
**FOOD AND AGRICULTURE REGIONAL MEMBER (FARM) POLICY
COMMITTEE****MEETING SUMMARY (DRAFT)****February 9, 2024**

All presentations from the meeting, and the approved October meeting summary, can be found at: <https://www.mwcog.org/events/2024/2/9/food-and-agriculture-regional-member-farm-policy-committee/>

DECISIONS AND ACTIONS:

- FARM members approved the December FARM Committee meeting minutes
- Members will review and provide feedback on the FARM Committee's Farm Bill letter by February 21st
- COG Staff will send out calendar invitations for the meetings for the rest of the year
- A new member orientation will be held on Tuesday, March 7th. Chair Stehle will be hosting us for a hybrid lunch in the City of Fairfax. All FARM members, new and returning, are welcome. COG will send out an interest sheet in advance of the meeting.
- The next FARM meeting is scheduled for Fri, April 12, 2024, from 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. and will be hosted at USDA's headquarters.

WELCOME, FARM MEMBER UPDATES, AND MEETING SUMMARY APPROVAL

Councilmember Jon Stehle, FARM Chair

Councilmember Zachary Parker, FARM Vice Chair

Chair Stehle called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m. The meeting began with introductions and a personal story from Councilmember Stehle.

Councilmember Parker welcomed Montgomery County Council President, Andrew Friedson, as FARM's new Maryland Vice Chair and shared an overview of the 2024 draft meeting schedule. With the exception of the April 12th Annual USDA Forum and October 11th farm tour in the District of Columbia, FARM meetings will be held virtually this year.

Lindsay Smith facilitated several timely updates from COG. Kelsey Boatwright, from COG's Climate team, provided a comprehensive update on the draft Priority Climate Action Plan (PCAP) and the Comprehensive Climate Action Plan (CCAP), detailing the measures included and the process for review and submission. Kenneth Derryberry, an intern from COG's Department of Transportation Planning, provided a detailed update on the Transportation Land-Use Connections (TLC) program, outlining the grant application opportunity, funding availability, project duration, and the types of projects it supports. Applications are due March 8th. More information can be found at <https://www.mwcog.org/transportation/planning-areas/land-use-coordination/tlc-program/>.

Ms. Smith shared that the COG Board approved its [2024 Legislative Priorities](#) in January, including the proposed changes the FARM Committee submitted for the food security and agriculture priorities. Ms. Smith also shared that the FARM Committee submitted supportive testimony for DC's

Healthy School Meals for All bill in November and the federal Child Tax Credit expansion, included in the most recent tax bill, in January.

Chair Stehle called for approval of previous meeting minutes; they were approved unanimously.

PRIORITIES FOR THE FEDERAL 2024 FARM BILL

Sydney Daigle, Owner, Lagniappe Partners in Health, LLC; Consultant, COG FARM Policy Committee
Ryan Losak, Vice President, Banner Public Affairs

Mr. Losak shared an in-depth analysis of the Farm Bill, focused on the conservation, nutrition, horticulture, and miscellaneous titles. He outlined the political hurdles related to funding allocation and negotiations and emphasized the urgency of making significant progress on the bill before the fall election cycle. Additionally, he discussed the priorities outlined in the FARM Committee's draft letter to the Senate and House Agriculture Committees and emphasized the importance of advocacy for maintaining funding levels for conservation programs and The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Ms. Daigle highlighted the impact of the pandemic on the regional food system, which led to the decision to include funding for various programs in the letter. She emphasized the need to strengthen regional food supply chains and address food insecurity, including making pandemic-era provisions related to food security permanent and supporting SNAP. Additionally, she discussed the challenges faced by BIPOC farmers, the need for support for farmers and food retailers, and the environmental benefits of the local food system.

Councilmember Stehle and Councilmember Friedson emphasized the need to capture lessons learned during the pandemic and build on them. Libby Garvey, Chair, Arlington County Board, also discussed the political significance of climate change arguments and the opportunity for the region to make progress.

Councilmember Stehle encouraged members to communicate their thoughts about the letter to COG staff as soon as possible. The letter will be submitted within the month.

MEMBER UPDATES: FOOD AND AGRICULTURE STATE LEGISLATION

Jon Stehle, FARM Chair
Zachary Parker, FARM Vice Chair

Ms. Daigle facilitated a discussion on legislative updates with a focus on SNAP, healthy school meals, child tax credits, and bills supporting small farmers and the region's food system. Cassie Edner, Public Benefits Attorney, Virginia Poverty Law Center, presented detailed updates on the legislative status of these programs in Virginia, emphasizing the financial challenges of this year's budget. Supervisor TeKrony, Loudoun County, expressed concerns about a bill focused on allowing solar arrays on farms and its potential impact on agriculture in Loudoun County. She emphasized the need to preserve land with prime agricultural soil for farming in rural parts of the county.

Heather Bruskin, Montgomery County Office of Food Resilience, Rachel Jones, Maryland Department of Agriculture, and Julia Gross, Maryland Hunger Solutions, provided updates on various food-related bills in Maryland. Bills discussed included those related to increasing SNAP minimum benefit levels, Maryland Meals for Achievement, healthy school meals for all, on-farm organics diversion grants, grant funding for non-profit farms, summer SNAP for children, and income-tax credits for venison

donations. They also discussed the challenges related to a tight fiscal climate for some of the bills and proposed different phased-in options for the healthy school meals for all bill.

Councilmember Parker shared updates from the Council of the District of Columbia on several food-access focused bills. After some back-and-forth between the Council and Mayor, the Give SNAP a Raise bill was funded at 40 million dollars which will provide a 10% supplement to SNAP benefits for District residents from March through December. The Healthy School Meals for All budget amendment, which the FARM Committee supported, will come up for a vote soon as will the Child Tax Credit, which was introduced by CM Parker. CM Parker also emphasized the fiscal constraints the district is facing for next fiscal year.

FARM MEMBER BUSINESS: NEW MEMBER INTRODUCTIONS AND 2024 PRIORITIES

Zachary Parker, FARM Vice Chair
Jon Stehle, FARM Chair

Councilmember Parker facilitated introduction of new members, including Councilmember Blount, from Bladensburg, and Supervisor TeKrony, Loudoun County, who expressed their enthusiasm and specific interests in the committee's work.

Councilmember Stehle announced a new member orientation on March 7th from 11:00 am-1:00 pm in the City of Fairfax and reminded members to revisit the strategic plan to review the committee's future goals.

Stacey Evers, Urban Agriculture Specialist with Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District, shared that they have started an urban agriculture road map workgroup to figure out how to facilitate more local food production in Fairfax County and the city. They are especially interested in Area 2 Farms as a model, which is a scalable in-soil controlled-environment urban agriculture operation. Chris Van Vlack, Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District, joined Ms. Evers in expressing challenges they have faced with agriculture support uses and zoning.

ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned by Chair Stehle at 11:44 am.

FARM ATTENDANCE

Jon Stehle, Chair, City of Fairfax
Zachary Parker, Vice-Chair, District of Columbia
Andrew Friedson, Vice-Chair, Montgomery County
Yesy Amaya, City of Manassas Park
Marilyn Blount (alternate), Town of Bladensburg
Libby Garvey, Arlington County
Randy Gibson, City of Takoma Park
Amy Jackson, City of Alexandria
Caroline Lian, City of Falls Church
Carrol McBryde, Town of Bladensburg
Danielle McKinney, City of Greenbelt
Denise Mitchell, City of College Park
Laura TeKrony, Loudoun County
Heather Bruskin, Montgomery County Office of Food System Resilience
Julia Gross (alternate), MD Hunger Solutions

Sara Pollock Hoverter, Georgetown University
Rachel Jones, Maryland Department of Agriculture
Meredith Ledlie Johnson, VCE
Charise Liggins, City of Laurel
Nick Stavely (alternate), FRESHFARM
Katie Stevens, Frederick County
Chris Van Vlack, Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District
Bridget E. Warren, Prince George's County Office of Food Security

PARTICIPANTS

Brian Alexander
Robin Bartok
Sam Bonar
Cindy Gibson
Kayla Agonoy
Carly Aubrey
Rebecca Bare
Elizabeth Borst
Alisa Brooks
Carla Cash
Brittany Cook
Alex Cordova
Robert Davenport

Jackie DeCarlo
Casey Dyson
Stacey Evers
Gretchen Greiner-Lott
Kellie Hinkle
Stephanie Hopkins
Natalia Salazar Lahera
Beth Sastre
Elisa Solomon
Jocelyn Tidwell
Debbie Tropp
Willie Woode
Alyssa Wooden

SPEAKERS

Does not include FARM members

Ryan Losak, Banner Public Affairs
Cassie Edner, Virginia Poverty Law Center and Virginia Hunger Solutions
Kenneth Derryberry, COG
Kelsey Boatwright, COG

COG Staff and Consultants

Steve Bieber
Heidi Bonnaffon
Sydney Daigle
Christine Howard

Wyetha Lipford
Brian LeCouteur
Lindsey Martin
Lisa Ragain
Lindsay Smith