



2020 Montgomery County Food System Policy and Program Recommendations

The following recommendations are intended to serve as a guide for Countywide food system advocacy efforts in 2020. The Food Council's 2020 initiatives will be driven and informed by these priorities, and we share them to serve as a guiding resource to foster systems-based, collaborative strategies for all policymakers, community advocates, and local leaders in the coming year.

These recommendations synthesize the findings from the Food Council's 2019 initiatives, through which we gathered community insights and identified best practices on a wide range of food system issues. More than 500 Food Council and Board Members, Working Group participants, event attendees, community partners and stakeholders, and Food Council staff collaborated through site visits, roundtable discussions, data analysis, surveys, special events, and more to develop the recommendations below, which reflect our core priorities of equity, community, and economic and environmental sustainability.

Expand Available Food System Infrastructure and Resources

- Enhance and expand food system infrastructure to increase access to food education and entrepreneurship opportunity, and foster small business growth within Montgomery County.
 - Pursue implementation of infrastructure investments recommended by [kitchen incubator](#), [food hub](#), and [co-packer](#) feasibility studies
 - Identify and publicize currently available County commercial kitchen and warehouse space
 - Increase funding for County Recreation Department kitchens so that these spaces can be utilized for providing food education to a variety of audiences
- Expand financial and administrative resources for Office of Agriculture support of food producing farms
 - Establish a pilot program for central aggregation and distribution from County farms to CSA, market, restaurants, or institutions
- Intentionally and comprehensively incorporate food system programmatic and infrastructure needs into the Thrive 2050 General Planning process, highlighting the impact of General Plan investments and priorities on food access and equity, the resilience and sustainability of our food system, economic opportunity, and small business growth

Expand Food Access

- Expand Countywide MCDOT policy for free/reduced fares on public transport to all low-income residents, just as currently exists for students and seniors
- Address zoning and/or County codes to encourage and incentivize food retail opportunities, especially in communities of limited access
- Fund software program access and technical support to all food assistance providers so that service data collection and analysis is easily accessible and uniform across the County

- Expand USDA Summer Meals Program by adding more sites, e.g. in hospitals and healthcare clinics, as well as at community centers, libraries, and local nonprofit organizations
- Increase the budget for the Summer SNAP for Children Act to allow SNAP recipients to receive more benefits during the summer vacation to feed their children
- Implement “Screen & Intervene” procedures in all County services and programs, as well as at all healthcare providers in Montgomery County
- Increase the production of, access to, and availability of culturally appropriate food in retail stores and at food assistance provider sites
 - Develop resources and educational materials for food producers, assistance providers, and donors on the traditional food needs of different cultures and communities in Montgomery County
- Increase use of the Women’s, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in Montgomery County:
 - Increase SNAP access points (retail locations, restaurants, college campuses, online redemption, and delivery) to reduce transportation barriers to food access
 - Inform and educate residents on SNAP eligibility, increase the number of SNAP caseworkers and outreach specialists in Montgomery County, and evaluate customer satisfaction at regional service centers
 - Work to provide SNAP application training and enrollment opportunities for food assistance providers and other multi-service agencies to enable their staff and case managers to help directly with enrollment
 - Identify best practices in WIC enrollment strategies and apply them to SNAP outreach

Expand Food System Education Opportunities

- Integrate comprehensive food system education such as gardening, composting, agriculture, food safety, nutrition, cooking/shopping/preparing food, and waste avoidance into the Montgomery County Public School curriculum
- Expand the number and variety of County food education programs
 - Establish food-focused workforce development and entrepreneurship programs and opportunities
 - Fund and expand senior nutrition programs and education, such as Senior Malnutrition Awareness Week
 - Identify and address inequities in access to food education resources, and advocate for increased programs that are available in languages other than English, reflect diverse cultural food traditions and diets, and serve food-insecure residents
 - Expand availability of educational resources highlighting the health and environmental benefits of plant-forward diets
- Conduct Community Needs Assessment for food education, particularly in low-income communities
 - Build upon recommendations of the Food Literacy Assessment (FLA) to translate findings into a roadmap for years four and five of the Food Security Plan

Expand Local and Sustainable Procurement

- Increase purchases of Montgomery County food and beverage products by local public and private institutions
 - Create standard language establishing local, sustainable, and healthy sourcing as a priority to be incorporated into food service operation RFPs. Preference criteria may include, but not be limited to, the following:
 - Participation in programs such as the Green Business Certification Program or Community Food Rescue
 - Energy efficiency and energy conservation
 - Waste reduction (production, consumption, materials used, disposal or recycling of food waste, etc.)
 - Implement strategies and create resources to educate and incentivize public and private sector offices, cafeterias, cafes, etc. to increase local sourcing for food purchases, ranging from event catering to wholesale sourcing
 - Unbundle procurement contracts to make it easier for smaller-volume capacity County producers and businesses to compete in bidding processes

Reduce Food Waste and Increase Food Scrap Recycling as a Climate Solution

- Address County codes and zoning restrictions that limit food waste composting capacity expansion, particularly those related to on-farm and backyard composting
- Support implementation of a non-regressive “Pay as You Throw” waste management program
- Support State- and County-level organics diversion and composting legislation and plans
- Educate and incentivize local food service and hospitality businesses to implement food waste reduction practices
- Establish curbside composting, community composting, and composting education pilot programs
- Educate farmers about the tax incentive for food donations and gleaning opportunities
- Research opportunities to standardize and clarify food date labelling language
- Expand the integration of food system-related solutions into the County’s Climate Action Plan to address greenhouse gas emissions, carbon sequestration, and food security
- Expand community education resources that highlight the connection between greenhouse gas emissions, climate change, and the food system

Reduce Licensing Barriers

- Address State and County licensing and regulatory requirements that non-profit organizations, food educators, and local food businesses face in providing food samples, cooking demos, and food education to the public
 - Provide advocacy and education regarding Maryland HB 522, and its provision that allows nonprofits to take advantage of the State’s definition of “excluded organizations”
 - Reduce cost of temporary food service licenses
 - Reduce cost of farmers market licensing fees

- Establish automated forms and payments
- Align Food Safety Certification requirements at the State and County levels

Our policy initiatives are led by our Policy Committee, which considers issues and facilitates the decision-making and establishment of policy positions on behalf of the Food Council. This standing committee is entrusted to make decisions that will represent the mission and vision of the Montgomery County Food Council (MCFC) on public policy issues that influence the Montgomery County food system.