



Forum on Jobs and Economic Growth

January 20, 2010

Rhode Island



Introduction

Rural Development's Southern New England jurisdiction (MA/CT/RI) joined forces with the Farm Service Agency's Rhode Island Office to hold a Jobs Forum on January 20, 2010. Thirty-eight attendees participated in the forum including the following organizations and individuals:

- Rhode Island Division of Agriculture (DEM)
- RI Dairy Farms Cooperative
- Representative Michael A. Rice
- John H. Chafee Center for International Business
- Bryant University
- Roger Williams University
- Office of Lt. Governor - Small Business Advocacy
- Narragansett Tribe
- RI Association of Conservation Districts
- RI Agricultural Partnership
- Rhody Fresh (Dairy Co-op)
- Washington County Regional Planning Council
- Richmond, RI Town Planner
- North Kingston Dept. of Planning and Development
- Southside Community Land Trust
- RI Economic Development Corp.
- Rhode Island Raised Livestock Assoc.
- University of RI
- University of RI Hunger Center/SNAP
- The Greene Consulting Group
- Groundwork Providence
- Jim McKanna, Crab Fisherman

Discussion Questions

1. From what you have seen, or seen reported about the President's Jobs Forum on December 3rd, and the administration's approach to job creation overall, what seems relevant to your community?

- *IT growth & technology; online marketing*
- *Defense contracting on Aquidneck Island*
- *Targeted efforts to support collaboratives*
- *Food production*
- *Funding for job creation & training should complement each other*
- *Historic partnership with USDA and Land Grant Institutions*
- *Cooperative Extension is more than just farms and it includes research and development*
- *Money to support educating agriculture producers*
- *Relax the lending policies*
- *Develop support to educate farmers to be business savvy*

2. A) What parts of your local economy are working or thriving? B) What businesses and sectors are expanding and hiring?

A)

- *Farmers Markets – Support local businesses*
- *Aquaculture has great potential*
- *Farming (but needs sustainability)*
- *Buy local works (but needs more awareness)*
- *Distribution of local products has improved*
- *Buy local has worked well for small businesses and commerce*
- *Animal care*
- *Bioscience works well (need to exploit innovation with Ag).*
- *Marketing local Ag works, but needs to be inclusive and refined*
- *Look at growth in smaller sectors as opposed to large projects*
- *We play to our strength of being small and let more people be involved*
- *Local land trust supports local agriculture well*

B)

- *Locally grown meats (but not much room for growth)*
- *Direct Market & Value Added (but need to help transition out of commodity agriculture)*
- *Agriculture and health-care are the only two sectors in Rhode Island that have seen growth lately*

3. A) What parts of your local economy are not working or thriving? B) What businesses and sectors have been hit the hardest? C) What are people struggling with the most?

A)

- *Manufacturing*
- *Building/New Construction*
- *Dairy Farms – They are excluded from Direct Marketing (need to floor Class 1 price)*
- *Energy \$ not being spent in RI*
- *Tourism*

B)

- *Retail*
- *Construction*
- *Manufacturing*
- *Commodity Dairy Farmers*

C)

- *Farm Policy should support or focus on small or limited resource producers*
- *Fishing and marine trade. Policy and regulations have impacted the industry. Must expedite changes to improve regulatory process*
- *Need to mimic the single point coordinator model in the aquaculture sector to all sectors*

4. A) What are the opportunities for growth in your community? B) What businesses and sectors seem poised to rebound? C) What do you see as the “jobs of the future”?

A)

- *Export of Agriculture and Aquaculture goods and manufacturing Agriculture products. (Need to import foreign plans to increase land production, efficiency and maximize use)*
- *Support BIO and alternative fuel/energy use on small farms through Co-Ops. Need implementation and O&M support*
- *Energy*
- *Windmills*
- *Education (incumbent worker training, technology transfer, workforce training). Bring Land Grants to the table*
- *Energy Audit – We don’t have a state program*
- *The USDA definition of “rural” excludes much of RI*
- *Market programs and services better*
- *Protein production*

- *New leadership*
- *Immigration specialist*

B)

- *Construction (only if lending and funding confidence on the part of lenders increase)*
- *Manufacturing (new green technologies)*
- *Credit (local community banks have gained popularity and trust in light of major bank failures)*
- *Tourism (several opportunities, we can compete with foreign destinations or other tourist sites)*
- *Local artisans (but lack local support structure)*
- *Venture Capital (we need venture capitalists to invest in RI business and services)*
- *Forestry and fishing has potential*

C)

- *Health Care, Biotech, Pharmaceuticals*
- *Value Added Agriculture production*
- *Support farming, aquaculture, and small businesses – they produce better results than big business – Ideas such as Health Care, Biotech and Pharmaceuticals*
- *We need to educate emerging and first time farmers*
- *We need to link potential new farmers with available land*
- *Small business is our backbone, but it lacks funding*
- *Build up the planning profession*

5. What are the obstacles to job creation in your community? What could make local businesses more likely to start hiring?

- *Outsourcing*
- *Regional differences (can't grow feed competitively, energy costs, labor costs, zoning – zoning language is not clear to planners or producers – need to educate public on agriculture operations)*
- *Municipal Governments and local regulations*
- *Government procurement (the federal government needs to buy locally as a priority over cost or low bidder)*
- *Capital (needs to be more available)*
- *Land cost*
- *Technical assistance, business training, develop skill sets for Ag workers too*
- *Federal subsidies to large corn production hurts competitiveness of locally raised pork. On a macro scale, cheap corn is an ongoing economic and public health disaster*

6. What other issues and ideas should the President consider?

- *Urban Ag and community farming*
- *Food production (protein). Coordinate between food and Ag production*
- *Revisit USDA definition of “rural” and all USDA rules and farm policy*
- *Level the playing field for small or limited resource farmers*
- *Farm Bill and/or USDA funding and policy should focus more on small or limited farmers*
- *Increase support to USDA at or above the level of NIH*
- *Strengthen or consider food security weakness*
- *Marketing of local programs and USDA services*
- *Transportation infrastructure*
- *Transportation needs to get the people to the locations of our products and commerce*
- *Support “grass roots’ efforts*
- *Northeast small scale farms can serve as models for test programs due to the small scale*
- *Stimulus money for small businesses. Financial media says we don’t need support just for existing companies to create jobs – need to support entrepreneurs in new economy*
- *Regional programs for Rural Development. The Northeast consists of small farms – Programs should be tailored to fit small farms*
- *Better service by Cox Communications or Verizon with new Wi-Fi services should reach remote rural areas. Need some incentives to have communication organizations complete in the small state of RI to fill broadband access. This idea should be extended to all northeast rural areas. More small businesses could do interstate business with better broadband and web access*
- *Ponds on rural farms would be a plus in supporting crop agriculture during drought periods and minimize the draw on water from wells during the summer peak months. Capture of the water would be during winter months. Construction and engineering jobs (although temporary) would put workers to work on pond creation*

7. A) Are there specific changes to USDA programs and regulations that could positively impact the development of businesses in Rural America or strengthen current businesses? B) What innovative ideas should USDA consider to increase economic opportunity in rural areas?

A)

- *Do not implement fee of \$500.00 for food safety regulations*
- *Change Federal Marketing Order to be more friendly to farmers over processors*
- *Educated Program participants of our USDA programs and work with partners and local government to provide clear guidance to implement programs*
- *Support education*
- *Need technical assistance/targeted business planning funding so commodity farmers can transition to direct marketing and value-added business*
- *Make regulations more scale specific and considerations should be made for smaller producers*
- *Regulations are not clear to the average person*

B)

- *SNAP funds – education should be improved between the local vendor to accept SNAP, and the Food Stamp recipient should spend locally*
- *Boost Cooperative Extension infrastructure*
- *Keep funding of CFP money for collaboration. USDA funding is so important to non-profits*
- *Schools should buy more local products*