



2021 Rhode Island Legislative Updates

Special thanks to Rhode Island Food Policy Council

Farmland Protection Funding

Governor McKee recommended \$3 million be allocated towards the protection of working forest and farmlands throughout Rhode Island in FY 2023-FY 2024. The funding would come out of a new General Obligation bond that was authorized by RI voters in March 2021. Approved funding would finance the purchase of forest conservation easements, the purchase of development rights by the Agricultural Preservation Commission and the State Farmland Access Program. Governor McKee's Capital Budget can be found [here](#).

Farmland Protection and Access Legislation

The Rhode Island Senate introduced [S.39 -- Senate Resolution Protecting and Ensuring Farmland Protection](#). If passed, this resolution would have requested that the Department of Environmental Management ensure that land used for agricultural operations be further protected and when the land is also used for fish and wildlife, these purposes are not detrimental to agricultural operations.

The RI Senate Environment and Agriculture Committee recommended that this bill be held this session and further studies be done before they take a vote on it.

State Commission to Study the entire area of land use, preservation

The Rhode Island House introduced [HR5950](#) Res. #139 of 2021: House Resolution Creating A Special Legislative Commission to Study the Entire Area of Land Use, Preservation, Development, Housing, Environment, and Regulation. If passed, this legislation would have created an 18 member commission charged with drafting a statewide study that would analyze RI's land use planning for all purposes, including environmental protections and food security. This bill passed the RI State House this session but was not passed into law.

Soil Health Legislation

Two pieces of legislation (one in the RI Senate and one in the RI House) were introduced that included a provision to establish a state run Regenerative Agriculture Program. [S.468/H.5955](#) – The Agriculture Jobs Bureau Act did not leave its first Committee this session. Efforts to pass these bills were led by the Renew New England Alliance as part of a broader package of bills called the Rescue Rhode Island Act.

Solar Siting on Farmland Legislation

Two pieces of legislation that addressed solar siting on farmland and forestland moved through the RI State Legislature this session.

The first bill was [H6169 -- An Act Relating to Public Utilities and Carriers --Renewal Energy Resource Projects](#). This bill would close a loophole in the state's current solar siting rules that allow a developer to create a utility scale solar development in two pieces, on contiguous pieces of land, without going through a complete review process. The loophole has been used in several of the larger solar installations in the state over the last few years. This bill was passed by the State Senate with substitute language, however, it was not passed by the House.

The second bill that was introduced and later signed into law is [H5760A -- An Act Relating to Agriculture and Forestry](#). This new law will establish a forest conservation commission with broad powers to identify and protect important forest land in the state that will be coordinated by the Department of Energy Management. This act will also allow the commission to seek new funding and identify incentives for landowners to maintain their land as forest. Governor McKee signed this act into law on July 7, 2021.