

MONTGOMERY COUNTY FARM TO FOOD BANK PROGRAM

The Montgomery County Farm to Food Bank program — a partnership between the Montgomery County Food Security Task Force, the Department of Health and Human Services, Manna Food Center, the Montgomery County Food Council, the Montgomery County Office of Agriculture, and the Greater Washington Community Foundation — has collectively invested and committed over **\$630,000** since July 2020 in local farms to support a sustained and resilient local food supply and provide more nutritious and culturally diverse produce to residents who experience hunger.

Since the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, food insecurity in Montgomery County has increased by **50%** with over **100,000** residents receiving regular food assistance. By June 2020, **86%** of food assistance providers shared that they did not have sufficient supplies of fresh produce to distribute to clients. The Farm to Food Bank investment not only served the needs of county residents who experience hunger, but it also helped preserve the economic sustainability of local food producers, increased the nutritional value of food consumed close to harvest date, and reduced the environmental impact of long-haul food transport. In addition, the program increased investments in local food production and procurement which are key pillars of building Montgomery County's food system resilience.

The number of farms participating in the program increased over time as word spread, due in large part to the better-than-wholesale purchase price, interest in supporting local community members through a public health and hunger crisis, and overall program flexibility.



Small groups of students visit Koiner Farm and pick lettuce from under the low tunnels in Bed #1 in December 2020.

JULY 2020:

Program begins with **11 FARMS** who sold food already planted when the supply chain was upended due to the pandemic. This food was then distributed to food insecure residents through the County's network of food assistance providers.

DECEMBER 2020:

22 FARMS

are awarded

\$236,800

in capacity building grants. These grants helped Montgomery County-based food producing farms purchase equipment or build food production capacity in order to contribute to the Montgomery County Farm to Food Bank program in 2022.

JAN 2021 – PRESENT :

33 FARMS

have sold or donated product to the food assistance network.

IN TOTAL:

112,235 lbs of fresh, locally produced food was purchased or donated to over **30** food assistance providers, creating over **90,000** meals for the Montgomery County community.

This includes:

-  **942** dozen eggs,
-  **3,390** apples,
-  **1,875** pounds of locally produced beef and pork
-  **400** sacks of locally grown oats.

Several participating farms specialize in and have sold culturally diverse foods including **bitter melon**, **long beans**, **kiwano** or **horned melon**, **bottle gourd** and several varieties of **hot peppers**. A [survey](#) administered to the food assistance providers in October 2021 offers more information to farmers about what items the network considers most desired by program recipients.



A homeschool student and parent volunteer trellis tomatoes in a high tunnel used year round for organic vegetable production at Chicken of the Woods Permaculture Farm. The homeschool cooperative harvested and packaged produce for the Farm to Food bank program throughout the 2021 growing season.

PARTICIPATING FARMS

- Alden Farms
- Amaranth Acres
- Beauty Blooms
- Bella Vita Farm, LLC
- Blueberry Gardens
- Butler's Orchard
- Button Farm
- Cedar Ridge Community Farm
- Chicken of the Woods Permaculture Farm
- Common Root Farm
- Dodo Farms
- Eat the Rainbow Farm
- Farm at Home Produce
- Fresh Mama Farms LLC
- Greenway Farms LLC
- Harvest Intercontinental
- Koiner Farm
- Lewis Orchards
- Love & Grit Farm LLC
- Metro Microgreens
- One Acre Farm
- Passion to Seed Gardening
- Peas and Peace Farm
- Plow and Stars Farm
- Purple Mtn. Grown
- Red Wiggler Community Farm
- Sandy Springs Gardens
- Savage Acres Farm, Inc.
- Serenity Orchards
- Somerset Produce
- The Farm at Our House
- The Hines Garden
- Tikkun Olam Farm



Community Food Rescue Volunteer, Alan, in a field of brassica at Sandy Spring Gardens during a recent pick up.

WHAT OUR FARMERS SAY ABOUT THE PROGRAM:

"My experience with the program has been excellent because every single person I've met through the program wants it to succeed. From the program team, the volunteer food runners, and the food assistance providers, everyone is eager to have an organized system of getting locally grown produce to neighbors facing food insecurity. It is both rewarding to be a part of addressing food insecurity in the county and contributing food locally, and knowing that my farming efforts are benefitting folks in the community."

"The combined community effort from the volunteers who come to pick up the produce and the Community Food Rescue coordinators who handle the scheduling gives me the inspiration and motivation to do my part in growing for this program to benefit those in need."

"The funds provided by this grant have allowed us to realize a 20% increase in crops harvested and distributed to partners in the MC food assistance network."

"You purchase produce at a very reasonable price in bulk and others come and pick it up. I've farmed for 13 years, this is manna from the sky. I can't imagine a better way to support local farms."

"This program is the best of both worlds, the farmer gets paid, the recipients get locally grown fresh produce and this reduces farm produce waste that would have decayed or decomposed in the field. This program helps to bridge the gap in some communities that are not able to afford good quality fresh produce. It is my sincere hope and wish that this program becomes a blueprint in the county for the foreseeable future."

"The Montgomery County program is leaps and bounds beyond other counties and areas in what they have accomplished with this program. I hope that other areas can model similar programs after what has been done here."

WHAT PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR, MANNA FOOD CENTER, REPORTS ABOUT THE PROGRAM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF LOCAL FOOD ASSISTANCE PROVIDERS:

This program demonstrates the utmost regard we have for all of our neighbors. When our community experiences hunger, we are not providing them with the leftovers, but instead with fresh from the field, intentionally grown, high quality products.

WHAT PARTNER ORGANIZATION, THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY FOOD COUNCIL, SAYS:

The expansion of infrastructure and local food production enabled through Farm to Foodbank builds critical resilience in our local food supply chain. Not only does it better prepare the Montgomery County community for future emergencies, but also addresses the impacts of climate change and benefits our natural resources. It's true systems change in action.

Thank you to the Greater Washington Community Foundation's Food for Montgomery Fund, whose generous investments will enable this valuable program to continue through June, 2022.

