



Northeastern Regional Association of State Agricultural Experiment Station Directors

## Building a Better America: Rhode Island

Submitted by:

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The Northeastern Regional Association of State Agricultural Experiment Station Directors (NERA) is an organization that represents the experiment stations located primarily on the campuses of the region's Land-grant universities (LGU) including the University of Rhode Island and the University of Connecticut. (The one exception to the co-location of an experiment station on a Northeast college campus is the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station, the country's oldest ag experiment station located in New Haven, CT.) Collectively, we are part of [agInnovation](#) which includes all the state agricultural experiment stations from across the country.

The colleges of agriculture/life sciences/natural resources from our region's Land-grant universities have drafted a joint vision for the future called the [Northeast Agenda](#). This document describes the unique characteristics of the Northeastern United States and shares the vision, mission, and purpose of Northeast regional Land-grant programs, our Extension services, and state agricultural experiment stations. The Northeast Agenda is complementary to the Administration's goal of building a better America.

Through the research performed by our experiment stations in the colleges of agriculture and life sciences at our LGUs, we ensure agricultural innovation, productivity, and sustainability. Consider for a moment that across the country, our state ag experiment stations perform ~75% of the publicly funded research for the public good.

To place the importance of agriculture to RI, we'd share that Rhode Island's agriculture and plant-based industries support over 23,000 jobs and contribute nearly \$3.5 billion to the economy annually.

Success has many parents and we're grateful for the Administration's support of the USDA's extramural grant agency, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture and the capacity funds

(e.g., Hatch Act, McIntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry, Evans-Allen Program [Research at 1890 Institutions] and Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) grants awarded by NIFA.

For instance, an AFRI grant awarded to [URI professor John Taylor](#) is helping to strengthen local food sovereignty, by studying the social-ecological dynamics of food production in urban and improving our urban food networks.

And through capacity funds, [Dr. Rebecca Brown, a URI professor](#), is developing new, climate-smart ways to monitor nitrogen and phosphorus and improve soil organic matter, all in an effort to take care of our planet and feed the people. This work and that of Dr. Taylor supports the President's [Vision, Needs, and Proposed Actions for the Bioeconomy Initiative](#) in which the Bold Goals include "increasing agricultural productivity while reducing nitrogen and methane emissions" and "developing new food and feed sources to eliminate global hunger by 2030."

Indeed, the University of Rhode Island is at the nexus of the green, blue, knowledge and bio-economies. Our Land-grant universities serve as innovation hubs, economic drivers, business engagers, research partners, and workforce developers. We want to shine a spotlight on our students (undergraduates and graduates). They are our stars and the beneficiaries and brokers of our knowledge economy.

We appreciate the Administration's support for the Chips and Science Act which will fund a [Tech Hub in RI](#). This hub is dedicated to the ocean and blue economy, a sweet spot for URI collaboration and public/private partnerships. Likewise, we're grateful for the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law which awarded [\\$82.5 million to RI](#) for upgrading the Pell Bridge, a span over Narragansett Bay. Not only is this an important thoroughfare for moving goods and services across Rhode Island, it assists in connecting Rhode Islanders with our local producers, connecting farms to eaters. That's a big deal given the importance that on-farm sales (including aquaculture operations) have on our economy and the quality of our lives.

Where do we need your help building a better America?

- Nurturing an enabling environment that values science-based technologies and strategies.
- Continued commitment to support, foster, and cultivate ag research at our Land-grant universities.
- Per [NIFA's FY 2024 President's Budget Proposal](#), increased investments in capacity programs to grow this country's largest and most robust ag R&D organization.
- Increased funding for the Research Facilities Act which will build new, cutting-edge, next-gen research laboratories.

