



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.

Name: **Paul Schwartz**

Campaign Website: www.paulschwartz.com

Candidate for: **District 7**

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

A: As a columnist for the now defunct Montgomery County Sentinel, I wrote about the Farm to Food Bank process.

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: Food security for the most needy is a critical issue for the county. Manna Food Center, the largest food bank in Montgomery County, has estimated that the number of food insecure residents has grown during the pandemic from 80,000 to 120,000. The Farm to Food Bank Program allows local table food farmers to receive wholesale prices for food that is offered to soup kitchens and food pantries. This program has given an important boost to local food farmers and has helped to address the growing food insecurity problem. Moreover, the food at food banks is often non-perishable whereas the local table food is perishable and provides for a more complete diet. As a member of the



County Council, I will support continuing subsidizing this program to provide locally grown fresh food for the needy and small business opportunity for farmers including minority farmers.

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: My answer to this question is similar to my answer to the previous question. Food security for the most needy is a critical issue for the county. Manna Food Center, the largest food bank in Montgomery County, has estimated that the number of food insecure residents has grown during the pandemic from 80,000 to 120,000. The Farm to Food Bank Program allows local table food farmers to receive wholesale prices for food that is offered to soup kitchens and food pantries. This program has given an important boost to local food farmers and has helped to address the growing food insecurity problem. Moreover, the food at food banks is often non-perishable whereas the local table food is perishable and provides for a more complete diet. As a member of the County Council, I will support continuing subsidizing this program to provide locally grown fresh food for the needy and small business opportunity for farmers including minority farmers. Our local farms are here, are growing and are in position to help fill any food insecurity void.

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

A: There is no excuse for our residents not to be able to take full advantage of government programs designed to help them. We must minimize bureaucratic obstacles and ensure that we provide any needed resources to eliminate barriers such as language and awareness. I support a help desk and an outreach program to help residents access the benefits of the programs to which they are entitled.

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: Build in greater reliance on locally grown food is a good place to start since it would serve to reduce our current reliance on out of county shipments. I would also advocate for private/public partnerships to address food needs during emergencies such as natural disasters which have been occurring all too often with the onset of climate change. This would include agreements with such private entities as Walmart or Target to serve as food banks in emergency situations.

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

A: Subsidies for local farmers who serve as mentors to develop other local farmers especially local minority farmers. This is a win win since the local farmers will benefit from additional workers who ,



in turn, benefit with the training essential for eventually running their own farms. How to access appropriate grant money is another key element of training.

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

A: As part of our recycling efforts we have to take stronger action to increase our composting efforts. The county government must set the example and also implement standards starting with the restaurant industry using a carrot and stick approach. Those enterprises who meet the county established standards for composting must receive some benefit whether a tax incentive or in some other manner. Those that do not need to be hit with some tax increase to offset the cost of not composting and creating a detriment to the public.

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: This brings us back to the food banks and the need to incorporate locally grown fresh food which provides a more complete diet. Further, it is not just the food banks but hospitals, schools and any other place providing meals that should rely more on locally grown food and less on the non-perishables that now fill their menus.

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 answer to this question is: Awareness. The safety and well-being of our residents is the number one priority of government at any level and we, at the county council, must undertake a more effective community engagement to ensure that our residents are aware of how to access food, business opportunity, government programs and so on to ensure that they are able to avail themselves of the opportunities that exist for their own benefit.

