



**Rhode Island**  
**Department of Environmental Management**  
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## News Release

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### DEM PROMOTES GROWTH OF GREEN ECONOMY WITH LATEST GRANT AWARDS

*Nearly \$400,000 to be invested in small businesses to foster innovation and growth of local food and agriculture*

PROVIDENCE – As part of its efforts to expand the green economy in Rhode Island and support working families, the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) announced today the availability of \$380,000 in grant funding to local small businesses under the Local Agriculture and Seafood Act (LASA) and Farm Viability programs. The grants are designed to increase the competitiveness of Rhode Island products in the marketplace and help local farmers and food partners grow their businesses.

"Rhode Islanders take great pride in their agricultural heritage and diverse food cultures," said DEM Director Janet Coit. "It is part of what makes our state such a special place to live, visit, and raise a family. And increasingly, local food and agriculture are hotbeds for innovation and entrepreneurship – spurred on by a growing awareness of the benefits of eating fresh, locally grown food and being connected to a local farmer, nursery, or fisherman. We're proud to invest in the continued growth of local food and green industries and to support the many new businesses, working families, and innovative initiatives funded under these programs."

#### Local Agriculture and Seafood Act (LASA) Grant Program

In partnership with the Rhode Island Food Policy Council, the LASA grant program provides up to \$20,000 awards to new and small farmers, producer groups, and non-profits to support the growth and sustainability of Rhode Island's farming, aquaculture, and seafood industries. Now in its third year, the LASA program funds both program and capital projects. For capital projects, priority is given to initiatives that (1) directly benefit new or small agriculture producers; (2) foster new collaborations or share new information among Rhode Island food-system partners; or (3) support new products or new sales channels with clearly defined markets.

"Adequate nutritious food is essential to human wellbeing and the bedrock of economic development," said Kenneth Payne, Chair of the Rhode Island Food Policy Council. "LASA is a building block in strengthening Rhode Island's agriculture and seafood sectors. Let's all eat well and enjoy Rhode Island's best."

LASA is a public-private partnership funded through the state with generous support from the van Beuren Charitable Foundation, the Henry P. Kendall Foundation, and the Rhode Island Foundation. A total of \$230,000 is available for the 2016 grant round.

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For grant guidelines and to apply, visit [dem.ri.gov](http://dem.ri.gov). Applications must be received by 11:59 p.m. on February 16. Applications may also be mailed or hand-delivered to DEM Division of Agriculture, Room 370, 235 Promenade Street, Providence, RI 02908 by 4 p.m. on February 16; however, applying online is strongly encouraged. Awards will be announced as part of the Rhode Island Agriculture Day held each spring. Non-profit organizations are eligible for program funds only.

### **Farm Viability Grant Program**

The Farm Viability Grant Program, made possible by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Specialty Crop Block Grant Program, supports efforts to increase specialty crop production and grow the marketplace for these crops in Rhode Island. USDA defines specialty crops as fruits and vegetables, dried fruit, tree nuts, and nursery crops, including floriculture and turf grass.

The grants – open to individual farmers or agricultural or educational groups – fund projects up to two years in duration that support the continued vitality of local agriculture. Funded areas include, but are not limited to, research, marketing, food safety and security, plant health, “buy local” initiatives, and development of cooperatives. For a complete list of funded areas visit [www.dem.ri.gov](http://www.dem.ri.gov).

Fund projects will support the broad competitiveness of locally-grown specialty crops in Rhode Island. Initiatives that benefit a sole commercial product or provide a profit to a single individual or group will not be considered. Single entities are encouraged to participate as project partners. For this round, \$150,000 is available in grants ranging from \$10,000 to \$50,000. To date, DEM has awarded more than \$2 million in farm viability grants to support the competitiveness of locally-grown specialty crops.

For more information, visit [www.rigrown.ri.gov](http://www.rigrown.ri.gov). Applications accompanied by a W9 form should be mailed to DEM Division of Agriculture, Room 370, 235 Promenade Street, Providence, RI 02908 and postmarked no later than March 31, 2016.

In addition to these grant programs, DEM works across many fronts to accelerate growth of the local food economy, which supports 60,000 jobs in Rhode Island. The department continues to make investments in critical infrastructure as well as provide farm incubation space to new farmers through its Urban Edge and Snake Den farm properties. The state’s food system now includes 1,243 farms, an increase of 44 percent from 2002, and nearly 70,000 acres of farmland. And Rhode Island’s green industries account for more than 15,000 jobs and contribute \$2.5 billion to the economy.

The Ocean State is a national leader in direct-sales to consumers, with approximately 50 seasonal farmers markets in the state’s urban, suburban and rural areas; seven indoor winter markets; and numerous pick-your-own and farm-stand operations. In partnership with the Seafood Marketing Collaborative, DEM developed the RI Seafood brand to uniquely identify Rhode Island seafood in the marketplace and help local fishermen and distributors grow their businesses. In 2015, nearly 100 million pounds of seafood arrived at Rhode Island ports, with an ex-vessel value over \$75 million. There are 20 registered users of the RI Seafood brand – which was recently featured as part of Newport Restaurant Week, the Rhode Island Oyster Festival, and the Narragansett Calamari Cook-Off. For more information, visit [www.seafoodri.com](http://www.seafoodri.com).

For more information on DEM programs and initiatives, visit [www.dem.ri.gov](http://www.dem.ri.gov). Follow us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/RhodeIslandDEM](https://www.facebook.com/RhodeIslandDEM) or on Twitter (@RhodeIslandDEM) for timely updates.