

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.

Sidney Katz

www.sidneykatz.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 Councilmember, I co-sponsored the Food Security Plan legislation and support annual funding for the Food Council and grants for food-related programs.

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?

FoodStat is, by far, the greatest success. As was realized during the development of the Food Security Plan, we had no real way to track local data when it comes to food access and security. Those working on the plan had to extrapolate data from a variety of national and higher-level sources, which affected reliability. FoodStat will offer localized data from which policy decisions can be made and programs can be deployed. It will help us see what programs are working and where the gaps are so that we can fund programs and ideas that work.

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.***

¹ Feeding America

² <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?

There are two major infrastructure projects that would play different but vital roles in the food economy value chain – the kitchen incubator and the food hub, each of which would help our smaller local food businesses aggregate and amplify their work. The County (finally) needs to act upon its plans to build a kitchen incubator at a scale that would support the County's needs and bring together smaller community incubation initiatives. And, while current production levels may not warrant a full-scale food hub, near term efforts to start laying foundations, like a virtual mechanism linking farmers with buyers, would be viable. A co-packing and/or cut & wash facility might presently be sustainable in the Agricultural Reserve and there will be room to grow as the sector develops.

- 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 am certainly supportive of zero-waste concepts and feel that, in order to meet any goals we may set, we must first address food scraps and organics. Luckily, there are many successful efforts around the country, in cities like Boulder, Berkeley, and Austin, from which we can draw inspiration and insight. In Montgomery County, I feel we should look more closely at composting infrastructure and equipment. Countywide curbside pickup of compostables may be difficult in the near term, but by making it simpler for residents, businesses, and compost-pickup entrepreneurs to get their materials to composting infrastructure (ie. compost sites and/or compost machines), we'll be laying a smart foundation for the next stage.

- 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?

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

Montgomery County government and, especially, its public facing agencies (like Recreation, Libraries, and HHS) already have wonderful and trusting community ties which can be leveraged for educational opportunities. I believe that we should support these agencies and other community organizations with their education efforts to ensure timely, engaged, and culturally-competent programming.

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)?

MCPS' Food Services Program is a hefty endeavor and, generally, operates with no impact to the County budget as an Enterprise Fund. From the County Government side, the Department of Recreation and the Department of Health and Human Services play an important role in out-of-school time nutrition and should continue actively engaging in programs to provide food for children. We also need to work closely with School Board members and candidates so they understand the deeply impactful role they play in meeting children's nutritional needs.

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?

Luckily, Montgomery County continues with its intentional and thoughtful workforce development. We should continue supporting stronger workforce programs for all age levels. Already, MCPS high school students can earn food service certifications, Montgomery College and the Universities at Shady Grove offer excellent food service programs, and we have the resources of WorkSource Montgomery at our fingertips. Creating better pathways through this progression will produce skilled workers for all

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

areas of food service. And, this is another area where a food incubator will produce exponential results by offering real time training in a food production facility.

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?

The Montgomery County Food Council is the most viable mechanism by which we can engage a broad cross-section of food system stakeholders. I support ensuring that the Food Council can pursue its mission at a more comprehensive scale by providing the resources needed to hire staff so that new programs can be implemented and so that their important work can be properly supported. The Food Council is an excellent tool to advance policy and convene stakeholders, through which we can create a more nimble and effective food system.