programs. Some universities in Rhode Island are diverting their food waste to Earth Care Farm and using the Compost Plant for hauling.
- Rhode Island has the first in the nation Director of Food Strategy who is effectively connecting this issue of food waste with the broader Food System.

## CHALLENGES

- There are some redundant efforts as cities attempt to implement programs similar to surrounding cities and towns.
- There is a lack of documented examples of local success stories and collaborations between waste generators, solution providers and government.

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Cities in close proximity, such as Jamestown and Newport, are considering small-scale pilot programs, and could collaborate to implement a program.
- Highlighting success stories would strengthen partnerships and create replicable examples for others in the state.

**Rhode Island has the first in the nation Director of Food Strategy who is connecting the issue of food waste with the broader Food System!**



*The Compost Plant diverts Brown University's food waste to Earth Care Farm in Charlestown, RI.*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Review the Food Waste Recycling Law and Evaluate Recovery and Processing Infrastructure

- State policy makers looking at wasted food may consider factors such as the size of the radius, tonnage, and industry sectors covered relative to the Food Waste Law. Private investors in facility development will look to committee findings for factors that will send a strong signal to the marketplace.
- There are key areas of development in the state where investment could help bridge gaps. Any potential investment from government agencies, philanthropic investors, and other stakeholders should consider the need for the transportation of donated food, and siting processing facilities in geographic territories that expand the effective area of the law. As infrastructure is developed, these priority investments will evolve.

### Develop a Trusted Resource for Information and Assistance

- Best Management Practices for food donation should be created and shared in coordination with the Rhode Island Department of Health and other stakeholders.
- It would be helpful to have one central place where interested parties can get the range of relevant information for Rhode Island, which could connect solutions across the wasted food hierarchy and the synergies among them.
- Web, telephone, and in-person technical assistance from solution-neutral experts would accelerate growth of the sector and increase the success of new solutions providers.

### Share Success Stories

- Promotion of successful local examples and best practices from across the region and country would help close the information gap, encourage industry growth, and accelerate adoption of new practices. For example, the fish processing sector could learn from regional examples to help inform a successful approach in Rhode Island.

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The connections CET made in Rhode Island over the last year have been encouraging, leading us to believe that with focused effort and investment, much can be accomplished in the coming years. Rhode Island is part of an expanding regional wasted food marketplace. Connecticut recently opened its first large Anaerobic Digestion facility. Massachusetts also recently released an economic impact study noting the tons of food waste diverted have nearly tripled over 5 years, supporting 900 jobs and \$175 million of economic activity. The conditions are right for Rhode Island to quickly achieve similar significant gains in its wasted food marketplace. CET thanks all the stakeholders who shared information and ideas, and looks forward to deepening our partnerships to support the Relish Rhody goals and make significant progress in reducing wasted food in Rhode Island.

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