

RI Legislative Update September 2012

Looking ahead to the next RI Legislative Session Steve Arthurs recently spoke to a group of members providing them with an update on our legislative program giving a brief update on the results of the last session as well as providing some insights into what is widely believed to be the issues that could face us in the next session. Some of the expended issues we need to prepare for include, sugared beverage taxes and limitations, menu labeling, plastic bottle restrictions, GMO restrictions and product requirements, Trans fat limitations and mandatory bookkeeping requirements, e-verification, sales tax modifications and expansion, producer responsibilities (various possibilities and probabilities) and most certainly plastic bag usage.

As this is a non-election year with our state legislature this will be a session where the state reps and senators are more likely to be open to move on some measures that they may have been reluctant to in the past session as they did not want to pass anything that their constituents could view negatively – particularly anything involving additional taxes or additional cost.

Steve then made mention of the current events in Barrington regarding their potential ban on plastic bags in their town – and most specifically about the potential for other cities and towns to follow similar agendas with regard to plastic as well as look at local regulations and requirements in other areas. Based on actions in other states these could include local ordinances on sugared beverages, local incremental sales taxes, limitations on tobacco sales – etc. This would cause a number of issues for our membership.

Related State Initiatives and Activities:

SNAP Distribution Window Expansion

There has been significant progress made with Sec. Constantino and Director Powel at the RI Dept. of Human Services at a meeting with them three weeks ago. They are in agreement that our proposal to expand the distribution was a needed change but they needed to investigate further the impact of current changes to infrastructure on the state's systems and where this could be placed into the go forward projects. We have a follow up meeting in October at which point we might more of an active realistic timeframe for this.

Food Delivery Trucks Priority During State of Emergency

After several meetings the association now has a procedure for contacting RIEMA during times of emergency and requesting exemption from the governor so that food delivery vehicles would be granted special status during times of emergency so that trucks could deliver to stores during periods when travel is restricted. This should help in minimizing issues in some of the smaller cities and towns and also provide better logistical planning during the period prior to and at the end of severe storms.

Other RIFDA Updates:**WIC Committee:**

We had a meeting last week on Sept. 13th. A general overview of the program was given by the people from the RI Health Department and the contractor who won the bid to facilitate RI's initiative to convert to EBT format. Unfortunately, they did not provide the anticipated timeline or next steps as expected. There is another meeting scheduled for Dec. 15 at which time they hope to have confirmation from the federal government which would then enable them to establish the necessary timeline. Steve noted that they were waiting for federal funding for the state to use to provide very small retailers with financial and/or equipment grants to support the conversion of the product. If that is indeed the holdup they may not get the necessary answers from Washington for several months as the gridlock continues in Congress.

Food Safety:

The next meeting is scheduled for October 8th – we are waiting for confirmation from the Health department regarding their availability for the meeting. Steve noted that things have been relatively quiet for us on this front and that the focus of food inspections over the past few months has concentrated on bakeries and on restaurants and that this is seen to be continuing over the next few months.