

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 personally supported Manna, including volunteering to sort food in their warehouse and donating to support their 35th Anniversary Leadership Circle. Professionally, in my position as Senior Counsel and Director of Government Relations at the National Women's Law Center, I worked in coalition for many years with anti-hunger organizations such as the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) and Bread for the World. Together, we advocated at the federal level for budget policies that would preserve and increase funding for SNAP, as well as policies to help vulnerable populations in general.

- 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?

I applaud the work of the Food Council in drafting the Food Security Plan. An important step in combatting food insecurity is understanding how many and which of our residents are most at risk for hunger, so I would see identifying the food insecurity rate in the county, along with the populations and geographic locations most at risk for hunger, as the plan's greatest success so far. I support funding and continued implementation of the Food Security Plan so that we can use the important data collected through the implementation of the plan to target our resources to those most in need of assistance.

- 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?

The Agricultural Reserve is Montgomery County's greatest natural resource, and as councilmember for District 1 (which includes much of the Ag Reserve) I will work to ensure that the county supports our local farms. One way to increase community interest in farming and nutrition is to expand educational programs in the schools to teach students about agri-business. I look forward to learning more from all stakeholders – including local farmers and the Food Council – about what more the County Council can do to increase local food production and distribution.

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?

I support expanding composting programs for Montgomery County. First, the county should finalize and implement a work plan to advance composting, as the Department of Environmental Protection plans to do this spring. I understand from a conversation with the Montgomery County Department of Economic Development Agricultural Services Division that there is still much work to do, including finding ways to make composting as easy as possible for residents. Ideally, the County would pick up food waste as it does yard trim.

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 support county government's role in encouraging food education to help our residents make healthy and sustainable food choices.

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)?

As County Councilmember, I would support continued funding for these MCPS programs. Children cannot learn and thrive if they are hungry.

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?

To support employer success, the County must sufficiently support workforce development, especially as the economy diversifies, because our talent pool is a huge asset. Both Montgomery College and WorkSource Montgomery are possible sources for programs that would foster skill development and job readiness, and I would support increased funding for workforce training in all sectors.

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

My job with the National Women's Law Center required collaboration with diverse stakeholders to achieve policy consensus and coordinate federal advocacy efforts, including co-chairing the advocacy/policy task force for an anti-poverty coalition of 1,400 national, state, and local organizations whose missions are to protect low-income and other vulnerable populations. As County Councilmember, I will bring community stakeholders together to develop specific plans and actions.