

Even though Rhode Island is the smallest state in the union, it is doing a great deal more than its agrarian share. According to the USDA, from 2002 to today, Rhode Island has had the highest increase in the number of farms and the total acreage of farmland in New England, and most likely the country; they currently have the highest value farmland in the United States, at \$13,600.00 per acre, and their agricultural revenue has risen from \$38 million in 1980 to \$79.5 million in 2011.

After WWII, Americans had begun to rely less and less on local farms. With the rise of supermarkets and farmers focusing on wholesale, consumers were not as interested in or aware of where their food came from. The idea of commercialized farming seemed like a great boon, where food quality and distribution would be regulated by the government, and, in theory, selecting the right local food was one less thing to worry about.

By the 1970s and 80s, commercial farming had fully taken hold of the market. Processed goods and hormone-treated meats were the norm, and no one considered what the ramifications of such agricultural practices could be. As technological advances gave rise to a greater proliferation of information however, consumers became more inclined to question institutional agriculture, and be more selective about their personal choices.

By the turn of the 21st century, Americans began to think carefully about what they ate. With a growing interest in sustainability and local food, people began seeking out farmer's markets and organic sources. In Rhode Island, there was a dramatic increase of direct farm to consumer sales, and as profits went up, Rhode Island claimed the highest percentage of agricultural market sales derived from direct marketing in the nation. Smaller, sustainable farming operations grew, and the state's agricultural renaissance took root.

While Rhode Island's statewide farming growth is significant, what may be more impressive are the developments happening on one small, bucolic farm in Newport, where the **SVF Foundation** (www.svffoundation.org) preserves heritage traits of rare and endangered livestock. In the event of a collapse in the food supply, SVF can reawaken these breeds with their full genetic diversity within one generation. Much like a seed bank protects plant diversity and food security, SVF collects and stores animal germplasm for future use.

SVF's work is just as important to protecting future of our food industry as it is to protecting the earth's biodiversity. Encouraging the preservation and use of heritage breeds has a ripple effect on the way we produce and consume food- promoting smaller, sustainable farming practices with grass-fed operations that local markets can rely on.

Likewise, purveyors of natural, grass-fed meat such as Heritage Foods USA and the Niman Ranch network are helping sustainable farms gain greater market share—currently about 3% of the American beef market—by pooling their resources. Meats from a number of the heritage breeds in SVF's germplasm conservation program are now available from U.S. farms through these sources, including

Ancient White Park cattle (fewer than 1,200 worldwide) and Tunis sheep. Yet, for sustainable farming to be successful on a wider scale, there must be wider “buy-in” to the shift from commodity agribusiness to sustainable farming.

As consumers become better educated about heritage breeds and the health benefits of eating natural meat, a greater conversion towards sustainable food practices becomes more possible every day. SVF's work ensures that such a dramatic shift can happen, to save our animals, and ourselves.