

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)?**

Personally, professionally, and as a member of a socially conscious women's organization, I have participated in serving and delivering food to the underserved. Food drives are the perfect opportunity to build maintain relationships with local food producers and farmers to establish viable methods to help ensure that foods with nutritional value are getting to our County residents, particularly residents with food insecurities.

- 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 of the plan, thus far includes: 1) expanding food assistance programs,

2) identifying factors that cause food insecurities, and 3) working with a vast network to help reduce the number of residents facing food insecurities.

The most critical next steps: 1) locate communities with high rates of food insecurities, 2) partner with local nutritionists and food producers to determine how to provide affordable healthy food choices, 3) reconfigure public transportation patterns to ensure that residents contending with food insecurities can access food assistance programs and establishments, and 4) create a database to track progress and identify shortfalls.

Yes, I would support and fund the continued implementation of the Food Security Plan if elected.

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?

Programs and policies that I would champion to increase local food production and distribution include but not limited to: 1) Work with school superintendents to create an agriculture curriculum to introduce and teach students proper farming techniques. 2) Solicit local business owners to participate in vertical agriculture initiatives – rooftop gardens. 3) Turn parcels of land, owned by the municipality, into micro-farms.

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 allocating resources to increase food waste composting, large and mid-scale, and backyard composting levels.

To pursue zero waste, I recommend: 1) Use food waste to feed farm animals. 2) Incorporate a food retail inventory management system to track shelf life. 3) Use food waste to reduce the amount of chemically treated soil and fertilizers.

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**

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

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

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 believe the county government should play a significant role in providing food education and encouraging residents to make healthy and sustainable food choices. County government has the resources and means to introduce and drive initiatives, track progress, and identify discrepancies.

- 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)?

It is imperative that county officials engage in MCPS provisions of food to children. Voters expect elected officials to have many answers regarding pressing issues. If nothing else, elected officials need to be in the position to provide resources that will help to improve quality of life. A proper diet is essential to growth and development. I am personally invested in ensuring that our children have the tools and resources needed to be successful.

- 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?

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

I would be a strong endorser and supporter of on-the-job training, certification and trade programs, college courses, and as an elective for students -elementary through high school.

- 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?

Polices and legislation I would establish to improve critical aspects of the County's food system are: 1) create a more efficient and inclusive system, 2) increase agricultural productivity, 3) reduce the use of hazardous pesticides and chemicals, 4) governance for compost, and 5) pursue agricultural expansion.

Ways that I would engage community stakeholders are: 1) discuss the need to make improvements to the County's food system, 2) build relationships with stakeholders and offer them an opportunity to collaborate on implementing and establishing policies, and 3) ask stakeholders to become supporters and spread the word about what we are attempting to achieve.

Federal, state, revise portions of the County's budget, earnings from lottery purchases are ways that we can fund these initiatives.