

Letter from the President

January 2013 Newsletter

As we put another year behind us and look ahead to 2013 we are also looking forward to a new legislative session for the state of RI. Although current news and social economic events will certainly result in corresponding reactive legislative efforts, we could also see the next generation of initiatives on legislation that has slowly evolved in the past few general assembly sessions, consistent with trends in other states, a good deal of which could prove to be contrary to the wants and needs of the food industry of RI.

Some of the “current news” reaction legislation efforts could center on gun control and security in our schools. Additionally, many of the legislators during this past election period, including Speaker of the House, Gordon Fox, made campaign promises to establish programs and regulations to deal with the high unemployment in the state and to create jobs. On the “social economic” themes we have seen early movement and positioning on legalizing marijuana (the focus of Edith Aiello, Chair of House Judiciary), and legalizing same sex marriage (originally introduced by House leadership and supported by the governor and this year supported by the Senate President).

While these would appear to be the initial worthy causes and the initial focus of the General Assembly – and leadership - we will most certainly see additional legislation introduced as the session progresses in a number of areas that has been building momentum over the past few years. These include plastic bags (already being considered in a few municipalities), producer responsibility (packaging responsibility), menu regulation, beverage taxes, GMO labeling, and potential expansion of the sales tax.

These later listings are items that, for the most part, are not in the best interest of the food industry, at least not in the format and requirements that have been introduced previously. We need to follow this closely and react strongly where appropriate. One of the most effective ways of stating our views is always to discuss these issues and our concerns individually with key legislators.

While from an Association standpoint we are already setting up meetings and developing strategy positions one of the early opportunities for all members to help deliver our position is at our annual Trade Day (Thursday March 7th) during our legislative reception. We plan on inviting some of the key legislators including House and Senate Committee chairs to this event. Similar to last year, we will set up networking opportunities and introduce members to these legislators. This is well received by the State Representatives and Senators as they enjoy meeting their constituents and learning more about our industry.

More detail will follow in the next couple of weeks. Please consider attending our Annual Trade Day. It is an effective, informative, and fun event which offers a number of events as well as a great networking opportunity.