

NEWS

Spring 2008

Volume 2 Issue 1

Greetings to All Rhode Island Farmers from Don Minto, President, RIRLA

This is an update of the RIRLA activities over the past years, and an invitation - for all of you who receive this letter, bring your farmer friends and join us for our Annual Meeting to be held on Monday April 21, 2008, 6:30 pm at the Elks Lodge, 42 Noosneck Hill Road in West Greenwich, R.I.

Over the past several years a small group of livestock farmers in Rhode Island have been working together to find ways to create and provide a better system for producing and marketing meat products within our local area.

For livestock farmers to be successful, they must pay attention to several areas. Production, processing, promotion, and permitting are the legs of the table on which the elusive ball of profit rolls around. If one leg is too short, that profit potential rolls off. We hope, as an organization to address each leg of this table and put the profit back where it belongs.....in the farmer's pocket.

Our efforts have concentrated on many fronts including getting proper permits from the Department of Health, labeling products to USDA specs, developing group trucking, and building the business aspect of the organization. The primary concern has been to address the declining infrastructure of USDA processing plants not only in Rhode Island but throughout the Northeast Region. In the past ten years or so, a dozen or more USDA and custom plants have closed their doors, forcing livestock producers to scramble around looking for places to get their animals processed. The remaining plants are overtaxed, maxed out, and in many cases unable to schedule appointments for many months if at all. Farmers have been forced to haul animals to processors

as far away as Vermont, New York, and even Pennsylvania. With diesel at \$4.00 per gallon, and rising, this long distance trucking is clearly not an efficient answer to our problem.

The short term band aid approach for Rhode Island Raised Livestock Association has been to work to schedule appointments, coordinate group shipping of farmer's beef, hogs, and sheep, and provide the necessary support for shipping and storing frozen product for each farmer's own marketing. This past year producers pooled animals and RIRLA hired truckers to ship several loads to four different plants. It was then shipped back, frozen, to a storage facility in Rhode Island. Although successful, it did not always run smoothly. However - it ran.

The existing model of Industrial Agriculture, when it comes to meat products, is indeed under extreme fire lately. It is clearly a broken system. When Topps Foods has to recall 22 million pounds of e coli tainted beef and the news is peppered with images of downer cows being fork lifted into the processor, the consumer takes notice.

Increasingly, a growing number of consumers are seeking healthy options for food choices for their families. They want to "buy local" from sustainable family farms. They want wholesome nutrition and are supporting farms in their communities that can deliver quality, healthful food. They want us to remain producing on our lands. The goal of Rhode Island Raised Livestock Association is to work with all livestock producers in developing a localized food system with the infrastructure in place to deliver a quality product to this growing market. If we can shorten the distance between the farm gate and the family dinner plate, including providing local processing, we will create a model of local livestock agriculture that is sustainable and in so doing will provide a climate of economic viability for each and every farm in Rhode Island.

The road ahead can be brighter for farmers if our organization is successful in accomplishing its mission. There is potential for some exciting developments regarding local processing that may well help us reach our goals. Please come to the meeting to learn more. The Rhode Island Raised Livestock Association is dependent upon input from all livestock farmers from all over the State. Our membership needs to grow and it will need farmers who want to roll up their sleeves and put in a bit of work to make things happen..... and reap the benefits that this organization will provide.

Please come to the meeting on April 21st!

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RIRLA News is published quarterly by the Rhode Island Raised Livestock Association. RIRLA's mission is "to promote the preservation of our agricultural lands, our rural economy, and our agrarian way of life by creating an organization that will secure a viable infrastructure and provide for the efficient and sustainable production, processing, and marketing of quality, value added, locally produced meats in the state of Rhode Island".

Annual membership is \$30 per farm, and includes the newsletter. We also accept unsolicited donations. RIRLA News welcomes articles, photographs, letters and classified advertising for possible publication. Publication of articles or advertisements is not necessarily an endorsement by RIRLA. Articles from this newsletter may not be reprinted without permission. ©RIRLA 2008

RIRLA Executive Board

East Region

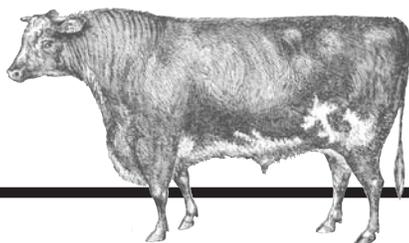
Don Minto, President, 423-0005

North Region

Kevin Bouthillette, Vice President, 742-6990

South Region

Will Wright, Treasurer, 392-3469



Why Rhode Island Raised Livestock Association?

Increasingly consumers want local foods, sustainable farms, a clean environment, and good health. Livestock producers seek economic viability, a good return for their quality products, healthy farms and livestock. Our success will come as we shorten the distance between the farm gate and the consumer's dinner plate.

Short Term Goals:

Farmers working together to address:

- Development of a "local food system": making better connections between the producer and the consumer through Farmers' Markets and On-Farm sales
- Creating a processing infrastructure
- Coordinating group trucking for long distance shipments
- Networking
- Educating each other
- Streamlining the RI DOH permitting process to aid direct marketing for producers

Long Term Goals:

- Establishing a livestock industry infrastructure for processing
- Developing strategies for non-direct marketing
- Branding – creating a quality "Rhody Raised" product line
- Marketing local meats to local institutions and restaurants

What are your benefits when you join this association?

- Gaining potential processing alliances
- Communication: working toward a web site or blog for member communication as well as a quarterly newsletter
- Help in locating feed sources
- Selling your livestock within the state
- Group trucking
- Equipment for sale or lease/custom work
- Educational opportunities – development and notification of pasturewalks, conferences, workshops, twilight meetings at member farms, etc.

Farmers are asked to join us in working toward accomplishing these goals.

Calendar

Annual Meeting

Monday April 21, 7:00 pm
Elks Lodge in W. Greenwich
6:30 Sign in and refreshments

President Don Minto will review accomplishments of the past year. Members of the Steering Committee and Executive board will detail the steps involved with processing an animal, give updates on processing facilities, both tried and new, and provide information on the permits necessary to market your animals for sale to the public.

New legislation will be discussed. Senators Sue Sosnowski and Kevin Breene will be on hand to inform the members of the new bill they have before the Senate.

Exciting developments in local processing for RIRLA Members will be explained.

Updates on the search for an Executive Director and the election of new Executive Officers will also take place.

The Elks Lodge is located at 42 Nooseneck Hill Rd. (Rt 3) just north of Exit 6 off RT 95

Search For RIRLA Director Begins

In February, the RIRLA advertised for a new Executive Director for the Association.

The Executive Director will act as the overall coordinator of all Association functions and report to the Board of Directors. Administrative responsibilities will include: membership recruitment, communications through newsletter and email notices, coordination of educational workshops for members, and cooperation and networking with other regional efforts on livestock initiatives. The Director will also have hands-on operational responsibilities for all logistics handling of RI member producers' livestock for processing.

The operational duties include establishing a schedule of processing dates with predetermined processing facilities, managing fees for services, arranging for safe livestock pickup and transport; coordinating all order requirements with farms, with timely monitoring and safe return of products to individual producers. The Director is responsible to the member group to negotiate the best price with vendors.

The current Board will be hiring the new Director after the new slate of officers is elected at the annual meeting in order that the newly elected President can have some input into the hiring process for the new Director.

Upcoming Events and Workshops

Sheep Shearing Day at Watson Farm

Saturday, May 10, 2008, 12 pm to 4 pm
at Watson Farm,
455 North Road, Jamestown, RI 02835
Admission: \$10 per car
for more info call 423-0005

RI 2nd Annual Wool & Fiber Day

Saturday May 17, 2008, 9 am to 4 pm
Coggeshall Farm
(RT 114) Poppasquash Rd., Bristol, RI
Admission: adults \$8
www.coggeshallfarm.org

Wool Collection Day

For growers with wool who want to participate in the 2008 Rhode Warm Blanket Project
Saturday June 7, 2008, 9:00 am to 2:00 pm
Urban Edge Farm
Pippin Orchard Rd., Cranston, RI
Contact: Barbara Thompson 949-0264, or
Polly Hopkins at: khop4811@aol.com

2008 Grazing Workshop Series

NOFA/Mass, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the University of Massachusetts Extension have organized these Grazing Workshops as a continuing education resource for Massachusetts farmers.
Go to: www.nofamass.org/programs/organicdairy/index.php

SVF Foundation

Second Annual Visitors Day

Saturday, June 7, 2008
9:30 m – 3 pm, Free Admission
152 Harrison Avenue, Newport, RI
SVF Foundation is a non-profit working towards the preservation of endangered breeds of livestock.
401-848-7229
www.svfoundation.org

2008 4H Show Dates

SRI 4-H Fair - June 27, 28 and 29
Washington County Fairgrounds, Richmond, RI

ERI 4-H Fair - July 18 and 19
Glen Farm, Portsmouth, RI

NRI 4-H Fair (Foster Old Home Days)
July 25, 26 and 27
Foster Fairgrounds, Foster, RI

Washington County Fair - August 13 - 17
Washington County Fairgrounds
Richmond, RI

