



PRESS RELEASE

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Initiative launches groundbreaking 2-year degree program First-of-its-kind program will educate future leaders in food, horticulture, and agriculture

[Dateline: Rhode Island, June 12, 2020] — The University of Rhode Island and Community College of Rhode Island today announced an initiative that will result in innovative new educational options at both institutions. Starting this spring, URI and CCRI will work with industry leaders to develop new courses, professional certifications, and a two-year associate’s degree program focused on agriculture, food systems, and plant-based industries.

The initiative is supported by a grant from the Agriculture Workforce Development Program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture, which has been developed to lead the collaborating partners: The Rhode Island Nursery and Landscape Institute, the philanthropic arm of the Rhode Island Nursery and Landscape Association, and Rhode Island Food Policy Council. RI Nursery and Landscape Association Executive Director Shannon Brawley stated, “This partnership’s goal is to help to provide students with the skills to be a part of the solution for some of the greatest challenges facing our communities – from a changing environment to food insecurity. Our collective industries offer high demand, meaningful professional occupations with a living wage. We are thrilled to be the lead partner of this innovative education and training collaboration.”

This work grows from industry-led partnerships cultivated by the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training Real Jobs RI program. Labor and Training Director Scott Jensen weighed in stating, “Providing Rhode Islanders with industry-led learning opportunities is essential for our state’s economic prosperity.” He added, “As Real Jobs RI partners, the association and council have played major roles in developing Rhode Island’s agricultural and food systems workforce. I’m proud and excited to see them continue their great work through this innovative program.”

U.S. Senator Jack Reed and state Senator Lou DiPalma provided substantial leadership on this initiative. Reed, a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, commented, “This federal

funding will open up new opportunities for students and support the development of a workforce-training program that will help prepare people for careers in Rhode Island's agriculture and food systems sector." DiPalma added, "This grant recognizes an invaluable public/private partnership between the project leads and several state agencies, including the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training, Department of Education, Department of Environmental Management and Commerce RI. The results will provide students with educational and experiential learning opportunities based on industry input that will meet the need for a 21st century workforce."

CCRI President Meghan Hughes said, "Developing significant partnerships and strengthening the training of Rhode Island's workforce continues to be an important initiative at the Community College of Rhode Island. We are excited to partner with the Rhode Island Nursery and Landscape Institute, the RI Food Policy Council, URI and RI-DLT to build and support a pathway for a degree in agricultural and food systems." URI President David Dooley stated that "The University of Rhode Island is proud to be a part of this innovative partnership. We must work together to equip students with the skills and knowledge they need to be a part of the process in finding solutions to ensure access to healthy food and a sustainable environment for our future."

The new educational options that come from this initiative will link to the Rhode Island Nursery and Landscape Association's award-winning and nationally recognized Registered Apprenticeship Program, which provides job-based training where participants can earn while they learn, and to the Rhode Island Food Policy Council's Real Food Jobs program, which works to create a ready, flexible, and enduring workforce for RI's food industry sector by closing workforce gaps and creating dynamic industry pipelines.

A durable link to the national USDA-NIFA press release is located at:
<https://nifa.usda.gov/announcement/invest-ag-workforce>.

Stay informed by following the Rhode Island Nursery and Landscape Association and the Real Food Jobs RI program on Facebook and visiting <https://rinla.org/> and <https://rifoodcouncil.org/real-food-jobs/>.

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