



2022 County Council Candidate Questionnaire

The Food Council invited all County Council candidates to complete a 9-item questionnaire, which was developed in collaboration with our community partners. Our goal is to provide information on local candidate's food system priorities and commitments. As a 501c3 nonprofit organization, we do not endorse candidates.

For more information, please contact Heather Bruskin, Executive Director at hbruskin@mocofoodcouncil.org.

Name: **Fatmata Barrie**

Campaign Website: www.fatmatabarrie.com

Candidate for: **District 5**

1. Please describe your personal and/or professional engagement in any local food systems initiatives, policies, and programs.

A: I have volunteered with Kings & Priests' Court International Ministries and American Diversity Group. I have helped with information sharing and food distribution to those in need.

2. Please describe any plans you have for creating economic opportunities for individuals who identify as Black, Indigenous, Latinx/Latino, and/or a person of color, particularly in food and agriculture?

A: One of my signature policies is the creation of an inclusive, integrated approach to Economic Development. The central tenet of economic development should be about people, not just about attracting investment. It may not be obvious how a comprehensive economic development plan will encourage "food sustainability" and reverse "food insecurity". The plan will consider all aspects of community life for all residents, including incentivizing small and large businesses to locate in underserved neighborhoods so families will have access to quality food sources. This includes affordable and safe transportation options to provide access to specialty services outside an immediate neighborhood. In addition, this plan will provide resources and incentives for fresh food



providers to encourage them to move to certain communities where they may not otherwise consider. We will use unused spaces to provide such resources, create programs for urban gardening for community members, and provide residents with the resources to learn about good nutrition and grow their foods.

3. Please describe your position on addressing income insufficiency, which is a major contributor to food insecurity in our County. Please describe any positions or initiatives in your platform that focus on food security.

A: We hear about a lot of plans for helping people post-pandemic. However, many people were struggling with food insecurity before the pandemic and the county was trying to meet those needs with stop-gap measures. Food banks help feed families and give them access to more nutritional options. However, I would prefer more permanent solutions that lift families up so they can provide for their own nutritional needs with dignity. The Food Secure Montgomery Five Year Plan released in 2017 was a good start. If elected, I will revisit the plan, review the metrics, identify what has been implemented to date and accelerate efforts to address food insecurity in the county, with a focus on District 5 and East County.

4. What role should the County government have in improving resident access to federal benefit programs, such as SNAP and WIC.

A: I have proposed a formal “network of ambassadors” be established to interface between the community and the county council and county agencies and services. The ambassadors will be the communication link to community centers, religious centers, and ethnic advisory groups to disseminate important and timely information to disconnected residents and their families, so they have the information they need to live and thrive on a daily basis. This network of ambassadors can also be used to educate the community on the SNAP program and other nutritional services available to them.

5. It is likely that the impacts of climate change, national and global politics, and future disasters will further disrupt food production, supply chains, and food security networks. Please describe any policies and programs that you will propose or support to address local food system resilience?

A: I propose supporting and creating programs to shorten the supply chain by incentivizing the food sources closest to where they are needed – the local farmers and small food service entrepreneurs. Expanding the Farm to Food Bank program. Also, increasing the number of local food pantries and locating them in underserved areas and supporting those we already have here in the East County. Preserving fresh produce should be encouraged, especially working with groups that are providing urban gardens. This will increase the demand for local produce and stock food pantries with nutritious canned options that are out of season. The county should incentivize and train local kitchens at community centers, churches, and food pantries in preservation techniques. We should engage our young people, many of whom are interested in healthy and sustainable food choices. Finally, the county should consider increasing their buying power by coordinating volume purchases to distribute to food access points across the county.



6. Please describe any initiatives or policies you would propose to increase local food production and access to affordable agricultural land.

A: I will refer to my previous answer with the addition of improving the supply-demand equation and transportation. In order to shorten the supply chain, farmers need to be able to get their products to the people who need them while maintaining freshness. Efficient, timely, and affordable transportation options on a regular basis would help. Perhaps gas cards for farmers who transport produce to food banks and local kitchens to help lower their transportation costs so they can make more trips; or incentives for farmers who pool their resources to bring more food into East County. To increase the demand side of the equation, incentives can also be offered to small businesses located in underserved areas to buy more from local food sources and to entrepreneurs who operate pop-up markets in areas designated as food deserts. Some consider weekend farmers' markets as pop-up markets. However, traditionally farmer's markets are low volume and higher priced. Urban pop-up markets don't need to be expensive if they are part of the farm to food bank program for example. Finally, an analysis should be done of the available agricultural land and how purchase of this land specifically for local food production can be subsidized if certain conditions are met.

7. Please describe any initiatives or policies you will propose to reduce food waste and advance zero-waste strategies.

A: The issue of food waste is at the intersection of Health and the Environment. A closed-loop food system will ensure that food waste is used by farmers to help grow more crops and feed more animals, while lowering the environmental impact of waste removal and disposal pollution generating machinery, toxic fertilizers, and reliance on mass produced feed. I support and encourage initiatives that divert food scraps to both commercial and residential composting programs. Farmers should be incentivized to use compost generated in the communities that they serve to generate more food products for these same communities. This is what I mean by a "closed-loop food system"

8. Where do you see opportunities for the County government to support food education? How can the County support residents in making healthy and sustainable food choices easier?

A: This is another area where my proposed "network of community ambassadors" can be part of the solution. This formal network of community liaisons between the county and community groups, where residents congregate and socialize, will provide a plethora of information that will help residents improve their daily lives; particularly those who are underserved and disadvantaged due to location in the county, language, cultural barriers, or the mentally challenged. A simple solution would be for the ambassadors to provide information to educate the community on nutrition, where to find nutritious options, how to start a neighborhood (urban) pop-up food market, and other access points.



9. What do you see as the biggest food system challenges in the County and what do you believe is the role of the County Council in addressing them? How should community stakeholders be engaged in that work?

A: There are many food system challenges in the County, particularly in District 5 where my focus is. District 5 has the highest percentage of non-white residents in Montgomery County, the highest percentage of Black residents, and a high percentage of immigrant-owned businesses. As previously noted, fewer than 10% of local agricultural producers are people of color in our County. Therefore, there is racial disparities at both the demand and supply side of our food system. Food insecurity should be an integral part of the County Council's plan to better the lives of our county residents. Other than providing important funding for organizations and initiatives such as the Food Council, I believe the County Council should be part of creating a more comprehensive solution to (1) improve the current food system for the food insecure, and (2) remove the racial disparities both for the consumers and the producers. Community stakeholders should be an integral part of formulating a solution both through the proposed network of community ambassadors and by requiring all councilmembers to go out into the impacted communities on a regular basis, which is what I will do on day one when elected.

