

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.

Hans Riemer

www.hansriemer.com

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 Montgomery County Councilmember the last 8 years, I have supported many programs, initiatives, and policies that improve our local food system as I enumerate below.

- I have supported hundreds of thousands of dollars in Council grants to local non-profits involved with the local food system.
- I supported and voted for funding to help create the 2017 Food Security Plan
- I have fought hard to maintain the agricultural heritage of the County by protecting our agricultural zones from non-agricultural uses while also promoting educational opportunities and other forms of agritourism.
- I advocated strongly for reforms that would promote backyard chickens and beehives during the 2014 rewrite of the zoning ordinance.
- I have supported and continue to support the important initiatives of “Real Food for Kids Montgomery” to promote greater wellness at our schools.
- I have been involved in the effort to create a cohesive Buy Local campaign to support and encourage local food and alcohol production.
- I have championed major reforms to state our alcohol laws and to the way the DLC is run that make it easier to run a restaurant and has spawned a brewery boom in the County.

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.*

¹ Feeding America

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 have strongly supported and will continue to support robust funding and rigorous implementation of the Food Security Plan.

- 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 have long called for a robust Buy Local campaign and am very pleased to see the MoCo Made label gaining traction. I strongly support balanced rules for the Ag Reserve that allow farmers to be profitable while protecting this precious resource, and I would like to do more to promote Agritourism and education.
- I currently have a proposal pending at the County that would make it easier for local alcohol producers to locate in the ag reserve if they are using ingredients cultivated on site.
- I am a strong supporter of the Revenue Authority's proposal to build an educational vineyard and crushing facility on underused land and would like to expand that project to include a malt house. I am interested in exploring the idea of a copacking facility for local processed food products but am not sure it will be feasible.

- 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?

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

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

- I absolutely support a County composting program. We do provide free compost bins and have an educational program but more resources are needed to make a greater impact.
- I am looking forward to reading the Plan when it is ready and hope for concrete recommendations I can support. I understand the major challenge is the lack of a regional composting facility and am eager to find a solution to that roadblock.

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 do believe the County can play a role in promoting a healthy diet and protecting residents from dangerous substances in their food.

- Requiring calorie counts on menus, banning trans fats and requiring healthy options in vending machines are important steps we have taken.
- I recently authored a new law that requires restaurants to have staff that is trained to handle food allergies, a small step to improving the quality of life for the large group of people that suffer from potentially deadly allergies.

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)?

As Council President and throughout my tenure on the County Council, strengthening the lives of our children and our education system overall is my highest priority. I have always supported growing these programs to meet the needs of students across the county, including those receiving Free and Reduced Meals. The role the Council has to play, in my opinion, is through listening to and addressing the concerns raised by parents, teachers, MCPS administrators and nonprofit partners and then allocating the necessary funds that MCPS and nonprofit stakeholders need to ensure healthy 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

nutritious meals are provided to all children in all educational programs, including afterschool and summer programs as well. While, as I am sure you know, the Council does not have the authority to direct the school system, we can encourage them through dialogue to ensure that our kids are getting healthy meals.

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 support expanded options for career education in food service and hospitality at MCPS and Montgomery College. I have been in discussion with Montgomery College about creating a program to teach the art of brewing beer.

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 have supported each of those measures. I look to the Food Council to help point the way and enjoy the regular dialogue I have with the Food Council's staff and members. I would look to the Strategic Plan to guide the way and keep stakeholders on the same page and would continue to support organizations like Manna that make such a tremendous impact in our community.