



## 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: **Dawn Luedtke**

Campaign Website: <http://www.dawnluedtke.com>

Candidate for: **District 7**

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

**A:** Through my current work with the MD Office of the Attorney General I serve as Counsel to the Maryland Food Systems Resiliency Council. I am thankful to be able to participate in this statewide initiative and grateful for the collaborative work of all of the involved stakeholders.

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:** The first step is increasing knowledge and awareness of the industry in those communities, and cultural awareness and fluency for our agricultural community to better marry those interests and opportunities together. The second step is working with our agricultural and food industry within the County to find opportunities for apprenticeships and internships for our high school students to learn more about the science, business, and operational needs of the industry and expose them to the different pathways into that workforce. Third is to develop ways to bridge the exposure at the high school level into training programs, agricultural science opportunities, and higher ed (including



policy work in this area) to give our rising students pathways into the workforce that support our agricultural businesses.

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 must pay a living wage. And we must insist on a living wage for all within our county. That's a top priority, and that leadership must begin with the County making good on paying a living wage to all employees and contractors. One of my interests within our county is making sure that our senior citizens do not end up as food insecure due to lack of other resources. For example, my prior work in health & elder law demonstrated to me how many of our senior citizens struggle with figuring out how to pay for their medications and then were food insecure because they could not buy groceries. With an aging population higher than any other county in Maryland, we must make sure not to lose sight of the needs of our senior citizens. While they may overlap in certain respects with our families and mother/baby program needs, they are unique. I also want to take a closer look at how MCPS is delivering meals in the school breakfast and lunch programs. Although they may meet basic nutritional requirements, the meals are not something that the children want to eat. We have a great deal of room for improvement within MCPS for the meals provided. And, since this is a large source of nutrition for children who are food insecure, we need to make sure that the items served are both nutritious and tasty. The Farm to School Meal program that just passed in the 2022 legislative session is a great start but will need to be expanded in order to appropriately meet the needs of MCPS. I am confident that the interim reports required under this new legislation will demonstrate the need to expand and build upon this rather than to discontinue it.

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

**A:** County government should be assessing whether communications and outreach regarding these programs and services are actually reaching the residents in need. This requires collaboration with non-governmental entities who can assist with facilitating services as trusted members of neighborhood communities. It requires a targeted analysis to see which areas and which families are not getting the necessary information. And it requires a willingness of the County government to change its messaging and outreach strategies so that they are adaptable for changing needs. What may have worked in the past isn't necessarily working now and reliance on social media for community outreach isn't the best way to directly connect residents in need with appropriate programming. The County elected officials also need to work with the State officials to lobby harder for increased funding to the newly created MD Farms and Families Program within the Dept. of Agriculture. The allocation amounts are insufficient to meet the needs statewide.

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:** Yes, this is not an if, it is a when. Given my current work, I understand the need for close collaboration between the multiple stakeholders within the food production and supply chain network, the need to plan proactively to minimize disruption impacts to our food security service providers particularly given that there's typically an increased need for services following an emergency event, and the need for close collaboration with our emergency management partners at the State, federal, and local levels in order to maximize funding for resiliency planning, develop regional support and mutual aid agreements and planning in place prior to a catastrophic event, and to collaborate between all these entities and the County governmental departments on maintenance issues that can reduce/mitigate the impacts of catastrophic events when (not if) they happen.

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

**A:** Incentivizing opportunities for individuals who want to start farming businesses but do not have access to lands to be able to lease existing farm land that is underplanted and thereby increase cultivation in a cooperative fashion with existing farm operations and expand the ability to connect locally produced foods to our County residents and regionally.

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

**A:** CH205 (MD Laws 2022) just passed this past session creating the grant program within MSDE to reduce and compost school waste is a great start. MCPS should work to incorporate zero-waste strategy education into its curriculum, as well as providing educational materials for families to reduce waste generated at home. I'd like to see greater efforts within the County to support reducing food waste and supporting zero-waste strategies at our restaurants by supporting our small business owners with adaptive techniques and incentives, as well as within all County government properties (lead by example), and hospital and nursing care facilities/rehabilitation centers.

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:** Food education within MCPS should be a top priority. Schools are reflective of the communities they serve and we should also use the MCPS facilities for after-the-bell programming for neighborhood residents on community initiatives on a range of health and wellness and sustainability initiatives. The COVID-19 pandemic disconnected the communities from the schools and forged isolation that needs to be undone. We should also use our local recreation centers and parks for hosting of community events with targeted information including having individuals onsite at the events who will be able to follow up with residents to connect them and register them for programs - not just provide information and call it a day.

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:** I think the biggest challenge we have in Montgomery County is connectivity and broadening our efforts to make sure that resources and existing programs are reaching their target audience. The Council members within individual districts need to take the time to seek out that information from community non-profit leaders and stakeholders who can partner with and assist the County with better communication and delivery of services. It would then require taking that information and developing strategies to meet people where they are to engage in meaningful connection across County departments with needed services.

