

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.

Pete Fosselman

www.petefosselman.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)?**

I've worked with Manna Food in my professional capacity with the Office of the County Executive to help find Manna a second location; as well as a resource for residents in White Oak. As the Mayor of Kensington, I organized food drives every year at our Town Hall. I also support the Coalition for the Homeless who house, clothe and feed 1000s of Montgomery County residents each year.

- 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?

Year One of the Plan has been extremely successful. The hiring of a full time Food Security Programs Manager has enabled the Montgomery County Food Council to implement the first steps towards reducing food insecurity to 5.5%. The data collection will prove to be invaluable to more accurately measure the impact of the services provided to assess food insecurity in Montgomery County. Additionally, the Montgomery County Food Assistance Resource Directory has proven to be a success, and the community looks forward to it being translated into other languages. If elected, I plan to continue supporting 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***

¹ Feeding America

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

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?

The Montgomery County office of tourism should closely collaborate with local farm businesses and rural communities. I'm a fan of the Land Link program to support emerging farmers and assist them to purchase or lease land to encourage farming to those who may not have the means to start farming. Another way to support farmers is to support agritourism such as farm breweries and wineries as accessory uses to farming. Farmers are finding it harder to make a living. In order to help farmers, we must support agritourism.

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?

The County should implement a "Zero Waste" plan to manage our solid waste in an environmentally responsible way. Incineration of trash should not be one of the ways we manage our solid waste. Composting and recycling should play big roles in creating sustainable solutions to managing solid waste.

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?

Healthy habits are best taught early on in life. Food education and sustainable food choices should be included in MCPS curriculum and implemented through diverse and local choices in school lunches. Composting and recycling should be taught in science classes at the elementary and middle school levels.

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

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)?

I support the Free and Reduced Meals program. No child should have to sit in class hungry because they can't afford breakfast or lunch. If elected, I will ensure appropriate funds are dedicated to providing meals for students in school including in after-school, weekend, and summer programs.

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 I mentioned above, the Land Link Montgomery program is helping emerging farmers by assisting them in mitigating the high land prices for those who want to farm but don't have farmland in their family. Their services help build a strong local food system and help local farmers enter the workforce.

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?

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

Charities such as Manna Food, A Wider Circle, and Bethesda Cares should be elevated; as these organizations - and many others - have excellent track records in partnering with the County to serve those in need. The business community plays a large role in sponsoring worthy causes. This relationship can be capitalized upon to further the investments in the County.