



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: **Brandy Brooks**

Campaign Website: <https://brandy4montgomery.com>

Candidate for: **At-Large**

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

A: I have been engaged in advocacy and organizing around community food systems since 2009, first in the Boston metro area and later in the DMV. In Boston, I served as Director of Community Programs for The Food Project, a nationally recognized youth and community food systems organization, overseeing our food access, community gardening, school food, and community engagement programming. I later served as Interim Director of the Boston Collaborative for Food & Fitness; our flagship program was the management of Boston Bounty Bucks, the City's SNAP access and matching program across more than 25 farmers markets. In DC, I served as the Director of Programs for Dreaming Out Loud, a local food justice nonprofit that supported food access, urban agriculture, and community-based food entrepreneurship, where I coordinated our partnerships across all aspects of our programming. I was also an active member of the Chesapeake Food Network, in particular with their Community Ownership and Empowerment working group, where we sought to identify and support food systems solutions rooted in building community power and resilience and dismantling barriers of racism, sexism, and classism in access to food system resources. I've been a speaker on food justice and community food systems at a wide variety of local, regional and national conferences, including Rooting DC, the Northeast Sustainable



Agriculture Working Group (NESAWG) annual conference, and the American Planning Association national conference.

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: Investing deeply in economic opportunity for communities that have been marginalized, exploited and excluded in our society is a core component of both food justice and economic justice. This requires recognizing BIPOC community members not solely as those in need of food assistance or those who serve our food, but for the central role that they have always played in agricultural production, processing, distribution, preparation, and innovation. As part of repairing the harm that we have done to Indigenous, Black, Latino/x, Asian, and other communities of color by exploiting their agricultural labor, skills, and knowledge, we must ensure that these communities have ready access to capital, physical space, and technical assistance to develop successful food and agriculture enterprises that help to meet the food needs within their communities and across our county in sustainable and culturally responsive ways.

This would include increasing support for programs like Montgomery Countryside Alliance's Land Link program and the Crossroads Community Food Network Microenterprise Training Program and Community Kitchen. It would also include ensuring that community members of color have access to capital for enterprises within the food system with more intensive initial capital costs, such as food trucks, storefronts, and agricultural storage, distribution, and processing facilities. Lastly, we must ensure that communities that have experienced marginalization in agriculture are given equitable opportunities to receive investment and develop businesses in rapidly growing food and agricultural sectors including breweries, wineries, distilleries, and cannabis production.

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 cannot expect to adequately address, let alone eliminate, food security in our county unless we address its root cause in poverty and economic injustice. We must support union employment in the public and private sector so workers can bargain for higher wages, fair promotional practices, and strong medical and retirement benefits. We must also continue to raise the minimum wage beyond \$15 an hour, as we know a living wage in this county is now closer to \$30 an hour.

We should move away from the regressive taxes we depend upon to fund local services, and pursue more progressive taxes on the income and property of our wealthiest residents and corporations. This would enable us to more robustly fund key social services and public benefits that help to combat poverty and food insecurity, as well as continuing to test and expand models like the universal basic income pilot launched in the fall of 2021. Fighting to secure housing and healthcare as human rights will also be crucial to addressing income insufficiency for county residents, because rising housing and health care costs are a key driver of economic insecurity.



For more on my people-centered policy platform, visit <https://brandy4montgomery.com/platform/>

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

A: In addition to partnering with our Congressional representatives on advocacy for these benefits to be maintained and robustly funded, the County plays a pivotal role in helping to connect residents to these programs. The Department of Health and Human Services, through both its own staff and its partnerships with community-based organizations, shapes how easily and effectively residents who need services can get them. As much as possible, we need to ensure that residents have a one-stop, culturally competent and linguistically accessible, respectful and supportive pathway for getting accurate information about the benefits services for which they are eligible and getting signed up for those services. We must also recognize how structural racism, classism, sexism, ageism, ableism and xenophobia all create barriers for those seeking to access services, and make sure both public agencies and private partners are taking concrete steps to address these issues in their organizations.

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: One of the most amazing things about Montgomery County is the fact that we have strong urban and suburban areas and a large and well-preserved rural region all in the same jurisdiction. This offers a tremendous opportunity for building out a resilient, hyper-local food system, and I want to actively support creating that system as a Councilmember. I think this includes talking with our farmers about the opportunities and barriers involved in shifting agricultural production from commodity crops to table crops and continuing to increase the use of sustainable and organic farming methods; working to increase community gardening skills, resources, and access to growing space across all parts of the county and especially in areas with a higher proportion of food insecure residents; supporting equitable local agricultural economic development as noted in question #2; and strengthening community-based networks and programs that help connect vulnerable residents to the food they need, from emergency food programs to community-supported agriculture programs to meal delivery services.

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

A: I'm especially interested in creating more community growing space on public lands and in partnership with community institutions that have large plots of land; this can include both community gardens and urban farms at a variety of scales. I think it's especially important to ensure support for and access to community growing space in areas where we already know residents have access to less outdoor and recreational space, as part of environmental justice for those communities.



Additionally, I think it's important to talk with current agricultural land owners about how they can not only lease their land to new and disadvantaged farmers in the near term, but also how land ownership can be transferred to Indigenous, Black, and other marginalized communities who have experienced a history of land expropriation in our county. Tools for this can include both individual ownership strategies for those who have worked a piece of land and community ownership strategies like community land trusts to preserve access to agricultural land over the long term.

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

A: I'm a strong supporter of waste reduction and zero waste strategies like recycling, upcycling, and composting. However, in order to support people to use these strategies, we have to make sure that the infrastructure to do so is accessible to them. I'm especially interested in working with landlords and tenants in multifamily properties to make sure residents have easy access to both recycling and composting services and that both residents and property managers have access to education and technical assistance around sustainable waste management, including addressing pest control concerns.

I want to continue supporting and expanding the County's Commercial Food Scraps Recycling Program; with proper infrastructure support and technical assistance for commercial entities, I would support a commercial food waste diversion mandate similar to legislation passed last year in DC. To meet the sustainable waste management demand that such a mandate would generate, I also support transitioning the Dickerson incinerator to a commercial composting facility and supporting the development of community-based composting business and partnerships with local farms.

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: While education around growing, preparing and eating healthy food is valuable for our community, we should be wary of the common trope that people struggle to eat healthy food or sustainably produced food because they don't know enough. Too often, food education frameworks blame individuals for their food choices while both ignoring the enormous structural barriers many residents face if they want to buy or prepare fresh food, from a lack of nearby grocery stores with good-quality fresh food to the relatively higher price of fresh produce and protein to not having access to a full kitchen for preparing meals. Additionally, food education and nutrition standards that do not recognize the wealth and variety of foodways people bring to our county from all across the world end up marginalizing immigrant residents and ignoring food practices people already have that are healthier than standard American diets.

I would like to see us develop more popular education approaches to food education - where instead of having an "expert" instructing a group of "learners" how to grow, prepare, or eat, we create opportunities for us to investigate and share the food traditions and knowledge that many of us still carry and are connected to through our families and cultures. Whether in schools or community settings, this kind of model helps us to value and draw on the wisdom that already exists in our communities and expand our collective understanding of healthy and sustainable food.



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: I think our biggest food system challenges are economic insecurity and food system resilience. The COVID-19 pandemic only increased and exacerbated food insecurity for Montgomery County residents; and while communities have developed new emergency food resources to help meet that need, the underlying economic issue remains and is not getting better for many families. We have to be working both within and beyond the food system to ensure that all county residents have stable housing, an income that allows them to meet their basic needs, and affordable access to high-quality health care. The County Council can play a particular role through housing and economic development policy that centers the needs of our most vulnerable residents.

When it comes to food system resilience, I believe we need a bold vision for making Montgomery County increasingly self-sufficient in meeting its own food needs. In order to both develop this vision and identify the most effective strategies for housing and economic policy that supports everyone to thrive, we need participatory policy-making practices that engage community stakeholders in setting policy agendas, identifying key strategies and priorities, and actively participating in implementation and evaluation of outcomes. As a racial equity and environmental justice consultant who has been working on land use and community food systems for more than 15 years, I'm excited to use my skills and expertise to facilitate this kind of deeply engaged and empowering policy development.

