



AQUIDNECK
COMMUNITY
TABLE

Strategic Plan
2022 - 2025

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OUR MISSION

Aquidneck Community Table is growing a healthy local food system accessible to all on our island.

BACKGROUND

Aquidneck Community Table (ACT) is building a new food system on Aquidneck Island where ACT is the only organization dedicated to comprehensive food-system transformation.

ACT achieved many goals in its last strategic plan. Now managing 80 garden plots at five community garden sites and two school programs - with a new program in development - and three farmers markets, ACT has achieved the financial objectives laid out in the past plan, despite the uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic, and now anticipates the next phase of program growth and organizational development.

OUR VISION

By 2030, we envision a rebuilt and more equitable food system. This system honors food cultures and agricultural land, allows many to grow their own food, and offers access to healthy food choices on an island that provides food security for all.

In that future, Aquidneck Islanders value their preserved working farms. Older farmers have sustainable succession plans and new farmers have access to land. Productivity and profitability have increased on small parcels as farmers have learned to grow more intensively yet without chemicals harmful to people or the environment. State and community regulations support farmers in making a sustainable living.

Food is grown everywhere. Every school has a garden that is an integral part of the curriculum. Homegrown produce from front or backyard gardens is an important and valued part of household diets. Community gardens dot neighborhoods, with beds for everyone who wants one. Land previously dedicated to traditional landscaping is given over to creative productive use.

Aquidneck Islanders have many fresh, healthy, and affordable local food choices. Farmers markets are readily available and affordable. Every grocery store has a large local food section with a growing stock of locally branded products and culturally desired options.

Menus for restaurants, schools, and other institutions are abundant with healthy choices and locally sourced food.

Islanders have a renewed interest in sourcing more of their own food, whether through growing, foraging, hunting, or fishing, and have the skills to prepare the results of this new bounty. Food preparation and cooking are once again common skills.

No one on the island goes hungry. While the need for food pantries is declining, those still in operation are stocked with fresh local food choices, year-round. Healthy food is affordable and accessible across the income spectrum. Foods with little nutritional value have become choices of the past; positive changes in food understanding and habits are reflected in healthier people who choose to consume more nutritious foods.

Islanders possess a keen understanding of zero-waste practices: refusing much, repurposing more, redirecting food waste and plant materials into animal feed or compost, and recycling effectively before sending residual trash to landfills. Households, businesses, and institutions all sort their food waste for composting at various sites on the island. Island residents increasingly support ecologically-sound practices and healthy working conditions.

This embrace of a new food vision and related practices, specifically the increased demand for locally-sourced food and other products and services, has resulted in an increased proportion of the island's food supply being grown locally – a boost of new vigor to both the island's economy and that of the state as a whole. Accessible and affordable infrastructure has generated many new and flourishing food businesses and restaurants that both strengthen the regional economy and further enhance the appeal of the island as a tourist destination.

Everywhere we see new community connections, regional collaboration, and civic participation, with multi-generational leaders across race, ethnicity, and class. People care for their neighbors and the environment and strongly support this model for a new food system. Aquidneck Island has substantially contributed to Rhode Island's role in achieving the 30 by 30 [New England Food Vision](#), which sets the goal for the region to produce 30 percent of its own food by 2030.

Aquidneck Community Table serves as a vibrant hub for all this activity, sharing information and skills as well as building the capacity to meet our common future. ACT is fully staffed and sufficiently funded to continue this work long into the future.

OUR VALUES

Food is a human right¹

- Access to healthy, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food – and the choice to grow, harvest and gather our food sustainably – is a basic human right.
- Food is more than sustenance for our bodies; it is at the center of our cultures. Sharing food bonds us.

We work with integrity towards equity

- We are called to promote an equitable and inclusive society, lifting the voices of those who have been marginalized and underrepresented.
- Achieving equity and justice demands that we work toward food access for all.
- As food citizens, rather than only consumers, each of us is obligated to know where and how our food is sourced, and to act to realize an equitable and sustainable food system.
- Our work calls us to act with integrity, in partnership with all members of our community.

Food systems must become sustainable

- We are all stewards of our food resources.
- Our region can meet the goals of the New England Food Vision, to produce 30 percent of our food needs locally by 2030.
- We support all participants in the food system; successful farms, growers and food producers are essential for community well-being.

**“Eating is an agricultural act”
– Wendell Berry**

¹ Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) begins: *Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself (sic) and of his (sic) family, including food ...*

United Nations Sustainable Development Goal #2: *End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.*

Declaration of Nyéléni, the first global forum on food sovereignty, Mali, 2007: *Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations.*

CRITICAL ISSUES GUIDING THE STRATEGIC PLAN

External

- During the COVID pandemic, Rhode Island experienced the highest level of food insecurity recorded in 20 years. 18.4 percent of households were worried about having enough food.²
- Racial and ethnic disparities were evident in access to food, as 34 percent of Black and Latinx households were food insecure compared to 14.2 percent of White households.³
- The New England Food Vision outlines a goal of 50 percent of New England’s food produced locally by 2060, frequently referred to as the 50 by 60 Plan, that has been updated to a new short-term goal of 30 percent by 2030. ⁴
- Public support for local agriculture, fresh foods, and food security is strong and growing.⁵
- Food purchasing habits changed dramatically as a result of COVID, with much more food now purchased online.⁶
- RI has lost over 80 percent of its farmland and the future of remaining farmland is precarious. Over one quarter of farmers are over 65 years old and nearing retirement. 75 percent of our farmland is unprotected and is prime development land; few farmers have a succession plan for their farm.⁷
- Farmland on Aquidneck Island is under pressure from real-estate development and climate change. ACT’s frequent collaborator, the Aquidneck Land Trust, is prioritizing and increasing preservation of farmland on the island before it is lost to development.⁸
- The fishing industry is experiencing increasing stress from environmental and policy changes.⁹

² 2021 RI Life Index, an initiative of Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island & Brown University School of Public Health.

³ IBID.

⁴ <https://foodsolutionsne.org/a-new-england-food-vision/>

⁵ Food Print, “Local and Regional Food Systems.” <https://foodprint.org/issues/local-regional-food-systems/>; “Varied Interests Drive Growing Popularity of Local Foods” <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2010/december/varied-interests-drive-growing-popularity-of-local-foods/>

⁶ Ellison, Brenna et al. “Examining Food Purchase Behavior and Food Values During the COVID-19 Pandemic” <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/aapp.13118>

⁷ Aquidneck Island Farmland Conservation Plan. Aquidneck Land Trust <https://ailt.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Full-Farm-Plan-June-20-2017-opt.pdf>

⁸ Aquidneck Island Development Impact Analysis. Aquidneck Land Trust https://ailt.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Development-Impact-Analysis_Final-Report_Spreads.pdf

⁹ “New England Fishing Communities Being Destroyed by ‘Climate Shocks’: Study.”

<https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/12/10/new-england-fishing-communities-being-destroyed-climate->



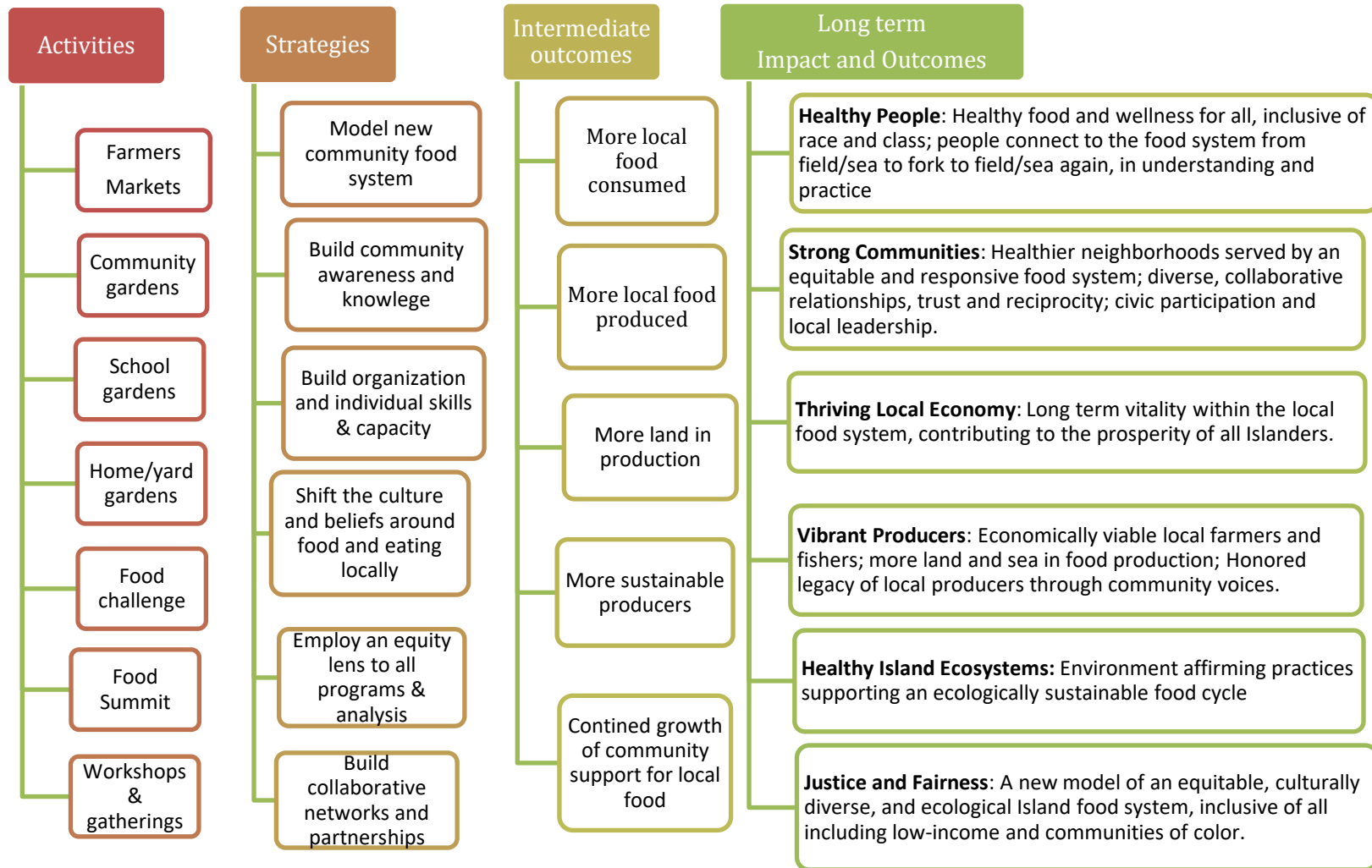
- Seafood harvested from the waters of Narragansett Bay is underutilized in the diets of the surrounding population. ¹⁰
- The fishing industry has been driven from historic docks in Newport. ¹¹
- Feeding America calculates that 7,110 Newport County residents are food insecure (2019).
- Most public-school systems on the island lack an integrated K-12 gardening and food-related curriculum.

[shocks-study](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/new-england-fishermen-fishing-industry-face-warming-world-climate-change/); “Historic New England Fishing Industry Faces Warming World.”
<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/new-england-fishermen-fishing-industry-face-warming-world-climate-change/>

¹⁰ Commercial Fisheries Research Foundation, “Understanding Wild Caught RI Seafood.”
<http://www.cfrfoundation.org/contact-us/>.

¹¹ “Newport Rhode Island’s Commercial Fishing Industry Faces Challenging Times.”
<https://fisherynation.com/archives/108035>

LOGIC MODE



A Logic Model, sometimes called a Theory of Change, outlines the logic of how we will achieve the community impact we envision.

THREE-YEAR PROGRAM GOALS AND ACTIVITIES

Priority activities are those ranked highest for action given ACT's current capacity.

Growth opportunities are initiatives that can be undertaken when dedicated resources and/or increased capacity are available.

1. Inspire and support the ability of islanders to grow more food

Strategic activities over the next three years:

Priority activities:

- Continue to manage 80 community gardens at five garden sites that are actively producing food for island residents.
- Strengthen all existing community gardens through documentation of policies, procedures, and consulting options.

Growth opportunities:

- Develop the capacity to consult on construction and management of new gardens in response to requests for support from other agencies.
- Prepare for a food hub and agricultural program by completing a lease, followed by site design, funding development and financial planning.

2. Increase access to and consumption of local food

Strategic activities over the next three years:

Priority activities:

- Stabilize locations for both winter and summer Aquidneck Growers Markets.
- Continue to grow a base of diverse and loyal customers and vendors by
 - Continuing the Miantonomi Monday market in partnership with the Newport Health Equity Zone.
 - Promoting Bonus Bucks to SNAP recipients.
 - Strengthening our outreach and ensuring market, garden, and educational programs are welcoming experiences for all community members.
- Grow children's and youth advocacy for local food by
 - Reinstating the Food Explorers Program.
 - Growing ongoing school garden programs at Pell Elementary School, the Met School, and at Portsmouth Ag Innovation Farm/Portsmouth Public Schools.

Growth opportunities:

- Increase island food production and food access by



- Developing more community garden programs such as new garden sites, [food forests](#), backyard and container gardens.
- Increasing growing assistance to new gardeners and farmers.
- Engaging immigrants who have farming/gardening skills as mentors.
- Reconceive and relaunch the Food Challenge to inspire support for consumption of local foods.
- Promote use of local sourced foods in local restaurants and institutions.

3. Advocate, educate and inspire sustainable food system practices

Strategic activities over the next three years:

Priority activities

- Grow youth involvement by
 - Expanding the Root Riders program.
 - Developing and building school gardens and programs at more island schools.
- Influence state and local policy by continuing participation in RI Food Policy Council Working Groups.

Growth opportunities

- Research, reconceive and relaunch Food Summits to support other strategies.
- Hold events that foster community conversation and uplift the issues of food system change.

THREE-YEAR OPERATIONAL GOALS

Aquidneck Community Table must prioritize growth in financial capacity and human resources to achieve goals and growth possibilities.

A. Ensure excellent execution of programs and operations through wise leadership by diverse and talented staff and board members.

Priority activities

- Plan for leadership transitions, knowledge retention, and ongoing community relationships through development of succession plans for all key positions.
- Increase diversity on the staff and board.
- Increase engagement of volunteers in ACT programs.

Growth opportunities

- Develop resources to increase staff capacity in these areas:
 - Fund raising
 - Marketing and outreach
 - Farm and garden management
 - Volunteer coordination
 - Food hub project management
 - Administrative support
- Explore innovative job design to attract and retain top talent.
- Explore ways to attract socio-economically diverse board members.

B. Invest in marketing and revenue development.

Priority activities:

- Improve public awareness of ACT's mission and programs through design and implementation of a dynamic marketing plan.
- Grow the annual operating budget by more than 10 percent annually.
- Design and implement new funding strategies including stock gifts and planned giving.

Growth opportunities

- Grow the annual operating budget to double in size by 2025.

C. Implement the vision for a food hub.

Priority activities:

- Secure a long-term lease for suitable location.
- Secure seed funding.
- Develop site and business plans.

Growth opportunities

- Design and develop a capital campaign.
- Secure full funding through a capital campaign.

“If kids grow kale, kids eat kale. If they grow tomatoes, they eat tomatoes. But when none of this is presented to them, if they're not shown how food affects the mind and the body, they blindly eat whatever you put in front of them.”

– Ron Finley, the “Gangsta Gardener”

From [“A Guerilla Gardener in South Central LA”](#)