

# Rhode Island Farm Bureau Newsletter



## 2021 RIFB Annual Meeting at a New Venue!

Please join us on Thursday, November 18 for our Annual Meeting at Crystal Lake Golf Club in Mapleville, RI. Registration opens at 10:00 am, and workshops begin at 10:30 am with events continuing throughout the day. Our Business Meeting begins at 4:00 pm, Social Hour at 5:30 pm and the Dinner Buffet at 6:30 pm. To register find the [link](#) on our website [www.rifb.org](http://www.rifb.org), or stop by or call the RIFB office at 401-385-3339. Space is limited, so register early!

American Farm Bureau Federation Vice President of Public Affairs, Sam Kiefer, will be one of our evening's speakers. Sam leads the AFBF public policy, advocacy and economics teams and before moving to AFBF was the Chief Administrative Officer of Pennsylvania Farm Bureau. Former Maine YF&R Chair and Former National YF&R Vice-Chair, Nick Smith, is scheduled to speak in a Young Ag Professional's workshop at 10:30 am, and also to the full group at the dinner meeting. Blackbird Farms will be sponsoring another chef demo after lunch as well; these demos have been delicious and very popular!

We welcome raffle donations for the meeting. Each year we have a beautiful array of farm products, gift baskets from member & other local businesses, handmade crafts, gift cards and more for our raffle. We already have gift cards from Dave's Marketplace and Dungarees— the online working wear store. All proceeds go to our Scholarship Fund. In addition, our RI Farm Products Raffle tickets are still available in the office and will be available for purchase at the meeting before we draw the three prize winners that evening! If you are not attending the meeting, please remember you can stop by the office or call to purchase tickets! **Prizes are \$500- \$300- \$200** in member farms gift certificates! **\$5/ticket or 5 for \$20.** Don't miss out on this great raffle opportunity!

**Please submit any 2022 policy recommendations in writing to the RI Farm Bureau.** Please mail or hand deliver policy recommendations to: 16B Nooseneck Hill Road, West Greenwich, RI 02817 or email the scanned document to [director@rifb.org](mailto:director@rifb.org). Submissions must be received in the office by 4:30 p.m. on Thursday, October 21. Policy submissions will be reviewed by the Resolutions Committee for inclusion in Policy Items to be voted on November 18, 2021.

RIFB once again had both an Ag Education and RI Farm Bureau membership and informational booth at the **Washington County Fair in August.** AFB Foundation for Education "Ag Mags" were distributed to teachers, families and individuals to provide plentiful information on over 24 agricultural topics!

Volume 22, Issue 4

October 2021

### Board of Directors

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## **Christmas Tree Farming—You've Got To Love it!**

Jean Helger-Bento, Patchet Brook Farm, Tiverton, RI

*(Jean's full bio was in our January 2020 issue which is still available on our website)*

I have always loved Christmas trees and as a child became very excited when it was time to pick a tree. As an adult I remembered that those trees were small, sparse and not sheared, but as a child I thought each was the best one ever. My mother would pay \$1 to \$2 for the tree.

In 1973 I ordered my first thousand trees. It took forever to plant them! I soon realized they were not doing very well and needed a lot of care. With three children I didn't have the time. What trees survived finally grew to a size to cut. I didn't sell them but gave them away. By 1980 I decided if I was going to grow Christmas trees, I would need help from an expert. I asked my neighbor, Leo Clark, who owned Clark's Tree Farm, if he could help me get started. He helped me and advised me to join the RI Christmas Tree Growers Association. I joined and within a couple of years was on the board of directors. I then held several offices which led me to being elected the first woman president of the RICTGA. The association offered both a social setting and the opportunity to meet growers from the northeast and learn from them.

Today I sell Christmas trees up to 30' tall and have had the opportunity to send trees to the US Capitol, the RI State House, several government centers, colleges, business centers and malls, and many Newport mansions including the Preservation Society of Newport. My biggest and one of my best trees went to Bowen's Wharf in 2020 for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of having a Christmas tree there. Because of the pandemic it was decided to leave the tree up until the end of February to bring cheer to people.

Growing Christmas trees is labor intensive. The trees require proper care to have good color, many buds that grow into strong branches, and resistance to diseases. I purchase 2 to 3-year-old seedlings to plant into transplant beds, then transplant into the fields 2 to 4 years later. The trees need nutrition from fertilizer and lime, and weeds cause competition for nutrients in the soil and must be controlled. With all the rain and heat this year it has been difficult. If not sprayed on time, the trees will have insect, disease, or fungus damage. The most time and labor consuming job in Christmas tree farming is shearing. Every tree must be sheared every year until it is sold, giving the trees a conical dense shape. Even after all this work, trees still die from disease and fungus and can be damaged by storms. Many farms are losing Fraser Firs including mine. They are dying from phytophthora root rot. I will not plant any Frasers again.

### **What has changed in 40 years?**

There are far fewer Christmas tree farms today, just a fraction of what we used to have. The cost of land is expensive whether you are buying a piece of property or an established tree farm. Seedling and shipping costs are high and can be more costly than the tree itself. Growing trees is still labor intensive. Operating costs have increased as with all businesses. It is difficult to find workers; we can thank COVID for that. We buy in wholesale trees because the volume and demand of customers has increased and there are only so many trees that are being grown in RI. There are not many large RI Christmas tree farms remaining. Many remaining tree farms are quite small, and there may not be any RI Christmas tree farms that can solely survive on tree sales today. The most stressful time selling trees was last year during COVID 19. Nothing can compare to that. We made it and our customers were very cooperative. There was quite an increase in Christmas tree sales in 2020, and we expect a lot of that to carry over to the 2021 season.

When I started planting I planted three basic varieties: white spruce, the “bread-and-butter” tree; balsam fir, the traditional tree; and Douglas fir, the tree that needed lots of spraying for fungus. Over the past 20-25 years, growers, including myself, have been researching and experimenting with exotic trees from Europe and Asia, looking for trees that are disease and insect resistant, and which have excellent needle retention. I now plant only Meyer spruce, Korean fir, Nordmann fir and Cook’s Blue balsam fir for those reasons. These trees have the qualities I am looking for as a grower and will please my customers as well. The only problem left is deer which I have fencing for. Shotguns work too, but behind every deer is five more.

### **Promoting the Real Christmas Tree**

Many people think cutting a live tree is wrong and hurting the environment. On the contrary, these are the facts: Christmas trees are a renewable resource. When a tree is cut, it is replaced with a new young tree. An acre of actively growing Christmas trees provides enough oxygen for eighteen people every day. Christmas trees provide shelter and habitat for wildlife. After a tree has been used in the home, it can be recycled as wood chips, used at beaches to provide barrier and erosion control, and its branches can be used to cover plants in the garden for winter protection. Conversely, artificial trees are bad for you and the environment. Landfills will not accept them. They are with us for eternity. There is lead in them. They are manufactured in foreign countries. They are not real, but fake. Would you want a fake turkey on Thanksgiving?

### **The Rewards**

Farming is hard work. Growing Christmas trees is hard work. You’ve got to love it. But all the hard work is worth the happy look on the faces of your customers. After all, this is a happy business. Christmas tree farms are some of the most important places in the world. We help people celebrate the birth of Christ by growing Christmas trees. We enable people to celebrate, be happy, come together and experience that special feeling of peace and love.

*We don’t just sell Christmas trees, we sell an experience!*



Bowen’s Wharf Christmas 2020



Meyer Spruce for a Newport Mansion

THE GREAT STATE OF RHODE ISLAND



## LET'S TALK ABOUT THE STATE OF YOUR HORSE FARM INSURANCE

When you dedicate your life and well-being to the well-being of horses, you need more than just a policy – you need an ally. A one-size-fits-all insurance policy isn't for you. You deserve a customized coverage plan and American National gets it. An American National equine professionals insurance policy can provide you with a flexible package that allows you to tailor a policy to match your individual needs, with coverage options that include liability coverage, property coverage, and optional enhancements that cover things like valuable paper records, golf carts and vehicles, show judge liability and more. For more information, and to connect with a local American National agent near you visit [an.insure/rifb](http://an.insure/rifb) or call 800-899-6519.



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# LOSS PREVENTION TIPS

## AGRICULTURAL SAFETY - CORN MAZE SAFETY

A corn maze is probably the most common and recognizable form of agritainment found on farms throughout the country. But there is a lot more to a safe and successful corn maze than cutting paths through a corn field.

### Plan the Maze

The design for the corn maze is a key initial decision. Whether the maze is designed and executed by a professional maze company or based on an existing plan, the maze design should address numerous safety issues, such as:

- Clearance from other structures and vegetation
- The complexity of the maze/customer length of time in the maze
- Number of employees needed to adequately staff the maze
- Location and number of emergency entrances and exits
- Whether a platform is incorporated to observe activity in the maze
- Whether help will be provided using flags, texts, employees or other means

### Training

Properly trained employees are a fantastic asset to the operation of a corn maze or any other agritourism operation. Make sure employees are not only trained in their primary job but are cross-trained as well so that absences do not cause workers to be placed in unfamiliar situations. Also consider giving employees distinctive t-shirts or hats so customers can easily identify them.

### Anticipate the Unexpected

Sometimes, events conspire to turn even the best planned corn maze operation upside down. Anticipating what could happen and training the staff on how to deal with these situations is essential. Events that may have to be dealt with include:

- Severe weather (rain/lightning/wind/tornado)
- Excessive heat
- Injuries, allergies and other medical emergencies
- Fire
- Incidents requiring the police (assaults, theft)

### Communicate

A maze operator needs to communicate a variety of things to customers, such as:

- Warning people that they are entering a natural environment and to expect uneven ground, rocks, mud, insects, etc.
- Advising customers on what is and is not proper attire (ex: no bare feet)
- No alcohol, no cigarettes, no lighters in the maze
- What to do when help is needed

By using signs, notices on printed tickets, oral communication and website FAQs, customers can be made aware of the above issues as well as others.

The information contained in this handout has been obtained from sources believed to be reliable. The information is general in nature and may not apply to all circumstances. American National, its affiliates, agents and employees do not guarantee the accuracy or completeness of the information provided and assume no liability, expressed or implied, in connection therewith. Further, the information is not intended to constitute legal advice and should not be relied upon in lieu of consultation with an appropriate legal advisor.



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## Young Ag Professionals

On the gorgeous evening of July 31st, the first ever RI Farm Bureau Young Ag Professionals fundraising event was held at the historic Fry Farm in East Greenwich. With the support of the state Farm Bureau, the Young Ag Professionals were able to raise over \$2000 to donate to Ronald McDonald House Charities. The night consisted of great food, great people and RIFB board members Scooter LaPrise and Kevin Breene getting pie to the face.

The young farmers served over 100 people a meal consisting of barbecued local chicken, Confreda Farms' corn on the cob, homemade mac and cheese, and finished off the meal with locally made ice cream on top of homemade apple crisp. Boy Scout Troop 1 from Wakefield provided beverages as a fundraiser as well.

This event will most definitely become a yearly event with the proceeds being donated to various charities each year. Interested in joining YAP? Contact YAP Chair Maggie LaPrise at [maggielaprise@gmail.com](mailto:maggielaprise@gmail.com).



Two hundred pounds of locally raised chicken was barbecued for the event!



Board members Kevin Breene and Scooter LaPrise were voted by the evening's guests to get a Cabot Whipped Cream pie to the face. They were such good sports!



Farm hosts Cynthia and Scooter LaPrise served dinner alongside RIFB Director Heidi Quinn.

**Editor's note:** This fundraiser could not have happened without the strong support of the extended LaPrise family who did the prep work, yard work, barbecuing and cooking to support our Young Ag Professionals. Thank you also to Committee Chair Maggie LaPrise, Vice Chair Meg Quinn and committee member Cara Woloohojian (Cara did a lot of the cooking!). If you are age 16-34 and active in, or interested in, agriculture, please call or email the RIFB office for more information on our Young Ag Professionals committee. You can visit our YAP page at [rifb.org/young-ag-professionals/](http://rifb.org/young-ag-professionals/). You may also email YAP Chair Maggie LaPrise at the email provided above.

## HELP WANTED– Tiverton, RI

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## Cow caught your eye?



**Your ad could be here for just \$100/issue!**

Contact Heidi or Rebecca at the RIFB Office to learn more about advertising opportunities in the quarterly newsletter. 401-385-3339 or [rifarm@rifb.org](mailto:rifarm@rifb.org).

## DID YOU KNOW THAT YOU NEED A CONSERVATION PLAN?



### WHAT IS A CONSERVATION PLAN?

A conservation plan is a tool designed to help you better manage the natural resources on your farm and in turn may help you save money.

If you are in the farm program or are thinking about applying, this is a great opportunity!

Funding has been secured for a limited number of plans. Contact us today to assure you are approved for this special offer before all slots are filled.

**You can get a \$950 valued plan for only \$100 under special project funds!**

### FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT YOUR DISTRICT:

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

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

**Northern Conservation District** (Providence County):  
Gina DeMarco, [gdemarco.nricd@gmail.com](mailto: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.

## The #1 Reason People Don't Join Farm Bureau?

**No one asked.**

**Not a member of RIFB?**

**Know someone who should be a member?**

Full-time farmers, part-time and hobby farmers, landowners, gardeners, foodies and anyone who enjoys local food and farms in Rhode Island– you can join RI Farm Bureau and help us to support the future of agriculture in RI and beyond. We have a number of membership levels– find one that suits YOU!

You can stop by the office to join or renew, or join or renew online at [rifb.org](http://rifb.org).

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## President's Corner

### It is Hard to Beat Convenience for Consumers

Always remember the driving force behind where the customer purchases their food is convenience, then price. You will never displace taking the food from the farm to a convenient location. Think twice before you act, can you entice the customer to “your” location? Is it really convenient, and can you be competitive? How can you keep the customer coming to you? It would behoove you to increase the items available at your location. A wider array of products will help bring them to you.



The most successful people have come to the conclusion that it is smarter and more profitable to grow a façade and buy what they need. It is more profitable, and often the only way to run the business by yourself. Don't let your pride get in the way of offering quality products that your customers may also need. If you don't grow it, look for local growers that you can purchase from. There is not always money to be made in growing food, but there is money to be made in merchandising. If you sell sweet corn, offer butter in your stand as well. A cooler can be filled with local products that could round out a meal with your other offerings, or even hold basic purchases such as milk which many people need to buy. Private label items such as pickles and jams are a great opportunity to have your customers remember you. Most don't care that these are not your own fruits and vegetables processed in the jars, but they trust you to provide them with a good product. This then becomes your job as well, to be sure that the products you offer those customers are quality products that will keep them coming back and recommending your stand to others.

Local farms have a good opportunity at this time of shortages and high prices due to high cost and lack of transportation. While this will raise our inputs of fertilizer, seed costs, construction materials, and replacement parts, we can eliminate the transportation of our own goods when transporting from our field to our stand.

This ties in to another sales opportunity. Don't miss the opportunity to receive SNAP benefits at your farm by offering too small a variety of items. If you offer a broader array of products, you would be more likely to attract those who qualify for SNAP benefits to shop at your location. Recently, a SNAP increase was chosen over farm relief programs which would have raised the value of the products leaving the farm gate. This 27% increase is permanent, and increases average SNAP benefit by \$36.24 per person, per month, beginning Oct. 1. It erroneously assumes that farmers will benefit financially from the increased SNAP benefits being utilized, yet there is no trickle-down effect to farm income from Walmart or the big retailers that most SNAP benefits are redeemed at. However, you do have the ability to receive some of the increased SNAP funds by expanding your offerings. (If you do not accept SNAP benefits, but would like more information on how to become authorized as a SNAP retailer from the USDA Food and Nutrition (FNS) Services, reach out to Heidi at the RIFB office for more information.)

*Henry B. Wright III, President RIFB*

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## The Zipline: The Challenges Facing Young Farmers

By Zippy Duvall, President, American Farm Bureau



I have been a farmer my whole life. Starting when I was just a young boy, I would help my dad around the farm, and as I got older, I took on more responsibility. I could often be found early in the morning in the barn, milking cows before school. I was fortunate to take over the family farm from my dad like he did and many others have for generations. When I was a young man, the average age of a farmer was just 50 years old, but today it is over 57 years old. That means there are fewer young people in agriculture – a troubling sign for the future of family farms.

There are many obstacles for young and beginning farmers: two of the most challenging are access to land and capital. We're all familiar with the rapid increase in farmland prices that occurred between 2009 and 2014. Well, after several years of prices holding steady, farmland prices are quickly escalating again. Average cropland prices across the country rose 7.8% just in the last year. Most young farmers can't afford their own land. Instead, they must rent. While renting is better than having no land to farm at all, it can be incredibly unpredictable from year-to-year. And relying only on rented land for your farm business means a bank is less likely to loan you money to expand your farm – whether that's for equipment or other essential farm tools.

Many young farmers are ready to continue the family legacy, like I was privileged to do. But current tax proposals in Congress present major roadblocks for the next generation and could even mean the death of many family farms. These proposals would eliminate stepped-up basis and impose capital gains taxes at death. These changes would cause family farms to face huge tax burdens, and potentially force them to sell off the farm piece-by-piece to pay the taxes after a family member dies. Most young farmers would sink under such hefty tax bills and might just leave farming altogether.

Another challenge for young people in rural communities is access to broadband. It is tough to keep young people, farmers or not, in rural communities when there isn't reliable and fast internet for them to stay connected to family and friends and access vital online resources. And as more of our business shifts online, young farmers need access to online resources to buy and sell livestock and other products, monitor their farms from anywhere, and use new technologies to maximize efficiency and improve sustainability.

As the average age of farmers continues to rise, it's harder for young farmers to find each other to talk about their experiences and share ideas on how to succeed. That's not to say that there aren't many opportunities for those in my generation to take younger folks under their wing, but it's just as important to connect with your peers. The Farm Bureau's Young Farmers & Ranchers Program helps interested farmers collaborate and gain valuable leadership skills. When I joined my county Farm Bureau's YF&R program, I benefitted from a support network that understood some of the challenges I was facing. I made lifelong friends and gained invaluable leadership training to take me beyond my fencerows.

Young farmers bring many new ideas to the table and we should encourage them to share their ideas with all of agriculture. We are stronger when we work together. At the Farm Bureau, we are the Voice of Agriculture and to do this effectively we need farmers and ranchers of all ages and from all backgrounds in our organization helping to develop policy solutions. Doing so will ensure we represent all of the ways America's farmers work to provide our world's food, fiber, and fuel. Taking these steps will help secure the family farm's future and American agriculture for the next generation.

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#StillFarming

## RI Farm Bureau

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## CALLING ALL FFA AND 4-H MEMBERS!



### JOIN RI FARM BUREAU FOR FREE

Just a reminder that all 4-H and FFA Members can join RI Farm Bureau for free, and receive all the benefits our other members receive including discounts at thousands of businesses nationwide.

Our 4-H and FFA Members are the future of agriculture and we encourage you to join, either online at [RIFB.org](http://RIFB.org), or by calling the office at 401-385-3339.

