



Hope's Harvest RI

Hope's Harvest RI, founded by **Eva Agudelo** in 2017, mobilizes volunteers to fan out into farmers' fields and glean fruits and vegetables left behind after harvest. The gleaned food is then brought to food pantries and distributed to people in need.

The idea for a farm-based food rescue program came to Eva while she was serving as a member of the RI Food Policy Council. Drawing on her background in sustainable farming, farm training, and nutrition incentive projects, she began researching alternatives and embarked on a listening tour with local stakeholders.

"Most people felt that the reason a program didn't exist was because there wasn't a dedicated person," she says. "The farmers need to be able to depend on it and the pantries need to have consistency. You really are doing logistics management and filling some gaps in the supply chain that are tricky if you are just doing it on a temporary or volunteer basis."

Eva stepped forward and developed a project plan. Then she enrolled in SEG's 2018 Food Accelerator and began to build out her idea.

The SEG Network Effect

The structure of the SEG Accelerator, with its weekly sessions and assignments, helped Eva develop the language and frameworks she needed to start up her venture. The connection to SEG's network was another advantage. As a finalist for the Carter Fellowship for Entrepreneurial Innovation through the Rhode Island Foundation, Eva needed to prepare a proposal and a pitch.

"**Betsy Santarlaschi** connected me to a previous fellowship recipient, and **Diane Lynch** worked through my pitch with me," she says. "There was just a lot of support from people ready to help me in any way."

Since 2018, Hope's Harvest RI has rescued fruits and vegetables from 25 different local farms. More than 250 people contributed over 1,300 volunteer hours. The organization has rescued 115,000 pounds of food in the past two years, and according to Eva they aim to recover 80,000 pounds this year. Every type of local food is represented in the haul – apples, chard, kale, potatoes, melons, a lot of butternut squash. It goes directly to food pantries or back to the pack house for temporary storage at Farm Fresh RI, which presently serves as a major partner and fiscal agent for Hope's Harvest RI.

Hope's Harvest RI has also grown its volunteer base. The mailing list is up to 1300 people, with 350 officially registered volunteers.

"Being able to do something that is tangible and grounded and has immediate impact and benefit for people is really satisfying and deeply meaningful," says Eva. "There's no ambiguity about whether it's good or not. It's very clear that you are feeding people who are in need with healthy, fresh, local food."

At left, Hope's Harvest RI founder Eva Agudelo (center) works with volunteers.