

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 have supported a number of initiatives locally and state-wide. I supported Maryland Hunger Solutions' priority legislation as Montgomery County Board of Education's legislative delegate. I've supported expansion of our summer meals program, and the addition of a meals program during lengthened weather emergencies. I also voted to support expansion of the Community Eligibility Expansion to more MCPS schools. I'm currently working on recovery of unused food from MCPS cafeterias to be distributed to the community. I've advocated throughout the county on food security issues and how they impact our students. I also supported the work of the Chief Innovation Office for Montgomery County to form a food hub for the agriculture reserve to get more fresh farm produce into our schools. I will continue to advocate for that initiative. I also was the only board member supporting a local organic farm on County property becoming a learning farm for our students. I've also advocated for expanding salad bars and other healthy and appealing options in our cafeterias so more students would be exposed to good nutrition habits.

- 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 greatest success is the creation of FoodStat to better understand the data and prioritize initiatives. Data is key to advocacy, funding, effectiveness and impact. We need all partners working together efficiently to prevent as many residents as possible from falling through the cracks. We need to know the level, type and location of need to best target resources and recruit the appropriate partners. Yes, I will support and fund the implementation. We must create the most favorable conditions for our vulnerable residents to have healthy outcomes, stability and social mobility.

¹ Feeding America

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 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 would support a food hub to enable agricultural reserve products to be efficiently distributed throughout the county and region, especially to schools and food centers in underserved areas of food insecurity. I would support increased nutrition education programs in community and schools, farmer partnerships to grow produce for tailored to our diverse population, and technical and grant support for local cultural food markets to stay in business and be outlets for this produce, expansion of partners as food distribution centers for food-insecure populations.

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?

Yes. I support curbside recycling in heavier populated areas. I also support composting at our 205 schools that could be maintained by partnerships with community groups, and used for school gardens and educational programs. I have supported composting at schools in the past and will continue to advocate for it at the county level. It will also be an added attraction for schools as community centers.

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.**

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

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

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

We need to start by using our school food system, both during school and outside of school to provide healthier choices and education. I have supported Real Food for Kids initiatives in the past. We also need to expand nutrition as part of our health curriculum. Also, target food nutrition information, recipe classes, etc, in highest need areas. I have also advocated for the school system to establish Meatless Mondays.

- 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)?

Expanding transit options will expand access. Programs must be equitably distributed at highest needs areas. Also, food selection must be nutritious and aligned with healthier, more appealing options in our schools. We also must have more culturally responsive meal variation.

- 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?

The school system is actively growing career certification programs. Expanding the nutrition sciences, culinary arts and hospitality programs to more schools will support student options for employment. The school system's closer partnership with Montgomery College also offers these opportunities for aligned career pathways.

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/>

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

⁸ SmartSacks Program Update 4.19.17

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 support all these initiatives and work closely with community stakeholders to formulate smart legislative to address current needs as identified in the Food Security Plan.