



# Montgomery County Food System Policy and Program Recommendations 2021

The following recommendations are intended to serve as a guide for Countywide food system advocacy efforts in 2021, and reflect our core priorities of equity, community, and economic and environmental sustainability.

The Food Council's 2021 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.

## ✓ PRIORITY: Recognize and Dismantle Systemic Racism in the Food System

### Strategies

- Strengthen food entrepreneurship pathways for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) residents through accessible workforce development programs, partnerships within the community, development/investment organizations, increased access to affordable farmland, and reducing barriers to entry for historically disadvantaged individuals.
- Enhance coordination among service providers (housing, DHHS, local food assistance network, employment agencies, education institutions, etc.) to address the underlying causes of poverty.
- Implement a Racial Equity Action Plan to guide the Food Council's work moving forward.
- Leverage the expertise of the Food Council's Food Security Community Advisory Board, and other community-led groups, to elevate community voices in the policy and legislative process.

## ✓ PRIORITY: Enhance Local Food System Resiliency

### State Level Strategies

- Pursue implementation of infrastructure investments recommended by kitchen incubator, food hub, and co-packer feasibility studies, including a local aggregation and distribution hub, at the State and County levels.
- Increase local sourcing and procurement by local public and private institutions, as well as wholesale and retail buyers, at the State and County levels.

### County Level Strategies

- Partner with the Montgomery County Department of Planning, the Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, local government, non-profit organizations, and regional partners to develop a comprehensive Food System Emergency Preparedness and Resiliency Plan, as recommended in Year 5 of the Food Security Plan, and as an extension of the COVID-19 Food Security Response Strategy.
- Support the development and implementation of the Montgomery County Climate Action Plan.
- Establish financial incentives and protections for long-term land lease agreements.
- Expand access to land for food production by reducing financial, marketing, and logistical barriers to beginning farmers.

## ✓ PRIORITY: Expand Food Access

### Federal Level Strategies

- Extend USDA waivers that allow for flexibility at meal distribution sites through June 2021.
- Expand the minimum Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefit to at least \$30.
- Extend P-EBT through December 2021 to allow families to receive benefits throughout the summer and during any other times that schools are closed.
- Automatically grant P-EBT benefits to school children whose households participate in SNAP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, and Medicaid (if the household income is 185 percent or below the federal poverty level).
- Expand SNAP benefits to apply to prepared meals purchases.
- Expand and strengthen child nutrition programs through the Child Nutrition Reauthorization.

## State Level Strategies

- Expand 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.
- Increase participation in SNAP programs such as P-EBT, the Restaurant Meals Program, Disaster SNAP, and online SNAP.

## County Level Strategies

- Continue implementing the recommendations of the Food Security Plan, including:
  - Maximize participation in benefits programs:
    - Increase SNAP access points (retail locations, restaurants, college campuses, online redemption, corner stores, farmers markets, and delivery) to mitigate transportation barriers to food access.
    - Increase County investment in the Maryland Market Money program to increase matching funds for residents to purchase nutritious food at local farmers markets.
    - Inform and educate residents on SNAP eligibility, increase the number of SNAP caseworkers and outreach specialists in Montgomery County, and expand opportunities to provide SNAP application assistance by phone.
    - Renew the Summer SNAP for Kids program.
    - Support the efforts underway at Consolidated Services Hubs throughout the county, including providing information on benefits programs, and identifying service gaps and opportunities.
  - Expand Culturally Appropriate Food Access and Production:
    - Increase the production of, access to, and availability of culturally appropriate food in retail stores and at food assistance provider sites.
    - Promote cultivation of traditional foods in existing community gardens to empower residents, build community within, and meet local food needs.

## ✓ PRIORITY: Reduce Food Waste and Enhance Food System Sustainability

### State Level Strategies

- Educate and incentivize food service and hospitality businesses to implement food waste reduction practices.
- Research opportunities to standardize and clarify food date labelling language.
- Support organics diversion and composting legislation and plans.
- Support pilot programs related to agrivoltaics and/or other renewable energy pilots.

### County Level Strategies

- Support the implementation of the Strategic Plan to Advance Composting and Compost Use, including:
  - 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.
- Establish curbside composting, community composting, and composting education programs in partnership with the Department of Environmental Protection and existing composting businesses.
- Educate food businesses and farms about the tax incentive for food donations, and opportunities to join the Green Business Certification Program.
- Expand County government procurement of locally produced compost as a strategy to support local composting businesses and increase market demand for compost.

## ✓ PRIORITY: Expand Food Education and Economic Opportunities

### State Level Strategies

- Alleviate licensing barriers for nonprofit organizations providing cooking demonstrations and/or food samples as a component of food education programming.

### County Level Strategies

- Align Food Safety Certification requirements at the State and County levels.
- Expand the number and variety of County food education programs.
- Work with community partners to develop a Food Education Resource Guide, as recommended in the Food Literacy Assessment (FLA), and translate findings into a roadmap for year five of the Food Security Plan.
- Align with considerations for Years 4 and 5 of the Food Security Plan, including:
  - Expand efforts to connect community grown produce with the food assistance network through the Food Council's Gardening Subcommittee and with grantees of the Resident and Community Food Access Gardening Grants.
  - Increase accessibility to cooking, food preservation, and gardening classes, held virtually or in-person.



*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.*