

Survey part of \$1.2 million URI study on island farming future

By Dotti Farrington

About 2,500 residents are being asked to take part in a research survey aimed at helping to save island farms through the expansion of profitable activities.

The survey has been designed by the University of Rhode Island's Department of Environmental and Natural Resource Economics. It is based on observations that farms provide many amenities for which their owners are not traditionally paid.

The survey is part of a \$1.2 million program at URI to help farms maintain themselves, while continuing to provide services not traditionally identified as a byproduct of their food production. Those services include providing and protecting wildlife habitats, scenic views, and educational opportunities.

Variations of the questions on the form are being used for the survey as part of the plan to experiment with different methods of asking people about their opinions and values. A report will detail the results of this aspect of the survey, as well as the direct results about farms and payment for amenities will be forthcoming.

One survey approach proposes the possibilities of paying farms to protect habitats for bobolinks, a species of bird being threatened by significant declines in population, mainly because of a change in farming practices. Residents getting surveys with that approach are being asked to tell URI how much they want to help the farms

and how much they are willing to pay to do so, including by supporting funds to save bobolinks specifically.

The propositions about paying farms is theoretical at this time, but could be translated into actual cash for the farm owners, depending on the outcome of the survey results, according to URI researchers.

The surveys were mailed last week, and URI hopes that completed forms will be returned by the end of this month. URI hopes to have an analysis by February, with possibilities of updates, depending on survey response. As in any survey, URI emphasized that the more responses, the greater degree of usefulness the results will be.

Farms in no other towns are involved in the survey, although a test mailing was used in Wakefield as a preliminary to the Jamestown survey.

The survey begins by citing residents in Jamestown for consistently showing appreciation for working farms and the amenities the farms offer beyond food production. "The way farmers manage their land determines the extent and quality of amenities. Providing more and better amenities can benefit the public but it often comes at a cost to the farmers," URI officials said in the survey's introduction.

It was noted that Jamestown has nine active farms on 700 acres, which is 12 percent of the total land of the island. It was noted that, throughout the state, half of all farmland has been lost for agricultural uses.

In the bobolink form, URI researchers explained that hayfields provide critical nesting and feeding habitats for such birds as bobolinks, cattle egrets, Savannah sparrows, glossy ibis, and red-tailed hawks. Bobolinks are among the most visible species, and are also of concern nationally because they are a declining species, according to URI.

Due to gradual changes in climate, hayfields mature earlier and are cut earlier and more frequently, meaning that the bobolink habitat is endangered and shrinking, and the bird population is declining. URI wants to determine how much support exists to pay farmers to adjust their practices in ways that would continue and improve

amenities. The survey findings might be used as a springboard to develop other ways to help farmers financially through special environmental projects.

Responses to the survey "directly can influence farmers and the farm landscape in Jamestown," the URI researchers said.

Half the funds for the survey, and related activities, come from federal sources, and the rest from other public and private entities, including EcoAsset Markets of Providence, which was founded about a decade ago to harness the power of the free market to conserve natural resources and protect the environment. EAM officials said the world's essential ecosystems, climate, and biodiversity are being destroyed in large part because economic markets have no way of assessing the financial value of many of our natural resources.

The purpose of the Jamestown project is to serve as a pilot for establishing community-based markets for wildlife protection. While securing nesting sites for bobolinks is the aim of this particular project, the project could serve as a model for securing protection for other forms of wildlife, for protecting water quality and addressing other ecological issues, URI officials said.



Where in the World is the Jamestown Press?
Dick and Ginger Flanigan of Jamestown recently took the Press on a romantic gondola ride through the canals of Venice.

Hazelett Marine presents alternative mooring system

By Sam Bari

Commissioners and attendees alike watched and listened intently as Hazelett Marine's General Manager Jeff Lefebvre presented the Hazelett Elastic Mooring System at the Nov. 8 meeting of the Harbor Management Commission.

The high-tech system is engineered for performance in severe weather conditions. The low maintenance system is ecologically friendly and designed to work at 30 percent capacity on specified boat weight classes in winds up to 70 miles per hour. However, the system is not guaranteed in uncontrolled, hurricane conditions.

Unlike traditional mooring systems using concrete block, chain, and nylon lines that can require

considerable scope, the Hazelett system eliminates the need for chain, and has the potential for 1 to 1 scope in ideal conditions. With mooring space in the harbors at a premium, the system shows promise of accommodating as much as four times as many vessels in the same area using traditional moorings. Although the system costs approximately twice as much as a traditional mooring, it is engineered to last four times as long. The system, however, does not work well with mushroom anchors.

After the presentation, the harbor commissioners decided to put the item on the agenda for next month's meeting to further discuss its merits and consider changing legislation to allow the system to be used in Jamestown waters. The system has had favorable reports from other towns and area marine operators. By implementing the system, the number of moorings in the now full-to-capacity mooring fields could substantially increase, according to Lefebvre.

In an unrelated issue, Harbor Commission Chairman Mike de Angeli and Commissioner Chris Brown recused themselves when Commissioner David Laurie opened the discussion about com-

mercial marine operators' business practices. Boat owners who had approached Laurie with complaints about unfair treatment by marine operators prompted the agenda item. The boat owners were afraid to identify themselves because of fear of losing their moorings due to retribution from the operators who control the mooring fields.

At last month's meeting, when Laurie first addressed the matter, several other commissioners said they had similar experiences. "Boat owners have no forum to report their grievances," Laurie said. "They need to have somewhere they can go, or someone they can talk to about their problems without being afraid of losing their moorings, or being intimidated in any way," he added.

Commissioner Andrew Kallfelz said he would get together with Laurie to forward questions concerning the commission's jurisdiction over mooring management to the town solicitor. The panel voted for a continuance on the matter to the December meeting.

In other business, Police Chief Thomas Tighe, the commission's executive director, reported that setting up a Web site for the harbor

See "Harbor" on page 18

HEALTH INSURANCE
for
**Individuals
Families
and the
Self-Employed**



Gaylin Cordes

**AFFORDABLE
FLEXIBLE
423-3605**

Bodycraft
Massage Therapy



Heather Kaye
Licensed & Insured

Gift Certificates
House Calls

\$10 OFF INITIAL VISIT

401.849.5300
342 Broadway, Newport, R.I.

Place your ad here and
**REACH MILLIONS
ONLINE**
All for one price!
Call 423-3200



H.V. HOLLAND, INC.
HEATING & AIR CONDITIONING CONTRACTORS

2 HAMMETT COURT, P.O. BOX 335
JAMESTOWN, RI 02835
(401) 423-0614 • FAX (401) 423-0619



It's Hard To Stop A Trane.™

Gillis Car Detailing
Have your car spruced up with all the trimmings!!!


- Sparkling Inside & Out... no jive
- Keep it Looking Great — Sign-up for Maintenance Care. Every 2 weeks or once monthly. Quick & Affordable
- Great Christmas Gift Idea for almost anyone!
- Gift Certificates Available



A Clean Car is a Happy Car **423-1512**

• ASTRONOMY COMPANIONS • SMITHSONIAN HANDBOOKS • GUIDES FOR YOUNG NATURALISTS

Books, Books (and More Books!)



**THE
WORLD
STORE**

16 West Main Street • Wickford, RI
(401) 295-0081

• WEATHER GUIDES • TRAIL MAPS • PETERSON FIELD GUIDES • BIRDS OF NEW ENGLAND