



THE RHODE ISLAND RURAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

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Highlights of 2011

Rhode Island Seafood Marketing Collaborative—Fresh Seafood direct to you

A Rhode Island Seafood Marketing Collaborative has been introduced by Senators Sosnowski, Sheehan, McCaffrey, Walaska, and Felag with the goal of promoting locally caught wild seafood and aquaculture. Access to new markets for our fisheries by selling direct to consumers is the intent to increase the income of fishers, while offering information and education to consumers about the benefits of buying local seafood products for the health and well being of all Rhode Islanders.

The general population and especially our low income families in Rhode Island have little access to locally caught wild ocean fish and shellfish or aquaculture products and, have limited knowledge about selections, freshness, and quality of locally caught fish species and aquaculture products; how to cook them properly; or, where the food comes from. Most supermarkets offer fish products from other countries and, the majority of our locally caught wild fish products are currently exported out of State.



GET FRESH
BUY LOCAL
seafood

Grants to RI Rural Development Council provided by USDA-Rural Development and The van Beuren Charitable Foundation will be used to support the partnership between RIDEM and our Council on behalf of the RI Seafood Marketing Collaborative. The RI Rural Development Council serves as a fiscal agent and administrator within this group.

The grant funds will be used statewide for marketing plans and educational informational programs about local wild catch fisheries and aquaculture farms. Our plans include marketing and selling fresh local, wild catch fish and shellfish (natural catch and aquaculture) through farmers markets, restaurants, supermarkets and other retail venues. The educational outreach will be in urban areas and target low income populations, seniors, and school age children. Sarah Schumann will be joining RI Rural Development Council to provide educational outreach programs, food-sponsored demonstrations and educational media and materials to promote healthy choices of local seafood.

Two current initiatives have already created consumer interest for local fisheries. The Local Catch, Galilee, RI and Ocean State Fresh, Newport, RI are employing a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) marketing model used successfully for years by farmers. These two businesses offer fresh fish and shellfish via website pre-purchased online by consumers, who then pickup their orders at a designated nearby Farmers' Market. Membership shares for weekly seafood is available in 12 week schedules. Refer to Ocean State Fresh www.oceanstatefresh.com and www.TheLocalCatch.com for more details and membership information. And, deliveries to restaurants and supermarkets are coordinated by Market Mobile, a Farm Fresh RI venture.



Rhody Mulch— New uses for wool from The RI Sheep Cooperative

The Rhode Island Sheep Cooperative has been successful in offering Rhody Warm blankets over the past 5 years. Some of the wool products have also been sold as spinning yarn, shawls, scarves, dog jackets, and cat and dog blankets. The Cooperative has remained energized in offering different options to buyers of their wool products.

A study was recently commissioned through a grant offered by USDA-Rural Development to pursue new uses for discarded wool —i.e., wool not used in the blanket manufacturing process. The grant to the RI Resource Conservation and Development Council offered the RI Sheep Cooperative members the option to explore other uses for the discarded wool. Two activities were designated for the research. One was to use the wool for soil moisture retention for potted plants and garden vegetables. The other plan was to mat the wool into batted 2'x4'x 1/2 inch sheets for use in garden weed control. A team of high school seniors from St.Raphael Academy, Pawtucket, RI worked on the moisture retention concept for potted garden vegetables and plants and, a URI Peckham Farm student conducted studies on weed control with batted wool mats at commercial locations with support from several RI Nursery and Landscape members' garden nurseries.

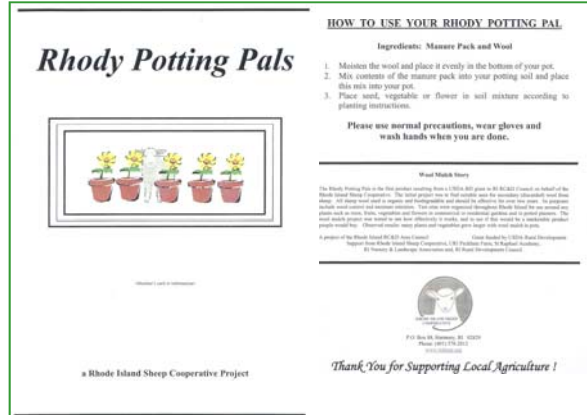
Successful results from the experiments yielded what we had hoped. The wool products used in potted plants yielded larger tomatoes from those vines versus the non-wool potted plants. And, the weed control batted wool barriers substantially reduced weeds but, did not completely stop all weeds. All sheep wool used is organic, will reduce weed growth for up to two years and, typically decomposes without need for removal.

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Rhody Mulch—Uses for wool (continued)



Left: Garden signs promoting the secondary sheep wool project. Vegetable garden with wool containers and non-wool control group potted plants at St Raphael Academy school. Wool and straw landscaped area for weed control experiment at local commercial garden nursery. **Right:** Literature used for Rhody Potting Pals.



Upon assessment and review of the results from the feasibility study, the members of the Board of the RI Sheep Cooperative decided to move forward on a potted plant moisture retention project. What was born was “Rhody Potting Pals”. This is a bagged product of sheep manure and separate bag of sheep wool. Instructions are to add the mixture to your potted soil with plants or flowers, for better moisture retention of growing plants. Many thanks to the participants: Brenda Titus, Susan Charwood, Tom and Sara Soucar, Mike Badzmirowski, Ethan Sneesby, Gregory Pereira, Chantelle Marechaux, Chris Modisette, Shannon Brawley (RINLA), RINLA Members, Rudy Hempe, URI Peckham Farm, St. Raphael Academy and the USDA-Rural Development Warwick Service Office for the grant funding of this project.

The product sells for \$5.00 and is available from the RI Sheep Cooperative. Refer to the website of www.risheep.org for more information or inquiries.

Rhode Island Raised Livestock Association-Congratulations !

The Rhode Island Rural Development Council was fortunate to be fiscal agent and grantor for several years in support of the growth, expansion of livestock farmers, and livestock owner membership to the RI Raised Livestock Association (RIRLA). Grants to our Council in support of a Livestock Association came from two USDA-Rural Development-Warwick Service Center grants, a grant from The Rhode Island Foundation; and, funds from congressional appropriations by Senator Jack Reed and Senator Sheldon Whitehouse. All were specifically authorized for the continuation of growth and programs for this group. Many thanks to all funders for their support..



In late October 2010 funds closed to RIRDC. The RI Raised Livestock Association (RIRLA) Board Members were left to fully sustainable their Association and livestock logistics program. Heidi Quinn was hired as the newest Coordinator in January 2011 and has done a wonderful job in taking command of the logistics and increasing livestock processing by more than 25% over last year's processing.

Today, the RIRLA has 107 members, recently purchased new labeling equipment that will do bar coding and print logos for all farmers meat portions, and the Association is sustainable and profitable. Membership and livestock herds are increasing and its partnering USDA processing facilities have expanded and/or added staff and new equipment.

All wonderful news ! Our RI Rural Development Council wishes the RIRLA continued success and all the best in 2012 !



Highlights of 2011

Ocean State Bees—Training Classes to Pollinate Rhode Island

A Rhode Island DEM Specialty Crops grant was awarded to RI Rural Development Council to create professional development training. The plan was to establish a statewide network of beekeepers to promote natural pollination and support organic and specialty crop growth. RI Rural Development Council received congressional fund support from Senator Reed and Senator Whitehouse as well as RIDEM/USDA funds towards this effort over the past two years.

The Rhode Island Rural Development Council was the awardee and lead agency of the RIDEM / USDA Farm Viability for Specialty Crops Competitiveness Grant on behalf of Ocean State Bees, principal Michael Southern partnered with Mark Robar, Trails End Farm, Richmond, RI. This two-year project encompassed the development and delivery of an intermediate training course for up to 45 participants comprised of hobbyists beekeepers and farmers each receiving classroom instruction from consultant / instructors. And, requesting participants would receive up to 2.5 hours of hands-on technical instructor field training on bee pollination processes of specialty crops within Rhode Island.

Historically in Rhode Island, there have been no beekeeper courses available in Rhode Island beyond a basic hobbyist training instruction. Today, with threats such as Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) and Disappearing Disease threatening to disrupt the natural pollination process, it is necessary for beekeepers and farmers (urban and rural) to understand and learn how to preserve honeybees especially over the harsh New England winters.



Left: Mark Robar provides hands-on classroom demonstration on use of bee box.

Adjacent Photo: Mike Southern covers pollination techniques via powerpoint presentation session.

Programs of training were held at URI East Farm. Many thanks to URI for its support of this project.

Women in Agriculture-First Year Conference 2011

Paul Brule, Director, USDA-Farm Service Agency originated the idea of the first Rhode Island area conference called "Women in Agriculture". Mr. Brule called a meeting of partners to garner support for this idea. Everyone invited thought it was a very positive program that would be hugely successful. Agencies in RI such as USDA-NRCS and USDA-RD, RI Resource Conservation and Development Area Council, RI Rural Development Council, URI, RIDEM, RINLA, RI Farm Bureau, Eastern District Cooperative Extension and others, were immediate in their support for this conference. The first conference was held on March 31, 2011 at the URI Coastal Institute, URI Bay Campus, Narragansett, RI. The building location offered workshop breakout rooms and a 100-seat auditorium. Roxanne Boisse, USDA-FSA, was Host Moderator for the conference and all USDA-FSA staff provided outstanding logistics support throughout the event. The Opening Speaker was Janet Coit, Director, RIDEM, and the Keynote Speaker was presented by Senator (and farm owner) Susan Sosnowski.

The daylong workshops were fully attended and many stayed to network beyond the last workshop and closing remarks presented by RIDEM Chief of Agriculture, Kenneth Ayars. To say the first conference was a success is an understatement. Attendance was over 150 people who have a passion for agriculture, cherish their farm and family lifestyle, and have an on-going commitment to locally-grown, healthy, nutritious foods.

For these reasons, our Council is partnering again with USDA-FSA, URI, ERICE, and other organizations on the Planning Committee for the program offerings at the second Rhode Island Women in Ag Conference to be held Tuesday, March 13, 2012, from 8:00am-4:00pm at URI Main Campus, Center for Biotech and Life Sciences Bldg, Flagg Road, Kingston, RI.

Shown below are a few photo highlights from the Women in Agriculture, March 31, 2011 Conference of several speakers, participants and workshop activities:



Breakfast, Welcome, and Registration supported by USDA-FSA Staff



Welcoming address presented by RIDEM Director Janet Coit.



Keynote Speaker was RI Senator Susan Sosnowski.



Over 150 attendees for this first ever Women in Agriculture Conference held in Rhode Island on March 31, 2011.



Lower L-R: Conference attendees, speakers and workshop leaders, USDA-FSA Director Paul Brule chats with guest, and USDA-FSA staff members busy at work and networking with guests at lunchtime.