



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE REGIONAL MEMBER (FARM) POLICY COMMITTEE

MEETING SUMMARY (DRAFT)

Friday, August 9th, 2024

DECISIONS & ACTIONS

- FARM's June Meeting Summary was adopted without edits.
- In lieu of FARM's regular meeting in October, FARM members are invited to join this year's farm tour in the District of Columbia on Friday, October 18.
- FARM Members are formally invited to attend Capital Area Food Bank's presentation of its 2024 *Hunger Report* on Friday, September 13th from 12:00 to 2:00 pm during the COG [Human Services Policy Committee](#)'s virtual meeting.
 - Staff will forward a calendar invitation.
- Thursday, September 17th from 10 am to 1:30 pm: Annual Compost Update with [COG's Recycling Committee](#).
- Members discussed exploring a regional farmers market permit.

WELCOME

Councilmember Jon Stehle, FARM Chair

Councilmember Zachary Parker, FARM Vice Chair

Council President Andrew Friedson, FARM Vice Chair

Jon Stehle called the meeting to order at 10:01 am. New committee member Deputy Commissioner Charles Green, from the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and new FRESHFARM alternate member, Carron Gremont, Director of Food System Resiliency, and Innovation, introduced themselves and expressed enthusiasm for participating in the group. Vice Chairs Parker and Friedson welcomed new members and meeting attendees.

Jon Stehle called for a motion to adopt the June meeting summary which passed unanimously.

UPDATE FROM FARM WORK GROUPS AND MEMBER REFLECTION

Zachary Parker, FARM Vice Chair

Michelle Caruso, Montgomery County Food Council, DMV Food Collaborative Member

Beth Sastre, Virginia Cooperative Extension - Loudoun County, Regional Agricultural Work Group Member

Victoria Treski, FARM Member, consultant, and outgoing Director of Bainum Family Foundation's Food Security Initiative

Updates from FARM's Work Groups: DMV Food Council Collaborative, Regional Agricultural Work Group

Michelle Caruso and Beth Sastre provided brief updates on their work groups' recent joint work session which focused on developing strategies to address the opportunities and barriers elevated at the Regional Food Aggregation and Distribution Summit in May. Sydney Daigle outlined next steps, including the formation of an ad hoc committee to identify the most impactful and feasible strategies, and developing a plan for their implementation. Ms. Daigle shared that, if appropriate, the final strategies may be incorporated into the FARM Committee's next two-year strategic plan. She also shared that workgroup members were interested in hosting a Regional Aggregation and Distribution Summit on an annual basis. Vice-Chair Parker thanked the speakers and underlined the importance of collaboration to move the initiative forward.

Vice Chair Parker expressed gratitude for outgoing FARM Member, Victoria Treski's contributions to the Committee. Ms. Treski was a founding member of FARM representing philanthropy and the former Director of Bainum Family Foundation's Food Security Initiative. Ms. Treski discussed the history of the initiative and its focus on advancing racial equity through its investments and programming. She shared context for the foundation's shift in focus to a new strategic direction centered on broadening and deepening their work in early childhood. The foundation has committed \$100 million to their early childhood initiative over the next five years. The foundation's Virginia farm, which launched their original food security focus, will continue its work to advance land conservation and production as an independently run organization. Ms. Treski emphasized the foundation's continued commitment to advancing systemic change.

Reflecting on her experiences with the Farm Committee and its Catalytic Opportunities Work Group, Ms. Treski discussed the challenges faced by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) farmers and the need to address power dynamics and build trust. She encouraged the committee to consider opportunities to leverage USDA's historic levels of investment in the region and highlighted the need for funders to provide flexible and responsive capital to support producers and businesses that have accessed the funding. She noted the exciting progress made by organizations like Dreaming Out Loud on their [Marion Barry Ave Market Project](#) and the work being done by [Nourish DC](#) and [Foodshed Capital](#) to expand equitable access to funding.

She encouraged the FARM Committee to consider how it can lead regional priorities, for individual members to identify what they can advance, and, collectively, how members can work together to measure their impact.

PANEL CONVERSATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION WITH OUR REGION'S FARMERS MARKETS

Andrew Friedson, FARM Vice Chair

Brittney Drakeford, AICP, Community Planner, National Capital Planning Commission and Planning Team, The Capital Market

Hugo Mogollon, Executive Director, FRESHFARM

Vice Chair Friedson introduced Hugo Mogollon from FRESHFARM and Brittney Drakeford from the Capital Market to discuss the challenges and opportunities for farmers markets in the region. They emphasized the role of farmers markets as economic drivers, sites for community organizing and development, and contributors to food equity.

Ms. Drakeford shared an overview of the work of [the Capital Market](#), which hosts farmers markets in under resourced communities with limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Through its work, the market also seeks to activate underutilized community spaces, attract public funding and resources, and foster economic development. She emphasized the importance of understanding the full scope of the food system to best support farmers markets, from the need for cold storage space to land access for agricultural production.

Hugo Mogollon from [FRESHFARM](#) discussed the 25th Anniversary of Farmers Market Week, highlighting the economic impact of farmers markets and the challenges they faced in terms of permitting, public space usage, and financial support. Mr. Mogollon noted the incredible amount of work it takes to start and sustain a farmers market and the shift in public perception and support from when FRESHFARM started its first market in DC 1997. While farmers markets are celebrated, often the full impact of placemaking, economic development, and entrepreneurship opportunities created by farmers markets is not fully understood by decision makers. Mr. Mogollon shared that FRESHFARM'S 27 markets and producers generated \$28 million dollars last year.

Ms. Drakeford highlighted the challenges of operating farmers markets in neighborhoods without grocery stores and with limited walkability. Investments are needed in public programming, infrastructure, and security to make the markets accessible and attractive to the community. Despite these challenges, the Capital Market has demonstrated significant economic benefits operating in Suitland, MD, a Healthy Food Priority Area, where the market generated the same level of sales (on average) that a grocery store would on an hourly basis. She also noted the barriers markets face related to Zoning and applying for permits which are often structured with larger businesses in mind. Ms. Drakeford also highlighted the use of markets and food systems as a redevelopment strategy in Prince George's County, focusing on the activation of underutilized institutional buildings to avoid blight and meet community needs.

Mr. Mogollon and Ms. Drakeford emphasized the importance of regional collaboration for farmers markets, discussing the challenges of operating in different jurisdictions and the need for economic development offices to consider markets when structuring opportunities like grants and financing. Hugo suggested COG explore a regional farmers market permit and recounted farmers markets' ineligibility for small business grants and recovery funds during the pandemic. He suggested the committee consider how the region could address permitting, licenses, payments for public spaces, direct financial support governments could offer to support the staffing of markets, permanent signage for markets, and resources for peace and clean teams.

Mr. Mogollon and Ms. Drakeford addressed questions about state versus regional farmers market permits and what challenges are specific to operating in under resourced areas. Beth Sastre asked how farmers markets can address the limited capacity and time scarcity faced by producers selling at farmers markets. Mr. Mogollon emphasized the role of farmers markets in driving innovation and discussed the difficulties faced by farmers in finding labor. Ms. Drakeford shared insights into the produce aggregation work at the Capital Market and support received through the Morningstar Foundation's [Keeping It Cool](#) grant. She shared that they have seen positive impacts from this practice for producers, consumers, and other businesses.

Vice-Chair Friedson thanked the speakers. He emphasized that definitions for farmers markets matter for zoning and permitting but also in emergency scenarios; he reflected on how farmers markets were not considered emergency operation during the pandemic and the advocacy required

to ensure they could continue addressing community food access needs.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT & DISCUSSION: TRENDS AND STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS FOOD INSECURITY

Zachary Parker, FARM Vice-Chair

Radha Muthiah, President & CEO, Capital Area Food Bank

Jennifer Montgomery, President & CEO, Loudoun Hunger

Nanya Chiejine, MPH, Executive Director, Montgomery County Food Council

Caroline Howe, DC Food Policy Director

Vice-Chair Parker welcomed Radha Muthiah, the President and CEO of the Capital Area Food Bank (CAFB). Ms. Muthiah provided an overview of the food distribution efforts in the region over their last fiscal year, emphasizing the substantial increase in meals distributed and the factors driving this increase, including inflation, retraction of pandemic-era government benefits, and wage growth stagnation. CAFB and its partners distributed sixty-three million meals; 47% more than they originally projected for the year. She shared that CAFB expects to see elevated levels of food insecurity for several years and that this is coming against the backdrop of pandemic-era government programs and resources ending.

Ms. Muthiah detailed the features and capacity of CAFB's new, larger facility in Lorton Virginia and expressed gratitude for the support received from various government agencies and partners. The facility has approximately 30,000 square feet of warehouse space with ten times more cold storage space (compared to their old facility), which is critical as approximately 50% of the food bank's distributions are produce and proteins.

Ms. Muthiah answered clarifying questions about her presentation and CAFB's partner network. A FARM Member expressed interest in COG partnering to support CAFB's research around their annual food security assessment, and Ms. Muthiah discussed potential areas for further research and collaboration with COG.

Vice Chair Parker thanked Ms. Muthiah for her presentation and shared Chair Rodney Lusk's invitation to FARM Members to join COG's upcoming Human Services Policy Committee on September 13th, when Ms. Muthiah will present the findings of the 2024 Hunger Report. Following this, he invited three food security leaders from the region to give brief updates from their jurisdictions.

Jennifer Montgomery shared that Loudoun County is seeing elevated food insecurity rates for similar reasons to those Ms. Muthiah shared. This year they have seen an 8% increase in unduplicated requests for individuals needing support; last year was a 32% increase. Increasing housing costs are a key driver for this in Loudoun. Loudoun Hunger recently celebrated an expansion; their increased warehouse space has allowed them to expand to new distribution models and serve new partners.

Montgomery County Food Council's new Executive Director, Nanya Chiejine, thanked the Committee for its warm welcome and shared feedback they collected last year from food assistance providers. They reported increased need and that participants are visiting more frequently. Providers are running out of food during distributions and trying to stretch their resources. Ms. Chiejine uplifted the launch of Montgomery County's Office of Food System Resilience and the strategic investments it had enabled to identify and address residents' needs through data collection and deploying innovative grants and benefit programs.

Caroline Howe emphasized the impact of ARPA funds on food access in the District of Columbia,

citing the success of initiatives like Keeping It Cool. She discussed the challenges of decreasing federal and local funding post-pandemic and the need to leverage federal and local funds creatively to address food insecurity, particularly for vulnerable populations such as the LGBTQ community, college students, and recent immigrants. DC is trying to conduct outreach for new programs, such as SUNBucks, as holistically as possible so residents can be made aware of the varied resources that can support them.

REGIONAL ANNOUNCEMENTS AND ADJOURN

Andrew Friedson, FARM Vice Chair

Vice-Chair Friedson wrapped up the meeting by thanking the presenters and attendees, and then invited others to share announcements.

- Lindsay Smith shared that the Congressionally Designated Spending Request that COG submitted on behalf of the FARM Committee was, unfortunately, not included in the relevant subcommittee's appropriations bill.
 - FARM will continue to look for opportunities to support the research efforts included in the request.
- She also provided dates for upcoming meetings, including the Annual Compost Update, hosted by COG's Recycling Committee, and the Human Services Policy Committee meeting.
- Heather Bruskin announced Montgomery County's Office of Food System Resilience's post for two temporary contract staff positions and encouraged wide sharing of the information.

In lieu of FARM's regular meeting in October, FARM members are invited to join this year's farm tour in the District of Columbia on Friday, October 18.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:51 am.

FARM MEMBER ATTENDANCE

Jon Stehle, Chair, City of Fairfax

Andrew Friedson, Vice-Chair, Montgomery County

Zachary Parker, Vice-Chair, District of Columbia

Brian Alexander, Capital Area Food Bank (Alternate)

Marilyn Blount, Town of Bladensburg (Alternate)

Heather Bruskin, Montgomery County Office of Food System Resilience

Tara Clemons Johnson, Montgomery County Council (Alternate)

Libby Garvey, Arlington County

Tom Gordy, Prince William County

Charles Green, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Caron Gremont, FRESHFARM (Alternate)

Julia Gross, MD Hunger Solutions (Alternate)

Caroline Howe, DC Office of Planning, DC Food Policy Council

Rachel Jones, Maryland Department of Agriculture

Carrol McBryde, Town of Bladensburg

Danielle McKinney, City of Greenbelt

Hugo Mogollon, FRESHFARM

Radha Muthiah, Capital Area Food Bank

Katie Stevens, Frederick County

Meredith Ledlie Johnson, Virginia Cooperative Extension
Victoria Treski, IvyWild Strategies, LLC
Bob Weir, Prince William County (Alternate)

PARTICIPANTS

Alex Cordova, OSEC, MD
Alice Chalmers
Amy Crone
Ann Medford
Anne Wallerstedt
Annika La Fave, MDEM
Ashley Sharpe
Bria Hamlet
Brittany Cook -MDEM-
Carly Aubrey
Carol Jones
Catherine Nardi
Corey B. Welcher
Danita Banks (DOH)
Darren Jarboe, UME
Devin Pharr
Dr. Camille Range
Eddie Oliver
Emily Landsman (FOUA)
Stacey Evers
Cindy Gibson
Harrison Palmer
Jackie DeCarlo
Jamie Baxter
Jason Sierra

Jessie Lupo (DOH)
Jocelyn Tidwell, Maryland SNAP-Ed
Joe Liu
Kim Rush Lynch
LaMonika Jones
Michelle Caruso (she/her)
Molly
Natalia Salazar Lahera
Pamela Montesinos
Piper Phillips Caswell
Rachel Clark
Riley Piva (HSEMA)
Sade Akinbayo
Samuel Wilson
Selena Mendy Singleton
Shelby Watson-Hampton
Stacey Evers
Stephanie Lansing
Steve McHenry
Steven Jones
Stuart Vermaak
Wendy Nevett Bazil
Woode, Willie
Yuki Kato

SPEAKERS

Does not include FARM members

Michelle Caruso, Montgomery County Food Council, DMV Food Collaborative Member
Nanya Chiejine, MPH, Executive Director, Montgomery County Food Council
Brittney Drakeford, AICP, Community Planner, National Capital Planning Commission and Planning Team, The Capital Market
Jennifer Montgomery, President & CEO, Loudoun Hunger
Beth Sastre, Virginia Cooperative Extension - Loudoun County, Regional Agricultural Work Group Member

COG TEAM

Leah Boggs
Sydney Daigle
Christine Howard
Wyetha Lipford
Lindsay Smith