

# Montgomery County Food Security Plan

Building a Montgomery County in which all people have access to safe, sufficient, and nutritious food, with dignity.



## Year 1 Update

The Montgomery County Food Security Plan, released in April 2017 outlines extensive strategies for reducing the number of food insecure individuals in the County by 22% by the year 2020. The Montgomery County Food Council, the Department of Health and Human Services, and many community nonprofit, business, and agency partners, have been working diligently to implement the Food Security Plan's Year 1 recommendations.

## Year 1 Recommendations:

- Explore New Datasets
- Transportation Analysis
- Identify High Priority Zones
- Leverage Existing Programs
- Standardize Data Collection & Reporting
- Increase Connectivity, Collaboration & Information Sharing

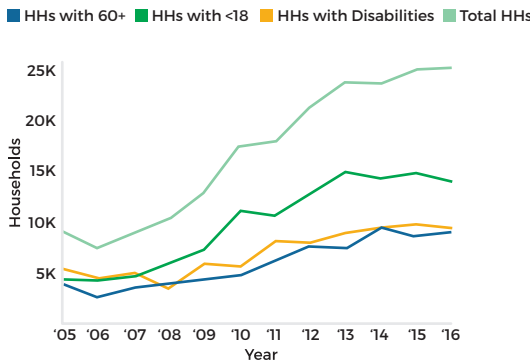
## Food Insecurity in Montgomery County

According to Feeding America statistics, 7% of the County's population (totalling 77,780 people) and 13.9% (or 33,000) children were estimated to be food insecure in 2016. In 2017, this overall food insecurity rate decreased to 6.3% of the County's population, and 13.3% of children. However, the most recent SNAP and FARMS data for the County indicates an increase in the number of participants, reflecting the reliance of families upon food assistance programs to alleviate their needs.

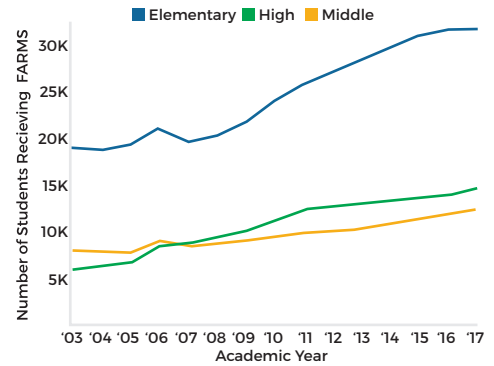
Food insecurity was most prominent in

- East County
- Silver Spring
- Aspen Hill
- Wheaton
- Gaithersburg
- Germantown

2005-2016 Snap Benefits by Sub-Group



2003 - 2017 MCPS FARMS Rate



## Root Causes of Food Insecurity

### Poverty

6.9% of residents live below the poverty level of \$24,600 (for a family of four), including 20,868 children.

### Self Sufficiency

The self-sufficiency standard for a family of four to live with basic amenities in Montgomery County is \$91,252. Even if a family has income above the poverty level, they may still not earn enough to make ends meet.

### Federal Food Assistance Program Eligibility

Income eligibility for SNAP was \$31,980 per year in 2017, and for WIC it was \$45,510 per year. A large percentage of Montgomery County residents earn too much to qualify for food assistance programs but not enough to reach the self-sufficiency standard.

### Lack of Transportation

There is a high correlation between access to grocery stores and healthy diets. Residents without reliable transportation may be limited to convenience stores with limited nutritious foods.

### Employment Status

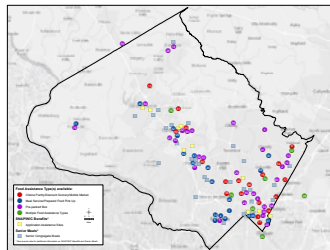
3.3% of Montgomery County residents were unemployed in November 2017. While lower than the national standard, this unemployment, coupled with other factors, impacts residents' food security.

# Year 1 Strategies:

## FoodStat

### FOODSTAT

The Food Council, along with Manna Food Center, the Capital Area Food Bank and Montgomery County DHHS have been working closely with CountyStat to create a new, online platform that will more accurately reflect the level of food insecurity in the County. FoodStat will be launched in May 2018, and will enable government agencies, food assistance providers and any other interested parties to analyze the community's access to food, its transportation/infrastructure needs, high priority zones and potential service delivery gaps, leading to the creation of policies and strategies that will inform priorities, drive collective impact, and ultimately reduce food insecurity in Montgomery County.



## Food Assistance Resource Directory

This resource lists over 75 food assistance providers along with their contact information, opening hours, and additional service details, as well as illustrates all providers by location and food assistance type on a map created by the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future. More than 2,000 copies have been printed and distributed to organizations and agencies across the County, MCPS has provided a link to the resource in their school lunch menus sent home to every student, and the Directory will be turned into an online searchable database, as well as being translated into five different languages.

## Data Standardization, and Connectivity & Collaboration Strategies

### Data Standardization Survey (DSS)

Surveyed 25 food assistance providers about the client service data they currently collect. Recommendations are currently being drafted on data collecting and reporting requirements for County grant recipients for the FY19 grant cycle, which will enable the County to more effectively measure the impact of services provided, and more accurately assess food insecurity in the County.

### Training, Connectivity and Resources (TCR) Survey

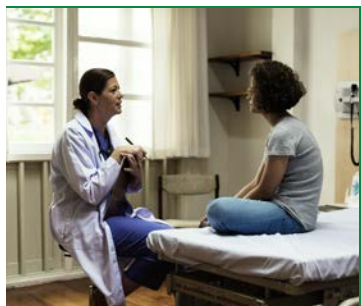
Surveyed 25 food assistance providers on their training needs, potential for increasing capacity (or barriers to doing so), the availability and sources of culturally appropriate foods, and the usefulness and format of a provider-to-provider connectivity and information-sharing platform

### TRC Survey Conclusions:

<p><b>Trainings currently offered:</b></p> <p>Food safety and handling trainings, and nutritional content/ education trainings.</p> <p><b>Trainings needed:</b></p> <p>Data collection, volunteer management, advocacy/outreach and customer service.</p> <p><b>Preferred format of future trainings:</b></p> <p>"Train-the-trainer" or self paced, and at a minimum, on a monthly basis.</p>	<p><b>Greatest number of provider clients:</b></p> <p>Hispanic/Latino from El Salvador, followed by Africans from Ethiopia.</p> <p><b>Culturally appropriate foods needed:</b></p> <p>Large bags of white rice, cooking oil, masa, beans, milk and fresh vegetables.</p>	<p><b>Biggest challenges for food assistance providers:</b></p> <p>Data collection, limitation of space and facilities, language barriers (with clients), consistent staff/volunteer support, reliable availability of food to distribute and donor concerns about liability.</p>	<p><b>8 out of 25</b> providers surveyed felt that they could increase their capacity.</p> <p><b>Barriers to increasing capacity:</b></p> <p>Lack of refrigeration/ storage space, lack of physically able/ bilingual volunteers, lack of concerted of efficient outreach strategy.</p>	<p><b>Local stakeholders to engage:</b></p> <p>DHHS, Office of Community Partnerships, County Regional Services Centers, MCPS, tenant associations, Healthcare providers, minority health groups and behavioral health crisis service centers.</p>
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## Culturally Appropriate Food Research

An American University student team is conducting an assessment on the need for, access to and availability of culturally appropriate foods in the County as part of their Senior Capstone Project. Their results, presented in May 2018, will be incorporated into strategies to better address the needs of the County's foreign-born residents.



## Food Is Medicine Program

The Food is Medicine Program aims to integrate food assistance and nutrition education into Montgomery County's safety-net health care programs by establishing infrastructure and support to provide routine food insecurity screening, generate referrals to community partners, and conduct needed follow-up and support. This innovative cross-sector collaboration was developed through the leadership of the Healthcare Initiative Foundation, expanding with support of the national Transforming Communities Initiative, Business Leaders Fighting Hunger, and Washington Adventist Hospital. The core community partners include the Primary Care Coalition, CHEER, Manna Food Center, Mobile Med Inc., Mercy Health Clinic, and many other organizations committed to improving health by addressing food insecurity.

## Food Literacy Assessment

This is a comprehensive assessment of all food education resources (e.g. culinary skills, gardening, food safety and nutrition classes) in Montgomery County. It will identify service gaps and necessary infrastructure, training, and other resources in order to attract investment and support to enhance existing and create new food education programs.





# Year 1 Strategies:

## Leverage Existing Programs

### Food, Fun and Fitness Program



This program by Montgomery County Recreation, MCPS, and other community partners serves young people who would otherwise be home alone during summer months and serves as a critical safety net to address issues such as:

Food Insecurity	Social Isolation
Physical Wellbeing	Psychological Wellbeing

Served over **2,000** young people since its inception in 2015 and has served over **90,000** meals to vulnerable youth since then.

Six locations throughout the county

Clopper Hills Elementary	Fox Chapel Elementary
Middlebrook Mobile Home	Galway Elementary
Francis Scott Key Middle School	Germantown Library

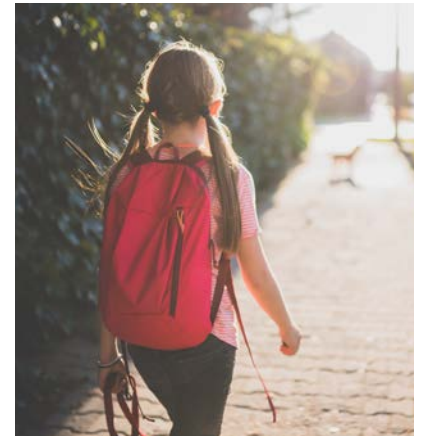
### Weekend Bag Program

Every week of the MCPS school year, volunteers from Manna Food Center, Kids In Need Distributors (KIND) and Women Who Care Ministries pack donated food in backpacks and deliver the backpacks to county elementary schools. Children take the backpacks home on Friday. These three providers added a total of 1,055 students to the Program last year.

### Senior Nutrition program



The North Potomac Community Center was completed and added to the Senior Congregate Meals Program.	The Cold Box Meal Program expanded from 3 to 4 days a week and 4 to 5 months this year	A new half-time Data Entry and Collection Position was released for recruitment.
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## Explore New Data Sets

### Children Under 5

MCFC has engaged with the Community Action Agency to discuss building food insecurity screenings and referrals into all CAA partner programs and initiatives.

MCFC is partnering with CAA to identify the appropriate organizations, groups and individuals to participate in a listening session on food insecurity in the Children under 5 population, which will occur in the Spring of 2018 at the TESS Community Services Center.

The listening session will focus on assessing the magnitude of the issue, the demographics and locations in which it is concentrated, and the barriers to food access that families of such children face.

The Food is Medicine program will work with Montgomery County's Care for Kids health care program, screening more 1,000 uninsured children in FY2019 and providing referral follow-up and navigation to food assistance and nutrition education.

### College Students

Recent studies surveying university and community college students found that between 35% and 45% of students reported being food insecure.

#### Barriers to Food Access:

Ineligibility for federal benefits and financial burden on student families

High tuition rates, accommodation costs, childcare costs and transportation

Limited employment opportunities and lack of facilities to prepare nutritious food

#### Solutions:

CAFB Mobile Markets, Food Assistance Resource Directory

Expand capacity and efficiency of onsite food pantries, clothes libraries and hygiene product distribution services

Food assistance information in course syllabus, online textbooks, "community day" benefits sign-up.

### Increased Food Access Risk for Residents with Mental Health Issues

Living alone & physically or emotionally isolated from friends and family

Additional physical, cognitive or developmental disabilities

Limited financial resources and inability to gain or maintain employment

No personal transportation and/or limited transportation options

Ineligibility for case management through existing assistance programs

Lack of knowledge about and/or inability to prepare nutritionally adequate food

Stigma, fear or distrust of authority that discourages the seeking of assistance from health providers or family/friends.



## The Future of the Food Security Plan - Looking Ahead

In Year 2, the Food Council, with the help of its Working Groups and partner organizations, plans to build upon the activities undertaken in Year 1 of the Food Security Plan. Among other initiatives, we will focus on strategies to increase benefits application assistance outreach and case management, and work with healthcare providers to help facilitate “screen and intervene” programs, along with appropriate sustainable referral and long-term case management mechanisms.

### Recommendations: Years Two-Three

Increase retail food access and expand food production	Adjust and increase transportation resources	Pending
Strategically build capacity of smaller organizations & establish new programs	Enhanced Communication strategies	Initial Stage
Strengthen Food Assistance Infrastructure	Maximize participation in benefit programs	Active
Engage Community Partners and the Private Sector	Support and expand food recovery	Active
	Health in all Policies for Food Assistance (Establish nutrition goals and standards for food assistance)	Active

### Considerations: Years Four-Five

Food Preservation	Disaster/Emergency Preparedness Plan
Increased Garden Capacity	Workforce and Economic Development
Nutrition and Culinary Skills Education	Expand Food Literacy Capacity

We are encouraged by the positive effect that the Plan has had on the community over the course of its first year. In all of our efforts at the Food Council, we endeavor to stay true to our mission of centering our activities around the community and its needs, to ensure that community voices are heard and given the weight they deserve.

*These Food Council initiatives are made possible by support from the Institute for Public Health Innovation through the Trinity Health Transforming Communities Initiative, the Mead Family Foundation, the Montgomery County Council and the Office of the County Executive, the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, Whole Foods Market, and additional community supporters.*



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