



## 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](mailto:hbruskin@mocofoodcouncil.org).

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Name: **Will Jawando**

Campaign Website: [www.willjawando.com](http://www.willjawando.com)

Candidate for: **At-Large**

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

**A: When the pandemic began, I volunteered with my church, Kingdom Fellowship AME, to distribute food to local residents in need. It immediately became clear to me that funding and support would be needed to continue their efforts to feed in excess of 1000 families a week, along with other organizations who were also trying to feed our neighbors in need. I proposed a special appropriation to create a public private partnership between the County Government, local businesses and the philanthropic community to fund Food for Montgomery, a fund that supports local farmers, non-profit and faith based food providers, local restaurants and local food banks.**

**Food for Montgomery has provided tremendous support to those entities and has helped distribute thousands of tons of food to hundreds of residents all across Montgomery County. The County Hubs are also a product of Food for Montgomery. I am an avid supporter and advocate of all the food security programs in Montgomery County and continue to look for ways to ensure their sustainability.**



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: Developing an infrastructure that is systems based and resilience building, that creates economic opportunities and feeds residents is important. Increasing land access for residents and community groups to use and build is necessary to create economic opportunities for people of color. 93% of the farmland in the County is passed down through families and 93.7% of those families are white. Looking for opportunities to incentivize these existing landowners as well as religious and faith-based organizations who own land to lease land to farmers / organizations of color is critical to creating economic opportunities. I will also investigate developing capacity building grants for providers to help them gain revenue from their products vs only giving their products away.**

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: To address income insufficiency in Montgomery County, I initiated a special appropriation for a Guaranteed Income Program Pilot. This pilot, which is a public private partnership, will provide 300 individuals/households with \$800/month for 24 months. Acknowledging that residents best understand their needs and/or the needs of their families, participants are not restricted in the use of these funds. Food insecurity will undoubtedly be addressed by the participants through this pilot. The program will be monitored and evaluated for outcomes and lessons learned and hopefully become a long term opportunity for addressing income insufficiency in our County.**

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

**A: County government can be a partner in improving resident access to federal benefit programs such as SNAP and WIC. Support can be provided via funding and special appropriations to nonprofits and community organizations for outreach to hard-to-reach communities to increase their knowledge of and enrollment in these programs. County government can also work with state government agencies so the state can provide waivers as needed to ensure that additional programs that support low-income residents can be developed that will not jeopardize or eliminate the resident's ability to access their public benefits.**

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: The intersection of food production and climate change is a profoundly important issue. We must reduce our carbon footprint and greenhouse gas emissions. This is not only an issue related to supply chain and food availability, but it is related to equity and health outcomes as well. For this reason, I am in favor of adding more transit as our focal point for transportation improvements to**



reduce car trips and also invest in improvements for pedestrians and bicyclists. We need to green our county vehicle fleet and make sure we prioritize green building techniques. We also need to create incentives to help residents do the same for their own homes, gas powered appliances and cars. We need a more comprehensive food waste program where we make composting more accessible and affordable for residents. We should also make sure we reduce the miles between where our food is produced and where it is consumed by helping our local farms continue to be sustainable by protecting the agriculture reserve and find ways to help a new generation of farmers preserve agricultural opportunities close to home. The county should lead by example as we move forward to tackle environmental issues and also find ways to assist residents to move towards green technology and options.

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

**A:** As mentioned previously, 93% of farmland in the County is passed down thru families, the majority of whom are white. Incentivizing these farmers, particularly those in the Ag Reserve, along with churches and non-profit organizations who own land in the County to consider long term affordable leases for minority and small farmers, can increase local food production and support minority business growth. I would also look at opportunities for use of County owned land for these purposes.

**I will also protect the Ag Reserve. We need to continue to maintain this amazing asset for future generations.**

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

**A:** I am committed to exploring best practices for initiatives and policies to reduce food waste and advancing zero-waste. This will inform any recommendations I make. Some of these include:

**Improving consumer education and outreach efforts around issues like food safety, food date labels and donations.**

**Collaborating with private industry to reduce food loss and waste across the supply chain.**

**Redistribute excess / unsold foods**

**Educate the public about reducing food waste by donating safe and edible food items which they no longer wish to consume. One strategy would be establishing collection points where residents can drop off their excess non-perishable food items.**

**Expand the compost pick up pilot and create a permanent county composting program.**

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:** During my time on the Council I have restored the Montgomery County Agriculture Education fund. Our Agriculture reserve is one of the crown jewels of Montgomery County and educating our MCPS students so they understand the importance of open space, agriculture and where their food comes from is critical to keeping our kids healthy and protecting the Ag reserve for future generations.

We also need to continue to support and fund ongoing programs to compensate local agricultural producers for table crops grown specifically for donation to local entities in the food assistance space. There is no substitute for fresh fruits and vegetables, we need to continue to make sure they are available to our more vulnerable populations.

Another opportunity for education is the continued support of the Minority Health initiatives and their community health programs which includes making healthy and sustainable food choices.

Other opportunities for the food education is through County government / County DHHS sponsored media campaigns that outreach to residents via social media, bus and/or shelter signage, PSAs, and information distribution through public libraries, MCPS, Department of Recreation sites, senior housing, etc.

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:** The biggest food system challenge in the County is sustainability. The needs of our residents as we continue to work through COVID recovery are changing every day. It is critical that our strategy is agile and able to respond to this evolving landscape. A major role for the County Council will be to ensure that the Food Council continues along with creation of the Office of Food Security. These entities will facilitate the engagement of community stakeholders in this work.

Through the Food for Montgomery Fund, our food system has been reshaped and once in a generation investments have been possible through grants to food providers and producers. We need to double down on these investments and continue to create a more comprehensive and connected web for our local food systems. As a Councilmembers, it is our role to remove barriers - no matter if they are financial, policy or otherwise- and to support the work of the Food Council to continue to improve and be responsive to the needs of the stakeholders such as farmers, food assistance providers, donors, restaurants, and residents. Our food system is only improved with the collaboration of our entire community, from making sure everyone has access to the fresh healthy local grown food, to zero waste programs and composting, we all have a role to play.

