



## 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: **Marilyn Balcombe**

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

Candidate for: **District 2**

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

**A: I run the Gaithersburg-Germantown Chamber of Commerce. Several times a year we do food drives for Manna and for the various Hubs. I've also volunteered for the holiday food delivery with the Upcounty Hub. I was on the Board of Germantown HELP many years ago and was also a volunteer driver and stocked the pantry.**

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: My number one priority is economic development and bringing more jobs to Montgomery County. As the CEO of the Gaithersburg-Germantown Chamber, I work with small businesses every day to ensure working families can support themselves and also create jobs in our community. During the pandemic I worked closely with County government as a member of the Small Business Work Group. One of the gaps we found was that if businesses weren't connected with formal business groups, they often did not receive covid-related funding. Those businesses were often**



women and persons of color, very often immigrant business owners. As a result, I created the Pathways program for women and minority entrepreneurs. Through a County grant, we recruited and trained participants on how to either start their business or take it to the next level. As graduates of the program, they continue to receive the full support of my Chamber for the next 12 months as their launch and expand.

Another priority for me is early care and education to support the workers of today with adequate affordable child care and to help create the workers of tomorrow by ensuring that ALL children have equal opportunities for educational success through access to quality early education. The economic model for day care does not work for low-wage workers. The County and State need to step in to help allow parents, primarily women, to work outside the home.

I am also a strong proponent of WorkSource Montgomery, which is the County's workforce development organization. My goal is to make sure there is a strong connection between the skill sets that employers need and the education / training pipeline for all our students. This would include the workforce pipeline for agri-business in the County.

I was on the Leadership Group of Montgomery Moving Forward for many years, working on both workforce development and early care and education. All of the initiatives mentioned specifically support economic opportunities for Black, Indigenous, Latinx/Latino, and/or persons of color.

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:** We have a great imbalance in Montgomery County. While income inequality existed prior to the pandemic, the gap became much worse in the past two years. As mentioned, my primary goal is to create a strong economy in Montgomery to support individuals at all income levels. However, that is a longer-term, macro goal and we need to support individuals and families now. This is not my area of expertise. My first task would be to have a strong understanding of what is currently in place and identify what is working and what is not. I would look to the Food Council for guidance as to what programs can provide the most benefit, quickly.

That said, I would like to see a more robust food recovery program in the County. I would also like to work with property owners in the Ag Reserve to see more food produced for local consumption.

There are great examples of local farmers providing fresh produce to the various food banks and would like to support the expansion of these programs. I'm fully on board with a shop local / eat local programs. Through my work at the Chamber I have been a leader in this area. Creating and enhancing more shop local programs keeps more dollars in our own community and will help support food insecurity through additional jobs.



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

**A: The County is responsibility for education and access. Another gap we found during the pandemic is that the County isn't always the be most effective messenger to reach our diverse communities. The County needs to work with and support our non-profit organizations who can be much more effective at reaching diverse populations. The County also has a responsibility to help more people apply for federal benefits. Again, this should be done through our non-profit partners.**

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: I agree that we need to be more self-reliant in terms of food production. The Ag Reserve is a logical resource for increasing our food production. As farming is a business, the County needs to work with farmers to see what they would need to add more crops for local consumption. We continue to see the disruption of the supply chain for various necessities. The most recent being the severe shortage of infant formula. This is not only a Montgomery County issue, it is a state and federal issue.**

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

**A: Similar to the answer above, working with existing farmers is a good place to start. This would also be a great opportunity for tax incentives or subsidized loan programs to help purchase agricultural land to be used for local food production. This would also be a great opportunity to facilitate new entrepreneurs getting into the farming business with a concentration on underserved populations.**

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

**A: I support having a robust infrastructure in place to allow for the donation of prepared foods through restaurants, hospitals, MCPS. Large organizations throw away a lot of food. The County could facilitate distribution of this food.**

**I also like the consumer education programs that support the purchase of not-so-perfect produce. The County could participate with grocers to eliminate the waste of imperfect fruits and veg.**

**I also support curbside composting. As a significant amount of waste is ultimately compostable, providing this service will help us with our zero-waste goals. I have been composting for over 25 years and it is a challenge in a townhouse community.**



**I support the Pay as You Throw pilot program which will provide an incentive for households to reduce their waste. At the very least it will make them think about what they throw away.**

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: The County should be proactively supporting programs to educate the community making healthy, sustainable food choices, as well as providing a basic understanding of where our food comes from. This type of education is an important investment in the health of our community. It should be part of our MCPS curriculum, as well as our general community outreach.**

**The County also has to clearly outline how it can best support additional costs often associated with healthy choices.**

**We've learned through the pandemic, especially in the vaccine outreach, that the County government may not be the most effective entity for outreach. This type of education and support needs to be done at the hyper-local level within vulnerable communities.**

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 challenge is intergenerational poverty. We have a growing percentage of our residents who cannot afford to live in Montgomery County. This is a complex issue that involves the high cost of housing, inadequate transportation options, food deserts in high poverty areas, high cost of health care, etc.**

**As our needs continue to grow, we need to address the immediate needs of effectively providing food for those who are food insecure. We also need to continue to address the root causes of poverty. As previously mentioned, it is the nonprofit providers who have the best chance of reaching individual families. The County needs to support the work done by our community stakeholders, while tackling systemic inequities in the County.**

