



2022 County Council Candidate Questionnaire

The Food Council invited all County Council candidates to complete a 9-item questionnaire, which was developed in collaboration with our community partners. Our goal is to provide information on local candidate's food system priorities and commitments. As a 501c3 nonprofit organization, we do not endorse candidates.

For more information, please contact Heather Bruskin, Executive Director at hbruskin@mocofoodcouncil.org.

Name: **Andrew Friedson**

Campaign Website: www.andrewfriedson.com

Candidate for: **District 1**

1. Please describe your personal and/or professional engagement in any local food systems initiatives, policies, and programs.

A: For the past four years I have had the privilege of representing part of Montgomery County's Agricultural (Ag) Reserve, perhaps the most consequential and forward-looking land conservation decisions in American history. More than 450 farms in the Ag Reserve produce table food crops or products. Strengthening and growing this network of farmers is essential to developing a resilient food system and strong local economy. Throughout my term, I have been an ardent supporter of the agricultural economy.

I have spent much of my time as a Councilmember meeting people who live and conduct business in the Ag Reserve, learning about their challenges and opportunities. I consistently work to ensure the Montgomery County Government operating and capital budgets include sufficient resources for our farmers to thrive. Specifically, I successfully passed legislation (ZTA 20-04) to help expand on-farm composting and mulching in the Agricultural Reserve by increasing the percentage of off-site materials farmers may use for the production and manufacturing of compost and mulch. This was a win for farmers and a win for our environment. I also served as the lead sponsor of Bill 5-21 - Agricultural Land Preservation – Solar Collection System – Dedication of Business Personal Property Tax Revenue, which became effective in March 2022. This bill dedicates business personal



property tax revenue received for a solar collection system constructed in the Agricultural Reserve Zone for the Agricultural Land Preservation Fund. Land preservation is hands-down the most effective way to ensure that the primary purpose of the Agricultural Reserve remains farming. In addition, when the County Executive's budget reduced funding for Ag in the Classroom, a popular program that teaches MCPS students about the importance of agriculture in our daily lives, I led the effort to restore it. I remain committed to upholding the core values of the Ag Reserve -- preserve greenspace, support farmers and families, and bolster economic development through agriculture and agritourism.

Most recently, I proposed the addition of \$132,000 to the FY23 Operating Budget Reconciliation List to expand the provision of weekly, fresh produce bags from local farms to the homes of an additional 200 families in need. This model, operationalized by Community FarmShare in collaboration with Linkages to Learning (LTL) and Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) Community Schools, provides micro- and macro-level benefits. It supplies fresh, culturally appropriate, nutrient-dense, local produce directly to families who need it most. Concurrently, it serves as an economic investment into our local, small-scale produce farms and is key to building a resilient food system by expanding regenerative, naturally grown table crop production in Montgomery County. In addition, this initiative closely aligns with the County's Food Security Plan and Climate Action Plan. I look forward to seeing this expansion across the finish line.

2. Please describe any plans you have for creating economic opportunities for individuals who identify as Black, Indigenous, Latinx/Latino, and/or a person of color, particularly in food and agriculture?

A: In 2021 I sponsored legislation mandating the development of a consolidated County Economic Development Strategy to provide the framework we need to move forward and build a stronger, more resilient, and more equitable economy that reflects the value of our talent and the quality of our assets. A top priority within the recently ratified four-year plan is to create an inclusive economy for shared prosperity.

Food and agriculture are ripe with economic opportunities for individuals who identify as Black, Indigenous, Latinx/Latino and persons of color. I will pursue two related projects in my next term to benefit emerging farmers, particularly BIPOC and new immigrant farmers. The first initiative involves increasing access to land. Many immigrants bring with them to our community the interest, experience, and talent required for farming. Unfortunately, land is too often cost prohibitive, fencing them off from the field (literally and figuratively). I would like to continue conversations that I have initiated with small farmers, the Montgomery County Food Council, Montgomery County Office of Agriculture, and Montgomery Countryside Alliance to determine how we can build upon the Land Link program by increasing incentives for property owners to lease their underutilized land to novice farmers.

The second project builds on the first. New farmers need support obtaining the business acumen required to grow and prosper in conjunction with access to land. Montgomery County's New Farmer Program ended in 2017. Working together, we can take the lessons learned from that program to create a holistic farm incubator that prioritizes BIPOC farmers thereby expanding equitable economic opportunities for residents and the sector.



3. Please describe your position on addressing income insufficiency, which is a major contributor to food insecurity in our County. Please describe any positions or initiatives in your platform that focus on food security.

A: COVID-19 shined a light on so many challenges in our community, exposing how many of our neighbors throughout the County are one paycheck away from missing a meal or being unable to access needed services and health care. It largely didn't create new problems, but took the existing cracks in our society and blew them wide open: income inequality, food insecurity, health disparities, racial and socioeconomic inequities. It's shined a light on the problems we face and also on our community's capacity to address them. The Nourishing Bethesda effort, as just one example I've been proud to support from the beginning, is a partnership of faith, nonprofit, business and community leaders which feeds hundreds of families each Friday at the Bethesda Chevy Chase Rescue Squad. Similarly, I have supported the appropriation of more than \$33 million in emergency food assistance funding since June 2020, including \$23.1 million in Fiscal Year 2021 and \$10.6 million in Fiscal Year 2022. These funds have supported emergency bulk food purchases, infrastructure costs for food assistance providers, piloting the Farm to Food Bank Initiative, establishing new grant programs to support local farmers and restaurants, establishing the Food Access Call Center, and obtaining contractor staff support for the Food Security Task Force. I am pleased that the Hub model, which started with the extraordinary efforts at the Upcounty Hub, will be continued with county government support, and will include efforts like Nourishing Bethesda in the Fiscal Year 2023 budget. The need for food assistance will not diminish and there is more work to do to bolster our food assistance providers and sustain our hungry neighbors.

4. What role should the County government have in improving resident access to federal benefit programs, such as SNAP and WIC.

A: The Montgomery County Food Council has done a stellar job educating me about the importance of increasing enrollment in Federal benefit programs. It is unconscionable that 60 percent of Montgomery County residents who are likely eligible for SNAP are not enrolled. I agree with the Food Council's recent testimony expounding the need for a partnership between the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services Office of Eligibility and Support Services and the community based organizations that assist residents with SNAP. I would be pleased to facilitate productive conversations that lead to increased collaboration and resources.

5. It is likely that the impacts of climate change, national and global politics, and future disasters will further disrupt food production, supply chains, and food security networks. Please describe any policies and programs that you will propose or support to address local food system resilience?

A: On February 1, 2022, the Council unanimously passed the Montgomery County Green Buildings Now Act, the most significant new investment in fighting climate change in county history, which Councilmember Tom Hucker and I co-authored together.



This legislation dedicates 10 percent, almost \$20 million, of Energy Tax Revenue annually to the Montgomery County Green Bank. Those funds will be leveraged for three to five times the value and used to help residents and building owners make energy efficient retrofits. Twenty percent of the funds will be allocated to projects in Equity Emphasis areas and the funding will be targeted specifically towards electrification projects.

We have raised the bar in Montgomery County for action on our climate emergency, and with this legislation, we have provided a ladder so our residents and the private sector can actually reach it.

As I mentioned above, my proposal for the expansion of the Community FarmShare model closely aligns with the County's Climate Action Plan. This program helps to reduce the carbon footprint through drastically reducing the miles traveled from farm to plate. And because all of Community FarmShare's partners use organic, certified naturally grown, or regenerative farming practices, chemicals are not added to soil or streams. Furthermore, these local farms actually sequester significant amounts of carbon by using cover crops and organic compost.

6. Please describe any initiatives or policies you would propose to increase local food production and access to affordable agricultural land.

A: The expansion of the Community FarmShare model previously described will increase the production of local table crops (see response #4). My efforts to increase opportunities for emerging Black and Brown farmers, particularly new immigrant farmers, address access to affordable agricultural land (see response #5).

7. Please describe any initiatives or policies you will propose to reduce food waste and advance zero-waste strategies.

A: We need to significantly increase our composting capacity in order to achieve zero-waste and there are efforts that are simpler to achieve that can make a meaningful difference in the near-term, like the recent expansion of onsite farm composting that Councilmember Evan Glass and I led on the Council. In terms of reducing food waste, there are great examples right here in our region that we could emulate including the curbside composting program in Arlington County, VA and a modern, large-scale commercial composting facility that includes food waste like in Prince George's County, MD to better achieve our zero-waste goals. There is no shortage of new, innovative technologies that convert waste to energy and organic nutrient rich soil via biodigestion – and we should be exploring all of them as opportunities to reduce food waste and advance zero-waste strategies.

The recently launched Montgomery County Food Scraps Recycling Partnership with Westfield Montgomery and MCPS recently joining several smaller organizations and businesses is a positive step forward in conjunction with the new residential composting pilot program in two neighborhoods in Silver Spring and Potomac, these are positive steps forward, but we need far greater scale to reach our ambitious goals.



8. Where do you see opportunities for the County government to support food education? How can the County support residents in making healthy and sustainable food choices easier?

A: Partnerships are a key component to supporting residents in making healthy and sustainable food choices. Government, the nonprofit community, and the grassroots community stakeholders are astoundingly effective when they join forces. We saw powerful examples throughout the COVID-19 pandemic such as the formation of Consolidated Services Hubs, Por Nuestra Salud y Bienestar, and the Black Physicians Network. Food education can and should be further incorporated into these collaborative models. County support, both administrative and financial, is required. We need to build on these partnerships, ensure they are healthy and sustainable from an environmental perspective and an ongoing financial one, as well.

9. What do you see as the biggest food system challenges in the County and what do you believe is the role of the County Council in addressing them? How should community stakeholders be engaged in that work?

A: Our biggest challenge is likely going to be transitioning from a temporary food security crisis response to a sustainable, resilient food system. The County must be a convener and facilitator of public-private partnerships, and provide sufficient funding and adequate oversight. Community stakeholders are central to the delivery of these services and must be intimately involved in setting up the systems and providing real-time feedback on how well it's serving the substantial needs of our community.

In order to be effective, we must eliminate the significant barriers and silos in this work. There is truly amazing work happening by so many individuals and organizations in our community, but there is often a lack of connection and communication among the various entities doing the work. Similarly, there are resources available but they are not always connected to organizations with capacity to distribute them so they don't make it to the families who desperately need them. County government can and should step in to serve as that conduit to eliminate the silos and break down the barriers.

