
**FOOD AND AGRICULTURE REGIONAL MEMBER (FARM) POLICY
COMMITTEE**

MEETING SUMMARY (DRAFT)

FEBRUARY 10, 2023

All materials from the meeting are available at: [FARM February 10, 2023 Meeting](#)

- Short Term
 - FARM members approved the December meeting summary with a quorum.
 - Send a letter in support of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council to the MD General Assembly.
 - COG staff will follow up with Secretary Atticks' office to see if we can brief him on the region's Regional Food Business Center application.
 - Staff will collect all input from the Strategic Planning session and share it back to FARM Members and meeting participants.
 - Learning from what worked to support food security and resilience in the pandemic, considering tactical actions at the local and federal levels, etc., should guide FARM's actions over the next two years.
 - There was agreement that education and schools need to be included in FARM's Strategic Plan.
 - All comments can be found at: [COG FARM Com 2023 to 2024 Strategic Planning All Comments.xlsx](#)
 - Chair Stehle directed staff to determine an appropriate mechanism for conveying priorities for the Farm Bill to legislators before the April meeting.
 - Priorities will emphasize federal pandemic support that FARM believes needs to remain in place.
 - Chair Stehle indicated that each upcoming meeting will include three, five-minute presentation slots as a way to raise awareness about important initiatives happening locally.
 - Members asked for more opportunities to meet in-person and have more conversation during 2023. The Chair will designate several more meetings as hybrid (in-person and virtual).
 - **FARM's next hybrid meeting is Friday, April 14th. Please RSVP by Monday, April 10th for planning purposes.** <https://forms.office.com/r/Yzf0q9Vzti>

MEDIA REFERENCED BY SPEAKERS AND FARM MEMBERS:

In majority-Black Prince George's, a struggle to help Black farmers

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2023/02/08/prince-georges-black-farmers/>

From \$258 to \$23, SNAP recipients will see a major reduction in benefits

Emergency allotments expire at the end of February

<https://www.wmar2news.com/matterformallory/from-258-to-23-snap-recipients-will-see-a-major-reduction-in-benefits>

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

- City of Fairfax Councilmember Jon Stehle, FARM Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting a few minutes after 9:30 am.
- Chair Stehle introduced FARM's Vice Chair for 2023 and 2024: Councilmember Kate Kennedy from College Park, MD and facilitated introductions in the room. Online participants were asked to introduce themselves in the chat.
- COG's new Executive Director, Clark Mercer, provided a welcome to in-person and online meeting participants.
 - Mercer is from Virginia and served as Governor Northam's Chief of Staff
 - Both of his grandparents were in farming and Mercer has experience in the oyster industry too.
 - He was excited to learn that COG has this important Committee.
 - Urged members and participants to consider during strategic planning:
 - Opportunities to leverage federal relief and other federal dollars
 - Actions that will get things done
- Mercer and FARM Member, Ruben Collins, President of the Charles County Board of Supervisors, referenced yesterday's article in the Washington Post about [Black farmers](#).
 - Collins is really thinking about the need to get information to farmers, especially women and minority farmers, about resources available.
- Michael J Wilson talked about the importance of the FARM Policy Committee's holistic view of the food system and helps us keep in mind how different issues are connected.
 - Wilson referenced the impending end of the SNAP Emergency Allotments.
 - This will not only negatively impact SNAP households, but all kinds of food retail in the state.
 - Recommended article on systemic impacts:
<https://www.wmar2news.com/matterformallory/from-258-to-23-snap-recipients-will-see-a-major-reduction-in-benefits>
- Chair Stehle reviewed the 2023 meeting schedule and provided a summary of the December meeting.
 - FARM members approved the December draft meeting summary with a quorum. There was one abstention.

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE RESILIENCE REMARKS AND DISCUSSION WITH MARYLAND'S NEW SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE

- Vice Chair Kennedy welcomed and introduced the new Acting Secretary of Agriculture for Maryland, Kevin Atticks.

Note: Secretary Atticks was confirmed by the Maryland Senate on Monday, February 13th.

- Secretary Atticks discussed Governor Moore's priority that the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) needs to be more proactive in supporting farming, representing the industry, and showing how agriculture offers solutions.
 - Atticks is not a farmer but for the last 20 years, has been the person that farmers call when they are having challenges.
 - He is continuing to listen and learn and encouraged members to provide feedback on what MDA needs to be doing.
 - He looks forward to working in MD and across state lines to encourage cooperation on the big issues discussed in the meeting.
- A key priority for Atticks will be increasing profitability for farmers.
 - Actions need to be considered in the context of the Chesapeake Bay and other major priorities.
 - MD farmers have access to two or three major Metropolitan markets.
 - Supporting agritourism, craft food production, getting more MD farm products into schools, universities, and the correctional system are among strategies that need to be supported.
 - Supporting Value-Added Production Centers around the state, leveraging technology, and improving regulations were other major issues the Secretary raised.
- Atticks, FARM Members, and meeting participants had a dynamic discussion about a number of topics. Among those raised by members included:
 - Support is needed to make the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (FSRC) permanent. (Wilson)
 - We need to be working with farmers markets to be able to offer matching incentives at a level that make sense for low-income shoppers. A \$5 match is not sufficient in 2023. (Wilson)
 - The need for the region's local governments to address how farming can be better supported by Zoning, including for those farming on smaller amounts of land who want to produce food. (Supervisor Gross)
 - Atticks offered that MD has established model definitions for certain uses to ensure there is a more comprehensive approach from state to localities. Perhaps this would be helpful elsewhere in the region.
 - In MD, the permitting process for septic systems can take up to a year right now. This is at a time when costs for everything are increasing and it will affect producing affordable food. (Stevens)
 - Atticks talked about the need to get all agencies at the table, including the Health Department and Department of the Environment.
 - There is also a need for value-added production facilities like the one being worked on in Frederick Co. Not all farmers can or want to install different

types of infrastructure on their farms.

- A large-scale, statewide grant program is needed in Maryland to help interested schools work with farmers to purchase local food. (Friedson)
- Public investment is also needed in strategically located aggregation facilities and other infrastructure to help take some of the risk out for farmers and make the economics work. (Friedson)
 - Grape crushing facility in Montgomery County cited as an example.
- Investing in the school food workforce is also critical. There's a community in Maryland that works with school and nutrition staff to process food in the summer – addresses the food system in many ways. (Kennedy)
Note: the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council is hosting a trip in June for its members to Caroline County to meet with Beth Brewster who runs this initiative.
- We need to ensure that allow "value added" for farming operations doesn't displace the agriculture piece all together. There are some "Farm"/limited breweries that don't grow anything in VA for the value-added product.
 - We need to ensure that the agriculture in the value-added opportunities remains.
 - We don't want to look back when we really need food production and wonder where the land we needed to do it on went. (Van Vlack)
 - Atticks cited Frederick and Montgomery counties as counties that created more specific Zoning regulations to a loose state statute to require greater linkages between production and this type of value-added activity.
 - Not all processing will be able to take place on the farm.
- If there are 100 million pounds of catfish in the Bay, we need a federal processing facility for blue catfish so MD can sell across state lines. (Wilson)
- Stehle talked about working with a farmer to bring a hundred pounds of pumpkins the City of Fairfax this fall.
 - Celebration of our food system, connection to the land and the way this is also good for wellness and mental health, needs to be kept in mind.
- Other issues raised in discussion and in the chat include:
 - Support for Controlled Environment Agriculture (CEA) is needed.
 - Another challenge Montgomery County Schools has is the need for GAP certified farmers. This is one reason that Manna has been awarding capacity-building grants to farmers for the last 3 years and creating a market for farmers within the food assistance sector in our County. Re: contract growing, projects like the County's Farm to Food Bank need sustained funding so that farmers know there is a reliable market to grow for.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS

- Lindsay Smith (COG staff) introduced the FARM Policy Committee: 2022 Year-in-Review document and shared a link to COG's 2023 Legislative Priorities.
 - The Legislative Priorities guide the outreach and advocacy that COG can do during the year.
 - <https://www.mwcog.org/documents/2023/01/11/cog-legislative-priorities-legislative-priorities/>
 - Food and agriculture priorities are on page 10.

- A few 2022 milestones included completing and releasing [The Healthy Food Access Policy Compendium for Metropolitan Washington](#) and forming two new Work Groups.
 - Catalytic Opportunities Work Group looks at the intersection of two of FARM's priorities related to supporting farmers identifying as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color and small farmers, and leveraging procurement to increase equity and the region's food and farm economy.
 - Outreach Work Group
- The Catalytic Opportunities Work Group has received the generous support of Bainum Family Foundation to hire a consultant to advance its work.
 - Candidates are being interviewed now.

BACKGROUND FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION

- FARM Members were invited to provide short updates relevant to strategic planning.
- Board President Collins emphasized the need for information and resources to share with minority and women farmers especially.
- Collins would also like to see FARM cover and explore many current issues in food and agriculture, for example the climate impacts of cattle.
- Hugo Mogollon, FRESHFARM's Executive Director, provided a Preliminary Report on the Economic and Social Impacts of FRESHFARM's 26 farmers markets in the region in 2022.
 - Mogollon's five-slide presentation is [available at this link](#).
 - FRESHFARM's revenue grew in 2022 as did the amount of local and federal benefits spent by qualifying shoppers, such as Produce Plus (DC Healthy Food Access Program), SNAP, etc.
 - Local governments can increase the impact of food access programs by providing matching funds that can be used to cover the cost of items that SNAP won't cover to help low-income shoppers complete their market baskets.
 - FARM supported a federal, regional GUSNiP grant to improve food access at farmers markets. There are opportunities to make these dollars go farther with local government matching dollars.
 - Farmers markets are reliable, clean, outdoors, and price competitive as the recent issue with the price of eggs have demonstrated.
 - They are an outlet for small business development and Mogollon would like to see increased understanding about the impact of this sector.

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR 2023 AND 2024

- Stehle indicated that the session should generate "a backlog of ideas" - more than can be acted on in 2023. Big, "blue sky" thinking was encouraged with an eye to tactical actions that colleagues not in the room could take as a result.
 - Provided a charge to staff and Chairs to provide summary of all comments and feed them back to the group.
 - In-person and online attendees were encouraged to brainstorm actions FARM could

- take in 2023 and 2024 on post-it notes, Padlet, and in the WebEx chat.
 - The Chair and members discussed the need to think both about what can be done locally and what can be done at a federal level.
- Councilmember Friedson and Arlington County Board Vice Chair Garvey recommended examining what had been done during the pandemic to support food security and resilience to understand some of the actions that should be taken going forward.
 - The pandemic offers a “once in a generation look back” at a transformational state.
 - Which programs and initiatives need to be made permanent or brought back to positively impact these issues?
 - This should guide how FARM thinks about and conducts its work over the next two years.
- Members referenced the opportunity to provide input to the Farm Bill at several points throughout the discussion.
 - Staff recommended providing priorities ahead of the April meeting given the timing of work and agenda setting happening in Congress.
 - There is a need for education on what the Farm Bill does.
 - Councilmember Friedson recommended focusing FARM’s comments on Farm Bill program/related program enhancements implemented during the pandemic that should be made permanent.
 - US House Representative Alison Spanberger (VA) is the only member of the region’s congressional delegation on the House Agriculture Committee.
- The importance of regional resiliency and emergency preparedness planning was discussed several times.
 - Resources from the 100 Resilient Cities initiative were recommended.
 - Staff shared that DC HSEMA continues to work on this with COG and can be invited to brief FARM again on progress.
- Chair Stehle introduced the draft, high level strategic planning document which organizes FARM’s priorities and introduces several activities for the next two years.
 - Priorities were set previously.
 - Stehle asked members to focus on the section headlined by “We deliver on our mission when” and 2023 and 2024 actions.
 - Several members requested adding schools and education as a core focus to the “deliver on our mission when.”
 - One member asked that COG report out every 3 months on the impact of benefit retraction (i.e. SNAP emergency allotments) on residents in the region.
 - Staff will follow up with MD Hunger Solutions which is having discussions with the State of MD on studying this.

STRATEGIC PLANNING FEEDBACK

- All compiled comments from the session can be found at: [COG FARM Com 2023 to 2024 Strategic Planning All Comments.xlsx](#)

MEMBER ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPDATES

Maryland Hunger Solutions invited all to raise awareness about National School Breakfast Week by participating in “Hear the Crunch” in Maryland on Wednesday, March 9th.

ADJOURN

Jon Stehle, FARM Chair, adjourned the meeting at 1:01 pm.

The next regularly scheduled FARM Policy Committee meeting is Friday, April 14th at 10:00 am.

Note: This will be a hybrid meeting. Please RSVP at this link by Monday, April 10th for planning purposes. <https://forms.office.com/r/Yzf0q9Vzti>

ATTENDANCE:

Jon Stehle, Vice Chair, City of Fairfax
Kate Kennedy, City of College Park
Andrew Friedson, Montgomery County
Amy Jackson, City of Alexandria
Matt de Ferranti, Arlington County (alternate)
Libby Garvey, Arlington County
Penny Gross, Fairfax County
Kenny Boddy, Prince William County
Ruben Collins, III, Charles County (alternate)
Cesar Cucufate, City of Laurel
Maria Mackie, City of College Park (alternate)
Jocelyn Route, City of Bladensburg (alternate)
Randy Gibson, City of Takoma Park
Katie Stevens, Frederick County Office of Economic Development
Hugo Mogollon, FRESHFARM
Nick Stavely, FRESHFARM (alternate)
Sara Pollock Hoverter, Georgetown University
Victoria Treski, Bainum Family Foundation
Chris Van Vlack, Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District
Bridget Warren, Prince George's County Office of Food Security
Kyra Cooke, Prince George's County Office of Food Security (alternate)
Michael J Wilson, Maryland Hunger Solutions

Zachari Curtis, MAFRAC Advisory Board
Eleni Rigsby, Capital Area Food Bank
Cindy Gibson, Office of Councilmember Friedson
Elizabeth Eppes, Maryland Hunger Solutions
Brittany Cook, Maryland Food System Resiliency Council
Ashley Sharp, Resurgence Consulting
Dr. Lawrence Schaefer, Schaefer Global Management LLC
Stephanie Hopkins, Arlington County
Julie Buisson, SpringForward (created by PHILLIPS Programs)
Heather Hulsey, Southern MD Ag Development Commission

Alice Chalmers, Sun Bird Farm and Senior Advisor to 4P Foods
Reana Kovalcik, DC Greens
Annarose Kennedy, Community Food Rescue Coordinator with Manna Food Center
Amanda Cather, American Farmland Trust
Nancy Nunn, Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology
Stacey Evers, Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District
Jennifer Freeman, Community FarmShare
Melissa Jensen, City of Alexandria
Alex Echols, Campbell Foundation
Mike Thielke, Executive Director at Eastern Shore Entrepreneurship Center
Jenna Umbriac, Manna Food Center in Montgomery County
Lauren Goldberg (she/ her), Crossroads Community Food Network
Juliet Glass, FRESHFARM
Kathy Johnson, Director of Agriculture Business Development, Howard County Economic
Development
Gretchen Greiner-Lott, Cafritz Foundation
Lianna Gomori-Ruben
Piper

Speakers

Kevin Atticks, Maryland Secretary of Agriculture
Clark Mercer, Executive Director, COG

COG Staff

Steve Bieber
Christine Howard
Brian LeCouteur
Wyetha Lipford
Lindsay Smith
Heidi Bonnaffon