

Rhode Island Farm Bureau Newsletter



Maintaining New Growth Post-Covid

Legislative Session is over for now, and I for one will not miss the incredible amount of emails from our lobbyists keeping us up to date the last week or so of session. Dozens of bills RIFB was following were up for Consideration in Committee or Vote in the Legislature in the rush to close out the session. The list on the RIFB website will soon be updated, and RIFB has a list of topics for possible 2022 legislation to be considered and worked on this fall.

On a positive note, early indications are that farm sales are continuing to stay up, with direct-to consumer sales starting off well with both veggie and flower plants from Spring into summer. It is nice to see folks are continuing with last year's uptick in planting vegetable gardens in response to supply concerns in 2020. Those plant sales are now turning to strong early-season vegetable and local meat sales. Farms and consumers will be adjusting to a post-Covid sales and shopping model, and as much as we hope to see consumers continue to buy local, only time will tell. But we can do something about it.

Adjustments were made on the fly over a year ago when Covid appeared and affected almost every aspect of our lives. Rhode Island's farmers deserve so much credit for creating new delivery, pickup and even no-contact pickup options; and in many cases, new online sales options. Farmers are innovators, and Rhode Island Farm Bureau is proud of how quickly they adapted to the circumstances we found ourselves in. We are well over a year into this new system and thankfully, restrictions have lessened or been lifted for most, and many businesses chose to continue to offer their new sales options. However the concern exists for many farms: "Will they forget about us?" "Will consumers just go back to the supermarkets and big box stores?" We hope the answer is "no".

Buying local is not just about supporting our neighbors, but also about re-connecting with our food. In the early 1900s, 40 percent of our population lived on farms; *today, just 1 percent does*. Many Americans learn about farming for the first time when they meet a local farmer or read about their products and production methods in a store. Local and regional food economies help non-farming Americans reconnect with all of agriculture. With the ability to stop by so many farm stands and farmers markets where you can actually meet your farmer, Rhode Island offers everyone the ability to learn more about their food. (cont pg 2)

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Maintaining New Growth Post-Covid, cont.

As farmers, we hope to see the same faces return to our farm stands and farmers market displays, remembering that local farms were there when the supply chains struggled. It would be wonderful if we could all work together to continue to spread awareness of the importance of not just local food, but local business. It will take not just those familiar faces in our stands and markets, but new faces to allow for growth and expansion of our farm-based businesses. Buying local and supporting small businesses helps our communities and our state. To paraphrase a comment from an important RI Agriculture meeting this week, “our farmers can’t make paper towels and toilet paper, but they did everything they could when their neighbors needed them.” I think that is also a good reminder to people that all our needs cannot be supplied by farms.

Of course consumers *do* shop at local markets, box stores, and online for most items, yet if each family dedicated just \$10-20 of their weekly food budget toward local farm and farmers market purchases, the resulting economic impact would resonate. This local economic impact is not just a dollar figure, but it is another family you have supported. This helps keep land in agriculture, it supports not just that farm but the other farms and small businesses that they purchase items from for resale. It also helps their local economy because that money is likely spent locally too. Dairy and livestock farmers need feed, bedding, veterinary and trucking services. Those raising produce require tools; seeds and fertilizer; irrigation equipment. Almost all farms require tractors and other heavy equipment, supporting those local sale and repair industries too. The increased success of these farm businesses then creates jobs for this growing economy, it creates food for not only their direct-to-consumer sales but also to supply local markets and restaurants. **Every dollar you spend locally helps an incredible array of associated industries most people don’t even realize are involved.**

A previous concern that became a reality during Covid was a lack of adequate local processing infrastructure in southern New England. Most local livestock farmers faced difficulty getting processing slots for their animals as farms all over the region rushed to take their livestock for processing to help fill the needs of their communities. It was not long before 18 month or longer wait lists became the norm for most processors, whether USDA or custom. We are just now beginning to see some openings as farms readjust their projections or hold back animals previously scheduled. RI Farm Bureau is currently a part of the Northeast Farm Bureaus Livestock Processing Issues Work Group to determine what exists for regional needs and how we can work together in the creation of a new regional plant. We are discussing the possibility of a dual-purpose plant that could provide both custom processing and also purchase livestock to create a local product, sell wholesale or sell in the in-house retail market. It doesn’t matter how high quality an animal you raise if you cannot get it processed in a timely manner, and the lack of processing availability extends all across the Northeast region.

We have an opportunity in agriculture to make the best of a bad situation: to continue to provide for our neighbors, to grow our farm businesses and increase sales. Letting your customers know they are appreciated is more than just a “thank you for coming”. Maintaining a positive impression of your farm, be it the people working your stand or the parts of the farm everyone sees, is also key. Make sure your location is the one they want to visit. In this month’s President’s Corner, President Wright discusses agritourism and how you can make your farm be that location people want to return to. Covid taught most consumers that their local supermarket chain or big box store won’t always be there for them. It is up to the farms to put their best products forward and show them that Rhode Island’s farmers will be there, to the best of their ability, with all the local products they can offer.

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20-050-334583.V1.6.2020



LOSS PREVENTION TIPS

PROPERTY OWNERS & COMMERCIAL OPERATIONS SAFETY- LIGHTNING PROTECTION

Fact: Although it doesn't get the publicity that tornadoes and hurricanes receive, lightning is the second leading cause of storm related deaths, trailing only flood. Each year in the United States, more than 400 people are struck by lightning.¹ On average, between 55 and 60 people are killed; hundreds of others suffer permanent neurological disabilities. In addition to causing loss of life, lightning also causes loss of property in the form of total fires, damaged electronics and equipment, loss of livestock and more.

Consider the following lightning protection ideas for your property:

Lightning Rod Protection System

The fundamental purpose of a lightning rod system is not to attract lightning but to provide a low resistance path for electrical currents to travel to the ground. With a properly working system, an electrical current is less likely to pass directly through your home or structure causing damage to electronics and increasing the risk of fire.

This system will include properly sized and placed lightning rods affixed to the highest point of the building. The lightning rods are connected to down conductors designed to carry the charge to the grounding rods. A properly installed ground rod system should have a minimum of two ground rods, driven at least 10 feet deep in the earth, optimally positioned at two different points near the structure. Special grounding requirements are sometimes necessary in shallow, sandy or rocky soil.²

Due to the significance of proper installation, it is recommended that only a qualified contractor install the system. One improperly installed component of the system can cause the entire system to fail or be ineffective.

According to the Lightning Protection Institute, there are five elements that need to be in place to provide an effective lightning protection system.

1. Strike termination devices must be suitably attached to accept direct lightning and patterned to accept strikes before they reach insulated building materials.
2. Cable conductors route lightning currents over and through the construction, without damage, between strike terminations at the top and the grounding electrode system at the bottom.
3. The below grade grounding electrode system must efficiently move the lightning to its journey's end away from the structure and its contents.
4. Bonding or the interconnection of the lightning protection system to other internal grounded metallic systems must be accommodated to eliminate the opportunity for lightning to side flash internally.
5. Finally, surge protection devices must be installed at every service entrance to stop the intrusion of lightning from utility lines, and further equalize potential between grounded systems during lightning events.

When these elements are identified properly in the design stage, incorporated into a neat workmanlike installation, and no changes to the building occur, the system will protect against lightning damage. Elements of this passive grounding system always serve a similar function, but the total design is specific for each structure.³

Certain codes and standards should be followed when lightning protection systems are installed. Standards and sources are listed below:

PROPERTY OWNERS & COMMERCIAL OPERATIONS SAFETY- LIGHTNING PROTECTION

- LPI-175: Standard of Practice for the Design - Installation- Inspection of Lightning Protection Systems (2008 Ed.), by Lightning Protection Institute.
- NFPA 780: Standard for the Installation of Lightning Protection Systems (2008 Ed.) by National Fire Protection Association.
- ASAE EP381: American Society of Agricultural Engineers, Engineering Practice.
- UL 96 & 96A: Standard for Lightning Protection Components (5th Ed.) and Standard for Installation Requirements for Lightning Protection Systems (12th Ed.), by Underwriters Laboratories.⁴

Surge Protection

Lightning protection systems are designed first and foremost as fire protection systems, to stop the building from burning down.

Even in a building equipped with a properly functioning lightning rod protection system, electronic equipment and appliances are still susceptible to damage. Lightning can strike a nearby power line causing an excessive amount of power to travel through the line and directly into your business or home.

In these instances, any items connected to the power system are exposed to the power surge. **Use of Surge Protection Devices can provide a more complete lightning protection system to protect structure, people, and equipment within.**

¹National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (2019). Lightning Safety for You and Your Family Retrieved from https://www.weather.gov/media/bis/Lightning_Safety.pdf

²Lightning Protection for Home, Property and Family. Retrieved August 2019 from Lightning Protection Institute at http://lightning.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Home_Property_Family_Brochure.pdf.

³Lightning Protection Overview. Retrieved August 2019 from Lightning Protection Institute at <https://lightning.org/lightning-protection-overview>.

⁴Information gathered in part from: Hallman, Eric M.; Chamberlain, Diane. Lightning Protection for Farms. Retrieved August 2019 from National Ag Safety Database at <http://nasdonline.org/1882/d001825/lightning-protection-for-farms.html>

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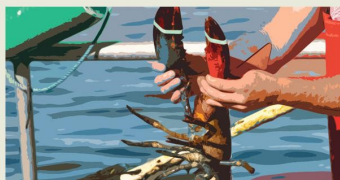
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FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT YOUR DISTRICT:

Eastern Conservation District (Bristol & Newport Counties):
Sara Churgin, schurgin.ericd@gmail.com | 401-934-0840

Southern Conservation District (Kent & Washington Counties):
Gina Fuller, gfuller@srccd.org | 401-500-0422

Northern Conservation District (Providence County):
Gina DeMarco, gdemarco.nricd@gmail.com | 401-934-0840



Southern Rhode Island Conservation District



The RI Conservation Districts are working with NRCS to write Farm Conservation Plans for the Farm Forest and Open Space (FFOS) Program of Rhode Island. USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP

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President's Corner

Opportunities Abound

As we have come through Covid and look at what we think is back to normal, we will find this new normal will not be the old normal, nor will it fall between the two. It is going to continue to move and we will need to learn to transition quickly, and guard against transitioning back to pre-pandemic “norms”. It has changed how people think about so much since 2019.



I believe 2021 to 2022 will likely be just as dramatic a change, but you need to guard against it—it behooves one to really study the market. People will be doing things differently as they come out the other side of this. There are many things that were learned by people as individuals during Covid, things they will continue to do and things they will no longer do because they've had enough of it. Agritourism is at a growth point, and you need to think how to draw people in not just today, but next year and beyond. Providing an experience, one that is not mediocre, is of key importance. You had a chance to help grow some family traditions, and now you need to keep those in the forefront of your advertising and therefore people's minds. Hold annual events, monthly events, special events. Memories a family makes at your farm are ones they will likely want to repeat. Be it mailing lists for postcards or emails, regular Facebook posts, local advertising in print or radio, all of these will remind them of the experience they shared with you.

One area farm stands need to consider is to be adapted to all 4 seasons. Yours needs to be a well-rounded experience, one that makes your customers want to return over the seasons and over the years. But don't over-focus on offering only your own products. There are plenty of local businesses you can offer products from, increasing your own sales while helping to support other local businesses. People don't necessarily care that the products on your shelf weren't grown by you, they care because YOU picked it out. For those who lack the location or desire to expand to agritourism, reach out to those who do offer those experiences to see if your products have a fit there. The importance of making an alliance with others who wish to create an agritourism experience should not be discounted.

In the end, customer satisfaction is the key. A high quality experience must be your goal. It isn't enough to have the best tomato, you must offer the consumer the best experience at your location. Whether it is unique, expansive or high-quality, remember that is what will bring them back.

The market is yours to keep, to develop or to lose. How do you plan to evolve your market?

Henry B. Wright III, President RIFB

The Zipline: I'm Proud to Farm for America

By Zippy Duvall, President, American Farm Bureau

As I think about our country's 245th birthday, I thank God for all those who have stepped up to defend our nation, for those who have fought for change and for those who bring communities together to support each other in times of crisis.

Our country was built on a spirit of self-sacrifice, ingenuity and hard work with everyone doing their part. Over the past 16 months, Americans have shown that spirit is still strong. We gave up time with family to keep each other safe. We found ways to serve and connect with our communities in spite of the distance. Others dedicated resources and expertise to create safe and effective vaccines. And as our neighbors were struggling, we came together to make sure everyone had the food they needed.

At the time of our first census in 1790, 95% of Americans lived in rural communities, and most families had to grow their own food. Today, less than 20% of Americans live in rural communities and only 1% are farmers and ranchers. At the American Farm Bureau Annual Convention in 2014, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack spoke about freedom. He noted that because 1% of the population chooses to farm, the other 99% are free to pursue their passion.

Everywhere I go, as I travel around our country, I speak with farmers and ranchers who take great pride in their life's work. We enjoy farming because this work is more than a job. It's a calling. We enjoy rising early, getting our hands dirty and putting in a full day's work. We take great pride in caring for our land and animals. And we recognize that through all our country's good times and bad times, it's our duty to make sure Americans have the food, fuel and fiber we need to help keep our country strong. As we gather around picnic tables, pools, and grills this weekend to celebrate our nation's birth, we will once again enjoy a delicious meal produced by America's farmers and ranchers.

Our economists at the American Farm Bureau crunched the numbers – with the help of some Farm Bureau price checkers around the country – and found that the average cookout basket for 10 people will cost \$59.50. The price of your July 4th cookout is down 1% from last year but is still an 8% increase from 2019. This fully loaded basket comes with ground beef, pork chops, chicken breasts, potato salad, chips, beans, cheese, hamburger buns, strawberries, lemonade, and, of course dessert, chocolate chip cookies and vanilla ice cream.

Even with the slight decrease in cost as the market continues to adjust from the pandemic, farmers see slim margins on the food dollar. U.S. farmers and ranchers get about 14 cents of every dollar consumers spend on food, which adds up to around \$8.33 from the summer cookout basket.

While farming is more than a job, that doesn't mean we don't worry about finances. We have families to support and a farm we want to leave in better shape for our children. It is easy to take the food in the grocery store for granted, but when shelves were empty at the beginning of the pandemic, Americans became more concerned about where their food would come from and whether there would be enough. Of course, farmers and ranchers were #StillFarming like we do every day. We worked with our partners in the food supply chain to restock shelves, fill food banks and made sure Americans knew we were still on the job.

Part of that job is ensuring we have a stable and secure domestic food supply, so we don't have to rely on other countries for our food. The increased public interest in our food supply brings new opportunities to highlight not only the commitment of farmers, but also the fact that food production is a matter of national security. In times of crisis, like the onset of a global pandemic, we all want to be sure that our families will be fed, and America's farmers are doing just that.

So as you gather together with family, friends and neighbors this weekend for a barbeque, a parade or a day on the water, know that America's farmers and ranchers are proud to supply the food in your coolers and picnic baskets and we are ever-thankful for the liberty we'll all be celebrating.

—This was President Duvall's Zipline column for the July 4th holiday.

RI Farm Bureau

16 B Nooseneck Hill Rd
West Greenwich, RI 02817

Phone: 401-385-3339
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