

## Montgomery County 2018 County Council Elections: Food Council Candidate Questionnaire

The Montgomery County Food Council (MCFC) is the primary connection point for all community partners engaged in cultivating a sustainable, equitable, and robust local food system. Our 25 Council Members are selected volunteer business and nonprofit leaders, government officials, educators, and community members who lead our four Working Groups, which convene an additional 100+ community partners on a monthly basis to identify local food system challenges and develop collaborative, feasible strategies to address these issues:

- The **Environmental Impact Working Group** protects and improves the local resources of the County related to agriculture and food, such as soil, water, and biodiversity, through promoting composting and sustainable practices.
- The **Food Economy Working Group** develops and sustains an economically viable local food system that supports producers, distributors, retailers, and consumers.
- The **Food Literacy Working Group** improves the eating habits of County residents through promoting access to educational resources on nutrition, gardening, cooking skills, food safety and food marketing.
- The **Food Recovery and Access Working Group** increases access to locally produced, culturally appropriate, nutritious food among all County residents, especially in communities with low food security.

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## Questions

- 1. What local food initiatives, policies and programs have you personally and professionally supported, and in what capacities, to improve the various aspects of our local food system (such as those outlined above)?**

I begin by affirming my full support for the Five Year Strategic Plan, A Food Secure Montgomery, prepared by the Food Council and County government staff in January 2017. I'm grateful for this useful blueprint. I support its well-researched findings and thoughtful and inclusive recommendations for a County free of hunger. As Recreation Director for the Leggett administration, I implemented programs to increase the number of low income children receiving food during the summer months when they were unable to access free and reduced meals through their schools. I also worked to expand meals for senior citizens in our senior centers. In both cases, I stressed nutrition education as well as providing food. If elected, I will support the implementation of the recommendations of the plan.

- 2. The Food Council partnered with the County government to convene 300 community stakeholders in the creation of a five-year Food Security Plan (FSP), released in January 2017. The plan identifies the food insecurity rate in the county (6.3%, of which 13.3% are children<sup>1</sup>), and the populations and geographic locations most at risk for hunger. In its first year, FSP successes have included creating FoodStat, a County-based platform for collecting and analyzing available local food access data, expanding existing programs such as the Weekend Bag food assistance program, and strengthening the network of food assistance agencies. Over \$500,000 in county funds were appropriated in FY18 to finance these initiatives and program expansions.***

**What do you find to be the greatest successes of the plan thus far, and what do you see as the most critical next steps? Will you support and fund the continued implementation of the Food Security Plan if you are elected?**

I think there are three very important accomplishments to date. The first is the collection and analysis of data. It is critical that we understand the scope of need in our County and exactly where it is located. Recent work by the Food Council tells us of the unique needs of poor children and senior citizens as well as people with disabilities. It also reminds us of the large number of immigrants living in our County with special nutrition needs. The second area of great success is the increase in awareness by the general public about the existence of hunger in this very wealthy county. Finally, the Food Council has been helpful in promoting greater cooperation among the many organizations addressing hunger in our County.

Next steps include continued focus on the Five Year Plan. Also bringing more private investment and business to the actual delivery of food to those in need. Getting food to parts of the County not served by existing programs such as in the East County and Northern County as well as those who are isolated.

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<sup>1</sup> Feeding America

I will support annual funding to advance our community to achieve the goal of ending hunger.

- 3. *Montgomery County's economy has a robust food production sector, with 540 total farms<sup>2</sup> (over 200 of which produce vegetables, fruit, dairy, and/or meat) that employ 836 agricultural workers, 20 farmers markets (more than any other county in Maryland). Our 93,000 acre agricultural reserve is a nationally recognized model for effective land preservation for farming. In addition, over 70 non-farm food and beverage producers are based here. In order to highlight the diversity of this producer Community, the Food Council launched the Food and Beverage Guide in 2016 and the MoCo Made initiative in 2017 in partnership with the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation.***

**What programs and policies would you champion to increase local food production and distribution to support these farmers and businesses to meet a growing regional consumer demand for nutritious, local food?**

I will promote the Agricultural Reserve as a resource to provide locally grown food for our community. I will support efforts to encourage local restaurant and grocers to use locally grown and prepared food products. I will support agricultural education programs that prepare individuals for careers in agriculture, other food preparation and related careers. I would promote agricultural cooperatives and consider economic incentives to grow this exciting business and career path.

- 4. *Montgomery County currently incinerates approximately 23% of all residential food waste<sup>3</sup>, a valuable resource that could be recycled and actually count towards the County's goal of 70% recycling by 2020. The County Department of Environmental Protection will be releasing a Composting and Compost Use Strategic Plan this spring. Additional resources will be needed to develop infrastructure to compost and to educate the public about the need to compost and how to use compost.***

**Do you support allocating resources to increase food waste composting at the large, mid-scale, and backyard composting levels? What suggestions do you have for the County to pursue zero waste strategies, such as establishing more locally based opportunities for food waste to be collected and composted and to promoting the use of compost locally?**

I support food waste composting. As this is a relatively new concept to many people, I would begin with an education effort and move to support various different approaches as pilot projects evaluating, each to determine most effective approaches to implement to scale

- 5. *A healthy diet is key to good overall health, and access to food education (such as nutrition education, cooking classes, and gardening) is a key component of a resident's or family's ability to grow, choose, safely prepare, and consume nutritious foods.***

**What role do you believe the county government should play in providing food education and encouraging residents to make healthy and sustainable food choices?**

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<sup>2</sup> <http://mdfoodsystemmap.org/data-summaries/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/sws/resources/files/studies/waste-composition-study-130726.pdf>

Good nutrition begins with an informed eater/food preparer. At the Recreation department we included nutrition education in our senior citizen and summer camp programs. I believe that nutrition education should be integrated in several of the County's services. In addition to recreation programs, nutrition education should be integrated into school health services, restaurant licensing and inspections, public libraries, residential programs for vulnerable populations such as group homes and shelters, services for immigrant populations and other services which may not have nutrition education as a core function, but are in a position to reach the public.

**6. MCPS serves an estimated 15 million meals each year<sup>4</sup>, and is a critical source of nutrition for our County's food insecure children. 33.2% of MCPS students receive Free and Reduced Meals (FARMS)<sup>5</sup> and 39.94% of students are eligible for FARMS<sup>6</sup>. The MCPS Summer Meals Program feeds over 9,500 children each day<sup>7</sup> when school is not in session, and schools are distribution sites for Weekend Bags serving more than 5,000<sup>8</sup> students and Family Markets serving over 800 County families.**

**In what ways do you think county elected officials should engage in MCPS' provision of food to children (including pre-k, after-school, weekend, and summer programs)?**

As Recreation Director we developed the Food, Fun and Fitness program in partnership with MCPS. This program added recreation programming at Title I summer nutrition sites across the County. This program was given an award by the National Association of Counties. The addition of the recreation programming, which was free to participants, significantly increased participation in the summer nutrition program. I used several models including expanded access to Ride-On buses and MCPS transportation, expanded summer camp programs, and outreach. I established a working partnership between Recreation and MCPS which should be expanded. I would make it a personal goal as a Council member to reach every child during the summer who qualifies for FARMS by the end of my first four years in office. We also partnered with HHS to offer a nutrition program at all 5 of our County senior centers.

**7. The food system offers tremendous opportunities for employment, from farming to food service to social enterprise. However, new entrants to farming face challenges such as securing long-term access to land and, despite the booming hospitality industry in Montgomery County, local food service employers report a shortage of trained line cooks. The recent closure of L'Academie de Cuisine has resulted in even fewer local food-skill workforce development resources.**

**What types of programs would you establish or support to develop pathways to employment in the agricultural, food service and other related sectors?**

I agree that food service from and seed to table to recycle and compost are good options for careers. I would encourage Montgomery College to enter into this area in a significant manner. I would build on our partnership with the UMD Agricultural Extension Service located at Bussard Farm to offer more services and courses for individuals who wish to become more

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<sup>4</sup><http://news.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uncategorized/five-food-service-workers-recognized-for-dedication-and-hard-work/>

<sup>5</sup><http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/about/statistics.aspx>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.mannafood.org/our-community/the-hunger-problem/facts-and-statistics/>

<sup>7</sup>[http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/exec/Resources/Files/pdf/MoCo\\_Food-Security-Plan\\_2017.pdf](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/exec/Resources/Files/pdf/MoCo_Food-Security-Plan_2017.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> SmartSacks Program Update 4.19.17

involved in food production. With Marriott, Host and Choice hotels located in the County, I would seek their help in the creation of a world class career training center in food preparation and agriculture. With private and public funds Montgomery County could become a model for the rest of the nation as an urban/suburban food preparation and agricultural center.

***8. In recent years, the Food Council has actively supported county legislative initiatives directing the creation of food security and food waste composting strategic plans, zoning text amendments increasing opportunities for on-farm composting and agritourism, establishing healthy vending requirements and an urban agricultural tax credit, and Council proclamations recognizing World Food Day and the contributions of farmers markets.***

**What policies or legislation would you establish to improve critical aspects of the County's food system? How would you engage community stakeholders in the creation and implementation of these policies? How would these initiatives be funded?**

I would look to the Food Council as the lead group to advise the government on these matters. If necessary I would support legislation and add resources to enhance its effectiveness. This is a new and important role for the County government. Much good work has been done in the last few years, but it's just the beginning. I will be available to get ideas and proposals from interested stakeholders that will move us toward the clear objectives of the Five Year Plan.