Agriculture in Rhode Island

The face of American agriculture is changing more rapidly now than ever before. In the early 1900, a team of horses and a good memory were the norm, compared to today’s farms with 40 to 300 horsepower tractors and computer spreadsheets. We have seen the conversion of potato fields to turf, and back to vegetables, and the emergence of multi-crop farming as the mainstay versus the exception. We have seen the transformation of the family farm into the family farm enterprise. We have seen our aquaculture industry make great strides toward increased size and production. We have seen our nursery and horticultural industry come to full bloom, representing over 50% percent of the agricultural value in our state. We have seen the transformation of our farms from wholesalers to astute retailers, featuring Pick-Your-Own of all types of crops. We have seen our farmers utilize agri-tourism concepts along with dramatic increases in farmers markets, roadside stands and other forms of direct marketing. In all, the last 30 years have probably produced the most dramatic changes in our State’s agriculture industry than any other preceding period.

Did you know:

*That the value of RI farm sales of fresh fruits and vegetables sold directly from the farm to consumers (via farmers markets, roadside stands etc.) is third in the nation at approximately $25,269 per farm.

Or

*That there are 1,243 farms in our state, representing over 68,000 acres of land, or approximately 11% of the land area of the State.

Or

The total market value of Rhode Island Agriculture, measured in 2012 by the Rhode Island Agriculture Economic Impact Survey, is $170.7 million dollars and contributes 1,790 jobs to the RI economy. Including indirect effects, the total economic impact of agriculture to the State is $268.2 million dollars and contributes 2,330 jobs.

Or

*That the foundation for all horse breeding in the United States was established in Rhode Island as early as 1676 followed by the establishment of the American Poultry Industry in 1854, and the Rhode Island Greening Apple was the first named apple in America.

Or

*That 25% of all Rhode Island farmers are women, the average age of all farmers is 57, the average size of a farm is 56 acres, and 83% of all farmers in RI earn less than $50,000 a year.

*Taken from the 2007 Census of Agriculture USDA - NASS
The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, along with local farmers, agricultural associations, collaboratives, colleges and universities, supermarkets, local food organizations, and government agencies believe that every Rhode Islander should understand how food and fiber products are produced, and should value the essential role agriculture contributes to our State’s economy and quality of life. Rhode Island Agriculture Day, which we are celebrating on this May 1st, is a day to honor the people who work to provide us with safe, abundant and affordable agricultural products. It is a day to focus public attention on our State’s agricultural industry and to educate our citizens on the many ways agriculture touches their lives each day.

What is Agriculture Day?

Janet Coit
Director, DEM
Master of Ceremonies

Louis Escobar
President, RI Dairy Farms Cooperative

Bob Rheault
Ocean State Aquaculture Association

Paul Willis
Ninman Ranch Pork Company
Thorton Iowa

Representative Art Handy
Chair, House Environment and Natural Resources Committee

Senator Susan Sosnowski
Chair, Senate Environment and Agriculture