

Montgomery County 2018 County Executive 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)?**

My wife and I support dozens of area organizations that aim to end poverty and homelessness, promote healthy living and food security, empower children with disabilities, and provide quality early childhood education. For example, we have worked closely with A Wider Circle, which helps lift residents out of poverty through neighborhood programs that help low-income families promote dignity in their journey out of poverty by providing basic goods and furniture. And as a former healthcare executive, I see how much of a difference high quality healthcare and healthy food access makes in people's lives, which is why I support organizations like the Peer Health Exchange and support putting telemedicine in all of our public schools to expand health and mental health access for youth. I am also a long-time supporter and board member of Partnership for a Healthier America, an organization that partners with former First Lady Michelle Obama to address childhood obesity through food education and encouraging healthy food choices.

- 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?***

The Food Security Plan is a huge step forward in supporting our residents that do not know where their next meal is coming from. The Plan is successful in identifying the issue geographically and creating a collaborative effort for addressing food insecurity by connecting nonprofits that provide food access via FoodStat. The most critical next step is the upcoming launch of FoodStat, so we can publicly analyze the data and identify pockets of the county that would benefit from increased funding to address food access barriers.

As County Executive, I will support and fund the continued implementation of the Food Security Plan because it works to make connections between food resource centers and ensure that food is accessible to our most needy residents and not wasted. This aligns with my effort to develop a bold Zero Waste Plan that promotes composting initiatives and reduces the use of single-use plastics. As County Executive, I'll propose a ban on single-use plastic bags and

¹ Feeding America

implement a straw reduction plan, so we can reduce the amount of non-recyclable plastics in the County and reduce our reliance on the trash incinerator.

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?

Agriculture is a growing industry in Montgomery County, contributing \$287 million to the County's economy. While many of our farms are family-run operations, there are plenty of opportunities to expand or start an agribusiness from jam production and organic farming to food delivery and sustainable farm consulting, among other exciting professions. As County Executive, I'll work with Montgomery County and the farming community to create a two-year agriculture entrepreneurship program to provide basic training about what's needed to start an agribusiness and to support agriculture production in our area.

I'll support our farms by finding ways to source more of their products here and get their products in our public buildings and schools. Des Moines launched its Look Local First Campaign and discovered that by shifting 5% of spending to local businesses it could generate more than \$1 billion in economic benefit and generate as many as 6,500 jobs. They had an aggressive direct mail and advertising campaign to raise awareness of the economic benefits that shopping local provides. This resulted in more than 5,000 businesses committing to reevaluating their procurement practices and shifting more of their purchases to local businesses.

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?

As County Executive, I'll work to develop a Zero Waste Plan that promotes composting initiatives and reduces the use of single-use plastics. Education is key to this strategy. We need

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

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

to lead by example and educate our employees and students about recycling and compost strategies and expand this to our residents.

We must also move toward a green economy to remain competitive in the future. My jobs plan calls for creating more incubators some of which will be in green tech industries, to accelerate growth in renewable energy sectors, composting, and streamlining zero waste strategies. I'll also increase investment to support our unique Green Bank so that we can make energy improvements across all sectors of the County. By supporting both our environmental economic sector and education of public on composting in the public sector, private companies will see the demand for compost collection in Montgomery County.

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 Agricultural Reserve is a nationally recognized model for environmental preservation that provides countless benefits to the DC area. Our county's unique agricultural sector is important because it employs 10,000 people and contributes nearly \$300 million to our local economy while preserving over 90,000 acres of land for farming, open space, and historical sites. People come to the reserve to enjoy recreational activities and the outdoors. They also come to learn more about the historical sites that have been preserved due to the restrictions on development. It is also a great resource for children in our public schools that have field trips to local farms. Education on food resources is especially important for children so they can learn about where food comes from and the importance of sustainable practices.

We need to start early when it comes to nutritional education and addressing the achievement gap. Studies show that children who engage in formal or informal education in a home setting arrive at school ready to learn and succeed. While we've made inroads here through programs like Baby Steps, a program that connects new parents to community health services and provides follow-up consultation, we could do more.

I want to connect more families to social services available in the county to educate them on the importance of nutrition and brain development. For example, Durham Connects in Durham, North Carolina provides three nurse home visits to new parents during the first 18 months to support newborns and their families. They recommend community-based programs and services to parents based on demographic risk, including early learning. As County Executive, I'll create a home nursing program to provide free home visits to new parents educating them on ways to enhance their child's development. I'll also establish public-private partnerships to expand early learning and school readiness programs for children preparing to embark on the transition to school.

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.*

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

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

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 Executive, I will work to close the achievement and nutritional gap by increasing funding for students in low-income areas, including expanding afterschool programs, creating more summer learning programs, and providing more apprenticeship and internship programs. I want to recognize and expand upon our existing early learning programs like Linkages to Learning, with a goal of making Pre-K available in all our Title I schools. I spent my career building a business in Montgomery County that created hundreds of jobs—I will bring our education and business leaders together to strengthen career readiness programs, so that all Montgomery County high school graduates are on sustainable pathways to economic success.

To identify areas in need of expansion, we can use FoodStat to analyze the data and identify pockets of the county that would benefit from increased funding to address food access barriers. These expanded programs will not only provide greater resources for food insecure children, it also allows for an educational or career pathway to high paying jobs in Montgomery County.

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 stated above, I'll work with Montgomery County and the farming community to create a two-year agriculture entrepreneurship program to provide basic training about what's needed to start an agribusiness and to support agriculture production in our area.

I've met with several business owners in the food industry and it's clear we need to make it easier to sustainably "buy local" here. We need to invest in our county's unique agricultural sector. What I have found from speaking to Montgomery County residents is that there are a number of small, specialty food producers in the County who are eager to expand their customer base and product offerings in the County. As County Executive, I'll support our farms and producers specializing in organic and locally grown products by finding ways to source more of their products here and getting their products in our public buildings and schools.

My jobs plan calls for creating more programmatic incubators. We are not funding it sufficiently and there are several other growing industries that could also benefit from incubators that aren't now, like hospitality. We should be planning to open an incubator in close proximity of Marriott's new downtown Bethesda headquarters to spur growth of our hospitality industry. With

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

a growing hospitality industry, we will see more pathways to employment in the agricultural, food service and other sectors. This is an opportunity we can't let pass by.

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've met with food industry business owners and it's clear we need to make it easier to sustainably "buy local" here. We need invest in our agricultural sector and support local processing facilities, so businesses don't have to ship goods out of the county for logistical tasks such as packaging.

Additionally, I'll create an ecosystem that ties our tourism efforts to our incredible wineries and microbreweries and taps into the farm-to-table movement that has flourished in Loudoun County. I'll increase the percentage that county departments procure goods, services and construction from local and small businesses from 20% to 35% through the Local Small Business Reserve Program. And I'll conduct an aggressive marketing campaign to encourage residents and businesses to also procure more goods and services from businesses in the County.

A common theme I have been hearing as I talk to residents is that they feel they are not being heard. To run a business, you need transparency from your government to properly prepare for the future. As County Executive, I will make sure that leaders have a voice on issues affecting the Agricultural Reserve and the County's food system.