

## 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.

## 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 believe in any initiatives that build a more robust local food economy. I support the sustainable community food initiative, and believe that we can combat obesity in a very real tangible way by improving health outcomes with the lunches we provide our students.

- 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 children<sup>1</sup>), 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 would support the continued implementation and, if necessary, expansion of the FSP if I am elected. In District One, I think the FSP's biggest success has been the strengthening of food network agencies, as both volunteering initiatives and providing much needed resources to those in need.

- 3. Montgomery County's economy has a robust food production sector, with 540 total farms<sup>2</sup> (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.***

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<sup>1</sup> Feeding America

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

**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 reassess land use, similar to what they did in Seattle where they allowed individuals to harvest edibles in the city parks. I would push to allow individuals to grow produce on the sides of buildings and on balconies. Lastly, I'd want to invest in intensive farming where our farmers are growing different kinds of produce on one field.

- 4. *Montgomery County currently incinerates approximately 23% of all residential food waste<sup>3</sup>, 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 allocating resources to increase composting, but I would also increase the opportunities for food waste to be collected: not only would this go a long way towards us reaching the identified target goal for recycling, but it would create some job opportunities for members of our community.

- 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?**

The county government needs to do a better job at educating our communities and partnering with local businesses to offer healthier dietary choices. One of the first cuts ever made in a budget cycle is to outreach for organizations, and we need to halt that so we can ensure that information is being delivered to our community members in a timely fashion.

- 6. *MCPS serves an estimated 15 million meals each year<sup>4</sup>, 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)<sup>5</sup> and 39.94% of students are eligible***

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

<sup>4</sup> <http://news.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/uncategorized/five-food-service-workers-recognized-for-dedication-and-hard-work/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/about/statistics.aspx>

**for FARMS<sup>6</sup>. The MCPS Summer Meals Program feeds over 9,500 children each day<sup>7</sup> when school is not in session, and schools are distribution sites for Weekend Bags serving more than 5,000<sup>8</sup> 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)?**

County elected officials should partner with MCPS to ensure that the food being provided is healthy.

- 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 would support internships and summer employment programs between our local high schools and the farms in Montgomery county. I think it's important to expose students to different career paths, so they are able to take advantage of everything the County has to offer. I would also support investment in training programs for older residents who want to transition to a different career.

- 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 think we need to expand the agricultural tax credit, and that is based off information provided to me by local farmers. I think you need to build consensus between farmers and the county council because we all want to make sure every member of our community gets the opportunity to live a healthy and sustainable life. I'd host town halls to hear directly from my constituents because they are the ones I will have to answer to. You fund any and all initiatives by utilizing the funds available to you, because you are investing in the County's future.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.mannafood.org/our-community/the-hunger-problem/facts-and-statistics/>

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/exec/Resources/Files/pdf/MoCo\\_Food-Security-Plan\\_2017.pdf](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/exec/Resources/Files/pdf/MoCo_Food-Security-Plan_2017.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> SmartSacks Program Update 4.19.17