



**FOOD AND AGRICULTURE REGIONAL MEMBER AD-HOC COMMITTEE (FARM)
MEETING SUMMARY (DRAFT)**

NOVEMBER 13, 2020

**10 A.M. TO 12:00 P.M.
VIA WEBEX**

LINK TO ALL MEETING PRESENTATIONS AND MATERIALS:

<https://www.mwcog.org/events/2020/11/13/farm-ad-hoc-committee-meeting/>

DECISIONS & ACTIONS:

- Members approved the Food and Agriculture Regional Member (FARM) Ad Hoc Advisory Committee Bylaws.
- Members will work together during the December meeting to determine the most important areas of focus for the FARM committee. Some potential discussed, in addition to initial presented priorities (e.g. food security, agriculture, data, post FARM Ad Hoc Committee regional group), included:
 - Regional Resources
 - Organize a compendium of food access/food security programs and resources across the region
 - Share regional local procurement strategies
 - Funding
 - Align the region to advocate for federal relief and recovery funding
 - Explore regional funding investments in food; identifying ways to promote more investment in local food production, in BIPOC and immigrant farmers and entrepreneurs
 - Promote funding for processing and distribution of local products and private sector engagement
 - Expand opportunities for community gardens both for those who want to grow food for themselves and residents who wish to donate
 - Research opportunities to incorporate direct community feedback as food security needs during COVID and beyond are considered
- COG will follow-up with FARM members about 2021 meeting dates following consultation with the Chair and Vice Chairs.

1. CHAIR'S WELCOME

Councilmember Mary Cheh welcomed everyone to the inaugural FARM committee meeting.

- We've faced an underappreciated food crisis across our region and the U.S. There is widespread food insecurity, lack of access to food, especially healthy food.
- There are economic pressures squeezing small farmers, and obstacles to getting fresh food to market to feed families.
- In trying to address these issues in D.C., seen that the interconnectedness of the food system demands a comprehensive approach.
- Successful efforts must take into account ways that food policy interacts with different parts of the economy and regulatory system.

- FARM has much potential by bringing together urban, suburban, and rural jurisdictions. This new regional collaboration will make our efforts more effective than if we act alone.
- Creation of FARM is timely. Healthy food access has only become more important in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - We must use this opportunity to build back with a stronger, more resilient food system that serves all people in the region.

2. REGIONAL COLLABORATION ON FOOD AND AGRICULTURE WITH COG MEMBERS

Councilmembers Rice and Stehle provided a short overview of member and staff work since 2019 with COG's Chesapeake Bay and Water Resources Committee leading to the formation of FARM. They emphasized that the FARM committee demonstrates the success of regional cooperation, and that is it was initiated before the pandemic hit our region.

- Created an Ag Task Force with elected official members of COG's Chesapeake Bay and Water Resources Policy Committee (CBPC).
 - Often talked about agriculture at CBPC but limited to Bay clean-up despite understanding the broader and interconnected nature of agriculture to healthy waterways, climate, and healthy communities.
- Interviewed leaders across DC, MD, and VA to develop Ag Task Force Working Paper to highlight great things happening locally and challenge selves to do more to promote agriculture, sustainable food production, and resiliency of the food system.
- COVID-19 has confirmed the need for regional collaboration on food; underscoring need to bring more focus to food security and food access while advancing Ag Task Force, What Our Region Grows recommendations.
- The COG Board endorsed the establishment of FARM in the Certified Resolution R37-2020
 - This is interim step, demonstration of the value of COG in action, moment to celebrate.

3. FARM COMMITTEE INTRODUCTIONS

FARM Members provided brief introductions highlighting their interest and background in food and farming issues. For additional details, click [HERE](#) for the background document.

4. FARM MEETING LOGISTICS, COMMITTEE CHARGE, AND NEAR-TERM PRIORITIES DISCUSSION

COG staff discussed meeting logistics. The Chair led a presentation and discussion on some common issues that FARM could work together on in the coming year.

- Meeting Logistics
 - Draft bylaws require that 1/3 of members or their alternates be present for quorum
 - RSVP via Outlook meeting invitation or directly to staff greatly appreciated
 - Meetings will be monthly, Chairs may move to bimonthly in 2021
 - Staff will seek to minimize communications between meetings given busy schedules
 - Meeting notes, agendas to be provided ahead of meetings in timely manner
 - FARM members welcome to join Biweekly Food Security and Food Access calls
 - FARM will have a meeting webpage like other COG Committees
 - Will include a list of FARM Members
 - Meetings will be open to the public
- Priorities
 - Group will need to choose three or four priorities to focus on within broad and meaningful mandate to use time together wisely
 - FARM will continue discussion at next meeting
- Near Term Priorities

- Chairs will develop recommendation for COG legislative priorities on Food & Agriculture and provide to FARM at next meeting
- Additional Priorities
 - Intended to promote discussion and get FARM Member feedback
 - Food Security, Agriculture, Data, Food Procurement and Purchasing, Food System Resiliency, Advising on Future Direction of Regional Food System Coordination are other possible areas FARM could consider establishing priorities in
 - Should consider what we are doing locally that can be shared across jurisdictions
 - May establish a subcommittee if need be
- Regional Background on Food Security
 - Number of people experiencing food insecurity is rising
 - Demand on our region's food banks and pantries has increased dramatically
 - 1.7 million DC, MD, and VA residents received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits in August.
 - Participation in DC has increased by 23%, 14% in VA, and 43% in MD.
 - Near Term Opportunities for Action in Policy Development and Advocacy
 - Develop COG's 2021 Food and Agriculture legislative priorities.
 - Generate regional letters on key food security issues (i.e. federal waivers for nutrition programs).
 - Sharing best practices for implementation and outreach federal nutrition programs.
- Chair advances through several slides with Regional Background on Agriculture and potential priorities as well as data
 - Members encouraged to take a closer look at PPT provided ahead of meeting and at meeting link.
- Member Discussion
 - Members had a broad but brief discussion on areas that it may work on. The need for FARM to be informed about existing food system issues and assets, and needs, came up several times.
 - Some shared areas of committee focus could include:
 - Looking at local food procurement strategies across the region
 - How are institutions supporting local farmers, BIPOC farmers?
 - Organizing a compendium of food access/food security programs and resources across the region
 - What is working well in terms of implementing federal nutrition programs, how can these programs work better?
 - Promoting the need for funding for processing and distribution of local products and private sector engagement
 - Example of Regional Agricultural Center (under development) in Southern Maryland is cited as an example of a facility that will provide needed infrastructure to farmers to supply the broader region. Are there opportunities for partners and funding from urban communities?
 - Infrastructure is another area where more information is needed.
 - Align the region to advocate for federal relief and recovery funding
 - Explore regional funding investment in food (either pandemic-response specific or more broadly). This might help define the impact of Federal relief and recovery funds on our local food system.
 - Increase opportunities for Black and Brown farmers, immigrant communities
 - Incorporate direct community feedback as FARM discusses food security needs during COVID and beyond to incorporate this into program recommendations.

- Identify opportunities to expand and streamline food access funding to reduce complexity from a management and consumer perspective
 - There are some challenges in smaller scale retail, in acceptance cross jurisdictional lines, etc.
 - How can we reduce barriers to food access at farmers markets across the region? Also help farmers?
- Identify alternative sources of funds to promote more local food production where the local farmers are helping to feed people in need.
- Links to other resources and requests
 - The Southern Maryland Agriculture Development Commission
<https://smadc.com/>
 - The Maryland Public Television Maryland Farm and Harvest show:
<https://www.mpt.org/programs/farm/>
 - In addition to <https://www.marylandsbest.net> and <https://www.mpt.org/farm> there is a new USDA monthly webinar series on Local Food Systems Response to COVID: <https://lfscovid.localfoodeconomics.com/webinar-series/>
 - Montgomery County is working on a resident-facing survey related to food access challenges and would welcome any examples from other jurisdictions that may have done/be doing the same.

5. REQUEST TO APPROVE DRAFT BYLAWS

- Members voted to approve the bylaws as presented.

6. ANNOUNCEMENT AND ADJOURN

- The next FARM meeting is scheduled for Friday, December 11 from 10 am to noon.

ATTENDANCE:

Members and Alternates

Mary Cheh, Chair, District of Columbia
Craig Rice, Vice Chair, Montgomery County
Jon Stehle, Vice Chair, City of Fairfax
Gilbert (BJ) Bowling III, Charles County
Libby Garvey, Arlington County
Penny Gross, Fairfax County
Sydney J. Harrison, Prince George's County, MD
Amy B. Jackson, City of Alexandria
Ann B. Wheeler, Prince William County, VA
Reuben B. Collins II, ESQ, Charles County (alternate)
Matt De Ferranti, Arlington County, VA (alternate)
Tom Ross, City of Fairfax (alternate)

Ona Balkus, Food Policy Director, District of Columbia
Heather Bruskin, Montgomery County Food Council
Jeremy V. Criss, Office of Agriculture, Montgomery County
Conaway B. Haskins III, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Commonwealth of Virginia
Hugo Mogollon, FRESHFARM
Sara Pollock Hoverter, Harrison Institute for Public Law, Georgetown University
Julie Oberg, Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, State of Maryland
Victoria Treski, Bainum Family Foundation

Chris Van Vlack, Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District
Michael J. Wilson, Maryland Hunger Solutions
Rachel Clark, Office of Councilmember Cheh (alternate)
Briana Sewell, Office of Chair Wheeler, Prince William County, VA (alternate)

Other Participants

Stacy Carey, Office of Supervisor Kershner, Loudoun County, VA
Sharon Ledner, Office of Councilmember Rice, Montgomery County, MD
Steve Bieber, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG)
Tom Gates, COG
Christine Howard, COG
Brian LeCouteur, COG
Lisa Raigan, COG
Lindsay Smith, COG
Steve Walz, COG