

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)?**

As a nonprofit executive director serving the needs of Montgomery County residents, I have had the pleasure of working with many organizations that provide food-related programming, such as Manna Food Center, Real Food For Kids, Red Wiggler Farm and Interfaith Works. My collaboration with these organizations ranges from providing communications support (videography and messaging) to general nonprofit support within county operations.

- 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 children¹), 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?

The Food Security Plan has had many early successes. Among the accomplishments so far: increasing access to food in Communities of Limited Access, which has been aided by Manna and other organizations collaborating with the faith community to open new distribution locations; expanding opportunities for low income residents to purchase food at farmers markets with increased SNAP assistance through partnerships with Crossroads Community Food Network; expanding food entrepreneurship to through the opening of the Takoma Park – Silver Spring Community Kitchen at the Takoma Park Presbyterian Church and the possible opening of a facility at Marvin Memorial United Methodist Church.

- 3. Montgomery County's economy has a robust food production sector, with 540 total farms² (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***

¹ Feeding America

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

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?

Montgomery County is home to the amazing Ag Reserve, where we are able to maintain our own farm-to-table economy. Many farmers working in the Ag Reserve have expressed a desire to modernize and improve their land in order to sustain a viable business. Some have indicated an interest in agro-tourism to promote brewing, spirits and wine making. I am supportive of these updates that will help farmers make a better living while also protecting the special nature of the Ag Reserve.

4. Montgomery County currently incinerates approximately 23% of all residential food waste³, 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?

As a Sierra Club endorsed candidate, I would like to transition Montgomery County to a zero waste community across the board. Regarding how we accomplish this for food waste, I am supportive of creating separate collection of commingled recyclables; compostable materials, including all food scraps, food-soiled paper and yard trimmings; and any remaining trash. We need to expand our collection services in order to isolate and support the different garbage that is generated.

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?

In 2010 I worked with County officials to start the county's community garden program and took the lead in opening the first community garden in a downtown area (the King Street Community Garden in downtown Silver Spring). I will work to expand the community garden program and provide opportunities for residents to grow their own food. I believe that the county should partner with nonprofit providers to host nutritional

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

educational workshops and classes to further assist with individual food and health awareness.

6. MCPS serves an estimated 15 million meals each year⁴, 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)⁵ and 39.94% of students are eligible for FARMS⁶. The MCPS Summer Meals Program feeds over 9,500 children each day⁷ when school is not in session, and schools are distribution sites for Weekend Bags serving more than 5,000⁸ 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)?

My top priority is to close the achievement and opportunity gaps within MCPS. One way to help improve the educational opportunities for our students is to ensure that they are mentally and physically prepared for school --- which means addressing issues like food insecurity at home, in addition to housing insecurity, economic insecurity and other socio-economic concerns. With my unique perspective as a nonprofit executive, I want to rethink, reimagine and strengthen the relationships between government agencies and nonprofit partners so that we can expand MCPS's food services to children.

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?

As noted in a previous question, I am supportive of the Ag Reserve and expanding educational and business opportunities for farmers and entrepreneurs. I continue to believe that partnerships between nonprofits and government agencies and institutions is the best way to develop food-related programming to serve the needs of Montgomery County residents.

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

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

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

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

⁷http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/exec/Resources/Files/pdf/MoCo_Food-Security-Plan_2017.pdf

⁸ SmartSacks Program Update 4.19.17

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?

Community engagement is extremely important to me and it is the only way we achieve big things. I have served as president of two civic associations, chair of a citizens advisory board, and board member of more than 10 nonprofit organizations. It is through this lens that I see my work on the Council: conducting a landscape analysis of the needs, allocating funding in the budget, creating unique partnerships to carryout programming and providing oversight to ensure the mission is being accomplished.