

## 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)?**

My interaction with local food initiatives has been from a personal perspective. I have been a long-term supporter of the Red Wiggler Farm as a past member of their CCA program, as well as an ongoing annual donor. I was on the Board of Germantown Help many years ago and worked in the food pantry and delivered food to people with low food security. When my daughter was in elementary school (1999-2012) I worked with a national organization to get vegetarian options in school lunch programs.

- 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?**

Based on the Year One Update of the Food Security Plan, I would say that the biggest success is creating the Food Assistance Resource Directory and expansion of the Weekend Bag Program. The next critical step would be the actual launch of FoodStat. I would assume that both the Resource Directory and FoodStat will make implementation of the Food Security Plan much more efficient by knowing everyone who is involved in food security and having a common standard to measure success.

I will support the continued funding of the Food Security Plan.

- 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***

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<sup>1</sup> Feeding America

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

**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 support the County's Department of Agriculture and the incentives in place to help support farming in the County. As the President & CEO of a local chamber of commerce, I strongly believe in the "shop local" movement. We need to push the LOCAL label as well as working with grocery store chains to purchase from local farms. This is part of educating the general public as to the importance of EVERYONE supporting the local food production. As for specific programs, I would talk directly with farmers and retailers to identify gaps in service and identify ways that will direct help bring the two together.

**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?**

Yes. I think we need an "all of the above" approach. I compost in my backyard, which is rare in my HOA Townhouse community. I would support increased resources to expand this level of composting. However, I think the biggest impact would be commercial composting. I listened to a program on NPR recently about large scale composting and for many commercial entities it was actually cheaper to compost than to have the trash hauled away. I am intrigued by curbside composting. It works in other jurisdictions and I would be willing to fund a pilot program here.

**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?**

I think it is in the County's best interest to proactively provide education on making healthy, sustainable food choices, as well as providing a basic understanding of where our food comes from. This type of education is an important investment in the health of our community. It should be part of our MCPS curriculum, as well as our general community outreach.

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

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)?**

The County has a moral imperative to make sure our children are fed. I support ALL the various meal / snack programs provided through MCPS. I don't necessarily believe the onus should fall on MCPS, but that happens to be the place where we interact most with children so it is the most effective way to reach the most kids.

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?**

Overall, I would like to see much more emphasis on skills-based training in high school to prepare students for various careers – including agriculture and hospitality industry. I participated in the development of WorkSource Montgomery, which focuses on workforce development in Montgomery County. I support their efforts in developing career pathways that include high-school, community college, certification career pathways. The Universities at Shady Grove also has a training kitchen that helps train kitchen staff.

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?**

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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

I would first look at the Food Security Plan to see if there is legislation required for full implementation of the plan. This is a very comprehensive strategic plan and it makes sense to continue implementing the plan. I have a strong reputation for working with various stakeholders. I would reach out to everyone who is impacted by food security issues and concerns – starting with the Montgomery County Food Council. For the most part, funding will come from the general operating fund, although I could see potential private sector and foundation funding contributing to the plan. The reality is that the County's funding comes from our tax base. The only way we are ever going to have enough resources to meet our growing needs is to expand our tax base. To me, this is the crux of this election. We all want to provide a high quality of life to all the residents in Montgomery County and the only way to do this is to have a strong, robust economy.