

# AGRICULTURE TASK FORCE: DRAFT WORKING PAPER

## SUMMARY AND REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK

A volunteer Agriculture Task Force (Ag Task Force), facilitated by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' (COG) Chesapeake Bay and Water Resources Policy Committee (CBPC), was established in the spring of 2019 to assess regional capacity to implement recommendations in COG's [What Our Region Grows](#) report. Since then, Ag Task Force members have convened several times, and asked COG staff to interview local elected officials and other key leaders to gauge broader interest and resources available for this purpose.

This working paper reviews:

- *What Our Region Grows* recommendations;
- A draft vision, goals, and sample milestones created by the Ag Task Force for implementing recommendations;
- Key themes from interviews and related-research; and
- Recommended next steps for the Regional Food Systems Program, including laying the foundation for a 10-year Regional Food and Agriculture Economy Commission<sup>1</sup> and funding future program budgets.

This working paper also provides background for **a companion one-page overview of next steps**, potential deliverables, and proposed funding contributions from localities, private, and philanthropic regional supporters to support the region's agricultural and food systems.

**Request for Feedback:** The Ag Task Force seeks feedback from other local governments and food and agricultural leaders on the future of COG's regional food systems work. This includes its proposal to convene policymakers and other experts in a Regional Commission to support the region's food and agricultural economy. The Ag Task Force welcomes expressions of interest in participating and providing funding support to realize the bold vision outlined in this report.

## TASK FORCE BACKGROUND AND REGIONAL AGRICULTURAL TRENDS

Since the creation of the volunteer Ag Task Force in March 2019, COG staff have interviewed over 40 regional leaders to assess regional interest, capacity, and resources to implement the recommendations of COG's [What Our Region Grows](#) report. The report recommendations include:

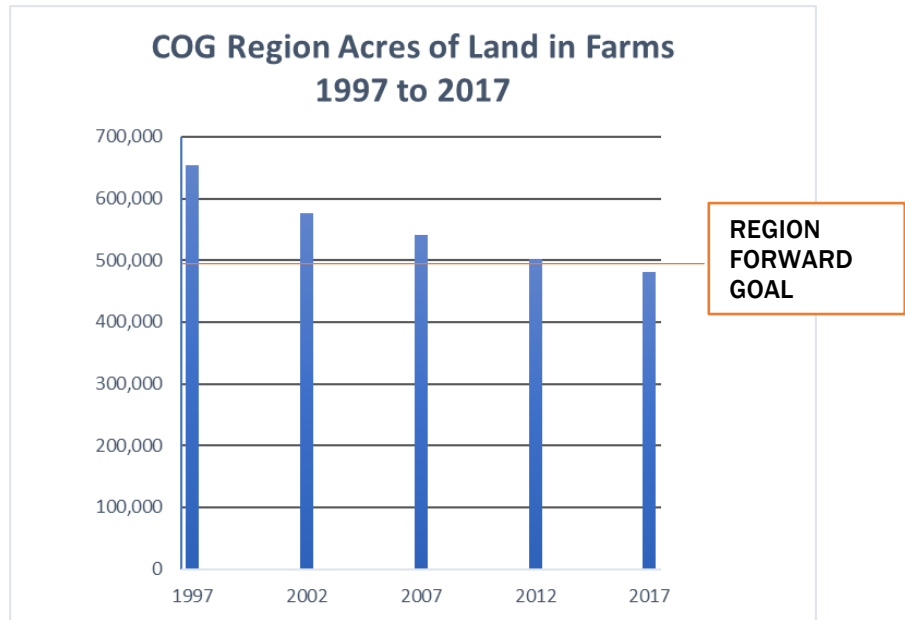
- Creating a regional commission on agriculture;
- Hosting regional forums on agricultural issues;

---

<sup>1</sup> Maryland's diverse, [25-member Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education](#), the "Kirwan Commission" has been recommended as a potential model for multi-sector membership, including both COG members and external stakeholders. While this has not been contemplated in detail by the Ag Task Force, in addition to COG members, Commission members *could* include a COG Ag Work Group Member (i.e. Soil Conservation District or agricultural marketing and business development staff), state departments of agriculture, a food policy council director, land grant universities, a direct-market association, food and farm entrepreneurs, philanthropy, CDFIs, etc.

- Commissioning a strategic plan for agriculture;
- Funding agricultural-related technical, educational and marketing services; and
- Supporting diversification of farm activity, incentivizing local food aggregation, processing, distribution and purchasing.

Data from the 2017 U.S. Census of Agriculture shows that the region has dropped below the goal established through COG's Region Forward initiative for maintaining nearly a half million acres of land in farms. At a time of heightened interest in local food and farming, healthy eating, sustainable agriculture and soil health, the region continues to experience declines in farms and farmland.



Now is the time to act.

There is growing awareness about changes needed to support farmers, businesses, institutions, communities, and consumers to reduce waste and lead the way in preparing for a sustainable food future. Agriculture and healthy soils, like forests, can also play a key role in mitigating the impacts of climate change. In a region where transportation and the built environment are major drivers of greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs), cutting emissions is not enough. Greater attention to the green infrastructure that can mitigate these impacts is also needed.

Food and agriculture need a forum for engaging policymakers and other leaders on important issues in the same way they work together on other critical needs such as housing, water supply, homeland security, and transportation.



*August 2019 COG Regional Agricultural Work Group visit to Potomac Vegetable Farms in Loudoun County.*

COG staff interviewed six local government elected officials who volunteered to be members of the Ag Task Force in April 2019. Initial interview findings indicated enthusiasm for COG taking a lead role as a convener for measurable, near to longer term strategic action on behalf of the region's food and farm economy. Interviews are continuing with regional leaders, and this working paper will be updated as new insights are shared.

The philanthropic grants and initial federal funding that have supported COG's food and agriculture work for the past four years are changing. The Ag Task Force members have identified a need for local governments to develop sustainable local program support to leverage existing philanthropic resources and foster private sector support. The program's philanthropic funders are interested in investing in a program that can ultimately be sustained by other funding streams.

## INITIAL AG TASK FORCE FINDINGS

Following initial interviews with Ag Task Force members, Montgomery County Council Member Craig Rice shared a "Vision Document"/framework with COG's CBPC and Climate, Energy, Environment and Policy Committee members at their July 2019 joint meeting. This framework includes initial thinking on the "how" and "why" of implementing *What Our Region Grows* report recommendations. The Summary and Vision from the draft framework are listed here. The full framework is included at the end of this document.

### Summary

We will create a new model for regional collaboration that leverages data, best practices, and expertise to drive policy change and investment to improve the resiliency of the metropolitan Washington region's food system.

### Vision

Our goal is a more resilient, connected food and farm economy across urban, suburban and rural communities in the metropolitan Washington region that provides more of the region's food needs: a disruption of current trends. This transformation to create a more certain food future will result in workforce development, economic growth, environmental, health, and cultural benefits, including as these relate to climate change. An increased number of diverse food and agricultural enterprises will be more visible, supported, and celebrated by residents, leaders, and visitors of all kinds.

**The primary goal recommended by the Ag Task Force is to create a 10-year Regional Commission** to oversee the implementation of the recommendations in *What Our Region Grows* in support of a profitable, diverse food and farm economy that can play a greater role in enhancing the region's quality of life, growing our economy, mitigating climate change, and improving water quality.

Several additional goals and milestones have been proposed to support the Ag Task Force's vision. These can be found at the end of this document. Further, as conversations with Ag Task Force members continue and a program budget has been proposed, several potential near and medium-term deliverables have also been generated.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Additional near-term Program deliverables include: A CBPC inaugural Research Competition for Food and Agriculture, COG's "Farm Card" employee Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Program: working group and program guide, a workshop with technical assistance providers on supporting minority and immigrant food and farm entrepreneurs, Regional Commission concept development to convene elected officials and experts in local food and agriculture, and ad hoc technical assistance to COG Member jurisdictions. Medium and long-term products could include creation of the Regional Food and Agriculture Economy Commission, a third edition of the *What Our Region Grows* report: a consensus position on establishing a regional food and farm financing authority and coordinator, and a Strategic Plan for Regional Food and Agriculture Resilience. Medium-term deliverables are expected to evolve somewhat as Commission participants and partners continue to be identified to shape this body's work program.

## SUBSEQUENT INTERVIEW AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

Here are some of the questions and themes that emerged in interviews and conversations over the summer. Some of these arose in multiple instances.

### *“This seems like a no-brainer”*

These were the words of one local elected official who has successfully passed legislation to strengthen their community’s food system in recent years. Although few interviewees were quite as direct, many thought an on-going regional forum for food and agriculture would yield value. Another expressed enthusiasm and interest for participating as a member of the Commission while several bluntly stated “tell me what I can do to help.”

Several interviewees spoke to the need and opportunity to bring greater attention to farm and agricultural issues in the metropolitan Washington region, and the potential that exists to connect elected leaders in these communities to other agricultural interests in their states, including rural interests.

One member of COG’s Regional Agricultural Work Group encouraged the region’s leaders to think about ways that agricultural and resource lands are at the nexus of Smart Growth. Stronger policies and responses are needed not just to address affordable housing, but to ensure that this housing will be directed to the region’s Activity Centers. Low density development is consumptive of finite resource lands, costly from the standpoint of public services, and creates burdens on the transportation network. These policies extend beyond locally controlled planning and zoning to elevating and leveraging effective local, state, and federal conservation programs to extend their reach and impact.

Based on experience in Michigan and elsewhere across the country, one interviewee who deploys financing for food-related infrastructure and businesses, believed an endorsed, time-limited Commission would provide value. A forum to address regional food system opportunities, particularly as they relate to better community, economic development, and health outcomes in the region’s historically marginalized communities, could yield benefits.

Another elected official working to increase economic opportunities for farmers in their jurisdiction underscored the importance of moving from regional collaboration to action and impact. They noted the need to not just identify where to spend money but to identify the policy changes that can drive progress. The ability to share information that ties fiscal cost to concrete outcomes would be helpful, as would better understanding of burdens that farmers can face in internalizing the costs of new policies.

### *Confirmation of challenges facing farmers and farmland identified in What Our Region Grows*

In several interviews and conversations, particularly when it came to the topic of the decreasing farmland within and outside of the region, several themes from *What Our Region Grows* were repeated. One of the challenges we heard about the most was the generational change in farm families occurring and the various reasons farmland is transitioning to other owners and uses.

Several interviewees acknowledged pressure on farmland from commercial solar interests. One elected official conveyed their hope that the tension between renewable energy goals and land conservation could be “confronted head on” to promote solutions that don’t undermine either goal.

To this end, in the near term, COG may want to consider working with members and other interested partners to develop a workshop on siting commercial solar operations.

Issues with maintaining farm viability, the cost of regulatory compliance, the difficulty moving farm equipment, and the shifting geography of agricultural support services, like large equipment dealer sales and service, were also raised.

It's important to improve understanding of the local changes that can be made to enhance the competitiveness of large and midsize farms in the region, as further losses impact the availability of services to all remaining farms. In some cases, this could be as easy as reviewing standards for new road and bridge improvements to ensure that they still allow for farm equipment movement in the safest manner possible.

### ***Strengthening opportunities for food and farm businesses and expanding how we think about agriculture***

Connecting small-scale farmers, including urban farmers, to value-added agriculture opportunities in the region came up in several interviews. How can jurisdictions that are changing zoning to allow for more urban agriculture also work to connect farmers to related entrepreneurial activities?

One local government staff member who has worked with farmers for many years shared that they are seeing a lot more demand and interest from small-scale farmers and young entrepreneurs, many of them women.

Urban agriculture, controlled environment agriculture, and agricultural technology were other issues that came up frequently in conversations. COG's Ag Work Group, while it remains focused on agricultural production, is working to broaden its membership to include local government staff and technical assistance providers whose work includes urban agriculture.

Through the Ag Task Force interviews, staff learned that the District of Columbia is launching an Office of Urban Agriculture in the Department of Energy and Environment.

### ***What happens in an emergency? How do we ensure a reliable, available food supply?***

We don't have a lot of answers to this question. However, several recent efforts in D.C., Baltimore, and New York City illuminate key issues policymakers and other food system stakeholders should be thinking about, such as the location of distribution facilities and retail outlets, utilities and fuel, the transportation network, and the extent to which existing emergency response plans contemplate food. Critically, the potential for increased vulnerability *among already food insecure residents* raises important questions about food security that leaders may want to address using new regional approaches.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, not all residents in the metropolitan Washington region have reliable access to the healthy food they need to thrive. The region is home to numerous nonprofit emergency food assistance providers (i.e. Capital Area Food Bank, Manna Food Center, Arlington Food Assistance Center, etc.), as well as advocacy organizations like MD and DC Hunger Solutions that partner with a range of nonprofits, schools, etc., to support implementation of evidenced-based federal safety net programs supporting child, family, and senior nutrition. Several local governments have also built strong partnerships with emergency food service providers and advocates to address food insecurity. See for instance, the [Montgomery County Food Security Plan](#) and FoodStat effort.

The *Baltimore Food System Resilience Advisory Report* measures resilience in several ways, including Pre-Event Functioning. It must be acknowledged that Pre-Event Functioning of the metropolitan

The District of Columbia's Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency (HSEMA) undertook a [Food Supply Chain Resilience](#) study to characterize the food supply chain serving D.C., to understand how a hurricane would affect grocery supply chain resilience, and use this information to improve planning and decision-making. The study found that most retail outlets in D.C., and the distribution centers outside of the city serving them, are outside of high-hazard areas,<sup>4</sup> but could be isolated by transportation disruptions or otherwise adversely affected by long-term power outages and limited fuel availability.

[The Baltimore Food System Resilience Advisory Report](#) considers the entire supply chain; identifying vulnerabilities in food access, food availability, food acceptability, social capital, labor, and waste in an emergency. It includes recommendations for intervention points throughout the supply chain, including some areas that COG's Regional Food Systems Program is already focused on like expanding opportunities for local and regional food aggregation and distribution, and incentivizing increased agricultural product diversity in regional production.

The Advisory Report also includes a recommendation for a *Baltimore Food System Resilience Plan* along with "Recommendations for Building Food System Resilience in Other Cities."

COG members may want to consider the value of using a regional approach to planning for the metropolitan Washington region's food system resilience for several reasons. There are resource efficiencies to be gained in gathering and analyzing data at a regional level, particularly given that supply chain assets are not confined to local jurisdictional boundaries. There is precedent for this in the way COG members work together to plan for drinking water protection and a reliable future supply. Information and key findings from such an effort could strengthen localized emergency preparedness planning.

### ***What happens when "California dries up?"***

It is clear that the climate is changing. Farmers are on the front lines and agriculture has the power to cause – consider the continued deforestation of the Amazon - or reduce the impact of increasing GHG emissions through innovation and mitigation.

This summer, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released [Climate Change and Land: An IPCC special report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems](#).

This sobering assessment of the urgent transformation required in how we use land triggered headlines like:

"World food crisis looms if carbon emissions go unchecked, UN says: The impacts of climate change on land will raise food prices and risk widespread food instability, says the IPCC's latest report. But there are solutions." ([National Geographic](#))

"Climate change could cause 29% spike in cereal prices..." ([Business Standard](#))

---

Washington region's food system is not optimal given on-going disparities in food access across the region. COG members may want to consider ways in which new or existing collaboratives can be supported and strengthened to share best practices, policy, and programmatic solutions to address this.

<sup>4</sup> The study also found that many areas within the District that are already food insecure may be more vulnerable to coastal storms.



“Food will be scarce, expensive and less nutritious, climate report says.” ([CNN](#))

With respect to California, it's the largest and most diverse agricultural state in the nation. It's responsible for more than a third of our country's vegetable production and two-thirds of fruits and nuts. As such, study and analysis of how climate change will impact the sector from the standpoint of changes in temperature, rainfall, drought, snowpack, flood events, and more, [is well underway](#).

What a changing climate in California means for the metropolitan Washington region's food security is beyond the scope of this report.<sup>5</sup> But farmers in California, our region, and elsewhere will be challenged to adapt to issues including both more intense precipitation events as we experienced in 2018 and 2019, and longer drought episodes, with cascading impacts to farm productivity, income, Bay health, and more.

A Regional Commission on food and agriculture would draw on COG's track record of bringing experts to the table. In this case, the experts would illuminate the complexity within food and agricultural supply chains to help policymakers and other leaders identify policies and incentives to support communities, farmers, food entrepreneurs, and others, to prepare for the future.

### ***Who would be on the Commission?***

This was a frequent question staff received and the Ag Task Force has not contemplated this in detail. However, it's assumed that it would be a multi-sector Commission made up of experts in food and agriculture from the private sector, government, colleges and universities, and non-profit organizations (an approach similar to the [Kirwan Commission](#) in Maryland).

In “Learning to Think and Act Like a Region,” from [The Lincoln Institute of Land Policy](#), the authors note several key principles for successful regional collaboration. These include mobilizing and engaging the “right” people, focusing on a compelling purpose, deliberating and making collaborative decisions, and taking strategic action, among others. These are all areas where COG excels, and many people commented that COG would be a good organization to convene a Regional Commission.

One interviewee recommended funding the participation of several Commission members to ensure that equity and inclusion in food system development are modeled in its work. Another encouraged staff to reach out to the co-chairs of the Chesapeake Foodshed Network's Community Ownership, Empowerment, and Prosperity Action Team to understand if there would be any synergy with the work of a Regional Commission.

Based on several conversations held, we believe that creation of a Regional Commission would be an opportunity to engage local philanthropy and community development finance organizations in a regularly coordinated forum aimed at strengthening the region's food system.

***What are some of the food and agriculture issues where near-term gains are to be had? Or that could galvanize attention and interest?***

---

<sup>5</sup> California's agricultural economy is affected by a range of other issues outside of climate and weather. The regulation of groundwater in CA is changing which may have the impact of removing some land from production. There's also some indication that investors may be buying farmland in anticipation of selling water to cities in the future, rather than maintaining this for productive agriculture. Further, the state has also voted to legalize hemp and marijuana production and it's not clear what impact these new markets may have on the production of other crops.

In staff's work with the Ag Task Force and in several interviews, a healthy tension emerged between the need for a forum that balances opportunities for Commission members and engaged stakeholders to take near term action to strengthen food and farming in their communities, *while also providing a place for longer-term strategic thinking.*

One near term milestone from the "Vision Document" that resonated with several interviewees was conducting a Comprehensive Plan Assessment that would provide an overview of policies supportive of food and agriculture in comprehensive plans in the COG Region.

A few other areas that seem ripe for near term gains would be in showcasing new investments in land conservation and soil health that could benefit from greater policy support in metropolitan Washington. Several interviews indicated that new public and private investments in land preservation and soil health are being made in Maryland and Virginia. A Regional Commission could bring greater attention to these; elevating practical ways local governments can connect these investments to other goals such as next generation farmland access, food and agricultural business development and entrepreneurship, climate goals, etc.

**In a region where transportation and the built environment are major drivers of greenhouse gas emissions, cutting emissions is not enough. Greater attention to the green infrastructure that can mitigate these impacts is also needed.**

Food waste and recovery is an example of an issue that touches most residents. There is some work underway in several COG member jurisdictions to redirect food that would otherwise be wasted to emergency food assistance efforts, and to increase public awareness. Few argue with the benefits of reducing food waste and there are roles for everyone to play along the supply chain. It saves money, maximizes resource use, and decreases GHGs associated with food waste.

COG has a long-standing Recycling Committee and hosts an annual "Compost Update" every September to share new information on best practices and composting facilities under development in the region. Several years ago, COG's Regional Food Systems Program helped to plan a meeting on food recovery in response to a request from the Recycling Committee.

Developing additional programming on this topic would be easy for COG to do with the existing network of experts and stakeholders that it engages with regularly. And it could bring this expertise to a Commission so that members and stakeholders could deploy near term solutions while also being mindful of some of the contradictions in food waste and recycling.<sup>6</sup> Another interviewee suggested that a focus on reviving local fisheries in the Potomac Watershed<sup>7</sup> could be a compelling

---

<sup>6</sup> A [widely cited study](#) from Ohio State University suggests that diners waste much less food when they understand the environmental impact of waste. However, if they know their leftovers will be composted rather than landfilled, they waste about the same amount of food as those that don't understand the environmental impact of food waste.

<sup>7</sup> The Potomac Watershed was suggested as the geography of concern for a Regional Food and Agricultural Economy Commission. It's a very interesting recommendation given the amount of productive agricultural land and farms, as well as population, that make up the watershed. Staff is interested in exploring this further with the addition of the Patuxent River Watershed and remaining areas of COG jurisdictions not found within these watersheds.



issue for local leaders to become more engaged in given the continued progress in cleaning-up local waterways. Yet another noted that subsistence fishing is almost possible on the Potomac.

## FUNDING AND BUDGET

### Current Funding Sources

Philanthropic funders of COG's Regional Food Systems Program include The Morris & Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, Prince Charitable Trusts, and The Agua Fund, Inc. One of the Program's founding partners, The Town Creek Foundation, has closed its doors. Other, initial funding was also provided from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

For FY 2020, COG's Department of Environmental Programs (DEP) is providing matching funds. To leverage FY 2021 funds, matching funds from localities will demonstrate programmatic commitment and interest from COG members. This will also strengthen the program's position when looking for prospective new funders in the future.

### FY 2021 Budget and Prospective Funding Sources

Based on discussion and feedback, the Ag Task Force recommended an initial budget of \$250,000 to support COG's Regional Food Systems Program and provide new deliverables to the region. These funds will be used to convert contract work to an FTE, hire a part-time Intern, provide management oversight, and support limited meeting expenses. Securing this expertise and programmatic certainty will also lay the groundwork for the launch of a Regional Food and Agriculture Economy Commission.

More detail on potential Program deliverables and recommended member contributions can be found in the **one-page companion document on next steps**.

COG's Regional Food Systems Program continues to build a list of prospective funders, including federal government competitive grants and philanthropy that could leverage local governments' commitments and deepen the Regional Commission's impact. Based on similar experiences with other projects, the commitment and engagement of local governments in the region should attract other partners.

Competitive grants through the U.S. Department of Agriculture are a potential source of federal funding. The 2018 Farm Bill created a new grant program, the Regional Partnership Program – now titled the Regional Food System Partnership Program – with an authorization of \$5 million per year. COG provided significant input during the rule writing process with the National Association of Regional Councils and the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition.

---

**“COG is the only entity thinking about regional coordination, economic development, and supply chain but they may not think they are the right entity to advance an Ag Strategic Plan. Do we need another entity? Will COG leaders embrace this role? If not them, who?”** – *Statement from a Regional Coordination break-out group comprised of funders and technical assistance providers at the Regional Food System Program's June 2019 Supply Chain Studies Summit*

It is clear from discussion with several of the Regional Food Systems Program funders and Ag Task Force members that there is a need for the regional coordination that the program provides, and that COG is the best place for this.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On behalf of the CBPC Ag Task Force, COG staff would like to acknowledge the following individuals for their feedback in interviews and other conversations. This input was provided between the months of March and September 2019.

It is important to note that this working paper represents a variety of viewpoints and additional perspectives are welcome. Staff has done its best to characterize the range of ideas and questions received to date in this report.

### *CBPC Ag Task Force Members*

Councilmember Craig Rice, Montgomery County  
Councilmember Jon Stehle, City of Fairfax  
Councilmember Kai Hagen, Frederick County  
Councilwoman Amy Jackson, City of Alexandria  
Supervisor Penny Gross, Fairfax County  
Vice Chair Libby Garvey, Arlington County Board

### *Interviewed Leaders*

Andy Flick, Chief of Staff, Congressman David Trone, MD 6<sup>th</sup> District  
Ann Mills, Executive Director, Agua Fund  
Anne Palmer, MAIA, Program Director, Food Communities & Public Health Program, Center for a Livable Future, Johns Hopkins School of Public Health  
Chair Phyllis Randall, Loudoun County Board of Supervisors  
Chris J. McDonald, Director of Government Relations, Virginia Association of Counties  
Christy Gabbard, Owner of Local Concepts, LLC (supports the Chesapeake Foodshed Network)  
Chuck Frye, President, Maryland Farm Bureau  
Colby Ferguson, Government Relations Director, Maryland Farm Bureau  
Commissioner Gilbert Bowling, Charles County  
Council Member Danielle Glaros, Prince George's County  
Councilmember Mary Cheh, District of Columbia  
Darren Jarboe, Assistant Dean, UMD College of AGNR, Director, UMD Extension Service  
Dena Leibman, Executive Director, Future Harvest CASA  
Debra Tropp, Principal, Debra Tropp Consulting, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (retired)  
Ed Jones, Director, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Associate Dean, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Virginia Tech  
Eric Kessler, Founder, Principal, and Senior Managing Director, Arabella Advisors  
Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, Heidi Hertz, Commonwealth of Virginia  
Holly Freishtat, Food Policy Director, City of Baltimore  
Hugo Mogollon Executive Director, Community Foodworks  
Jeremy Criss, Director, Montgomery County Office of Agriculture  
John Piotti, Executive Director, American Farmland Trust  
John Reich, PhD, Scientific Program Director, Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research  
John Snarr, Principal Planner/Technical Manager, MWCOG Department of the Environment  
Kate Clancy, Food Systems Consultant, Senior Fellow, MISA, Visiting Scholar, Center for a Livable Future, Johns Hopkins School of Public Health, Adjunct Professor, Friedman School, Tufts University  
Katherine Antos (Chief, Partnering & Environmental Conservation Branch) and Dan Guilbeault (Chief, Sustainability & Equity Branch), DC Department of the Environment  
Kyle Shreve, President, Virginia Agribusiness Council  
Les Knapp, Legal and Policy Counsel, Maryland Association of Counties

Mark Scott, Critical Infrastructure Specialist, DC Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency

Members of COG's Regional Agricultural Work Group (members representing the District of Columbia, Arlington County, Prince George's County, Fairfax County, Montgomery County, Loudoun County, Fauquier County, Howard County, the State of Maryland, and the Commonwealth of Virginia received an update on the Ag Task Force's efforts at the August Regional Ag Work Group meeting.)

Olivia Rebanal (Director, Inclusive Food Systems), Lauren Counts (Senior Director of Strategy, Innovation, and Impact Management), and Mary Donnell (Program Manager, Michigan Good Food Fund), Capital Impact Partners

State Delegate David Bulova, VA 37th District

State Delegate Lorig Charkoudian, MD District 20

Tommy Wells, Director, DC Department of the Environment

Vice Mayor Elizabeth Bennett Parker, City of Alexandria

Staff plans to continue interviews to gauge interest in a Regional Food and Agriculture Economy Commission. We look forward to any additional interview recommendations from the Ag Task Force, other COG members, and food and agriculture leaders in and around the metropolitan Washington region.

DRAFT

## VISION AND FRAMEWORK FOR WHAT OUR REGION GROWS IMPLEMENTATION

### Summary

We will create a new model for regional collaboration that leverages data, best practices, and expertise to drive policy change and investment to improve the resiliency of the metropolitan Washington region's food system.

### Vision

Our goal is a more resilient, connected food and farm economy across urban, suburban and rural communities in the metropolitan Washington region that provides more of the region's food needs, disrupting current trends. This transformation to create a more certain food future will result in workforce development, economic growth, and environmental, health, and cultural benefits, including as these relate to climate change. An increased number of diverse food and agricultural enterprises will be more visible, supported, and celebrated by residents, leaders, and visitors of all kinds.

### Goals

- Create a 10 Year Regional Commission<sup>8</sup> to oversee the implementation of the recommendations in *What Our Region Grows* in support of a profitable, diverse food and farm economy that can play a greater role in enhancing the region's quality of life, growing our economy, mitigating climate change, and improving water quality.
  - o Establish the metropolitan Washington region as a national model of *regional* collaboration; too often food system efforts are limited to local and state boundaries.
- Support farmland in the metropolitan Washington region to ensure viability and growth for current and next generation farmers while also capitalizing on existing assets (i.e. rooftops and vacant buildings, knowledge economy) for urban agriculture to help food and farm enterprises position themselves for coming supply chain and market shifts.
  - o Broaden awareness about the urgency of protecting irreplaceable agricultural lands, including tools to prevent losses and negative consequences for the economy, environment, transportation network, and much more.
- Provide an on-going forum to share best practices and inspire policy changes needed locally and regionally to improve food security for all residents, build market demand for local food, and promote new beneficial practices like [regenerative agriculture](#).
- Support school programming in preparing students for careers in agricultural related fields, including food security, and educating children about the benefits of healthy eating.

---

<sup>8</sup> Maryland's diverse, [25-member Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education](#), the "Kirwan Commission" has been recommended as a potential model for multi-sector membership which would include COG members.

### Milestones: (Sample) Near Term

- Identify members for a Regional Commission and solidify a funding strategy by April 2020.
- Food and farm policy and programs environmental scan.
- Use findings from *What Our Region Grows* for a broader scan of major policies, programs, and key stakeholders in the metropolitan Washington region supporting the development of the region's food and farm economy by March 2020.
- Provide a three-year inventory of COG members' own surveys of their farmers, food businesses, food assistance organizations, etc., to promote member-to-member sharing of best practices and to determine the value of encouraging standardized data collection on key metrics.
- Provide an in-depth overview of the ways in which public schools, institutions of higher learning, and partners are engaged.
- Reference national and international best practices that could benefit local communities and the region.
- Comprehensive Plan assessment. Provide an overview of policies supportive of food and agriculture in comprehensive plans in the COG Region. Identify national best practices and resources for comprehensive plan updates.

### Milestones: (Sample) Medium Term

- Co-host regional forums on farm viability, land preservation, next generation farmers, and food and agriculture supply chain infrastructure needs in the Washington Agricultural Region.
  - Examine what can be done to support farming as a profitable profession; illuminating the different needs of those "farming for money" versus those "farming with money."
- Identify opportunities for local legislative action to support identified needs and advance progress.
- Provide an on-going forum to address funding and financing for food system improvements with a focus on resiliency and expanding opportunity in equitable and inclusive ways.
  - Consider the findings from the *Chesapeake Foodshed Assessment*, including the recommendation to "identify or create an entity to serve as a regional coordinator of local food system development projects...and build a recognizable brand for the Chesapeake Regional Food System." Is a regional economic development authority for food and agriculture needed and feasible?
- Pinpoint opportunities for synergistic action at COG and with other regional partners on key issues related to food, health, land use, emergency preparedness, climate, waste, jobs, water, and transportation.
- Commission and implement a Strategic Plan for Food and Agriculture Resilience.
- Evaluate the accomplishments of the Regional Commission at the five-year mark.