

COG FARM POLICY COMMITTEE

Background for Third Annual Forum with the USDA

Lindsay Smith
Regional Food Systems Planner
Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

April 12, 2024

This slide deck will not be shown at the Forum



About Metropolitan Washington

- Home to about 5.7 million diverse residents (July 2023).
- During February 2024, the Washington MSA Unemployment Rate was 3.0%.
 - The U.S. Unemployment Rate was 4.2%.
- Home to many best in class institutions and employers
- Prosperity is not evenly distributed.



Above: COG provides regional analysis and forecasting on issues such as population, housing, employment and jobs.

About COG

- An independent, nonprofit association founded in 1957.
- Brings leaders together to address regional issues.
- Membership comprised of 300 elected officials from 24 local governments, the Maryland and Virginia state legislatures, and U.S. Congress.
- 125+ staff.
- Region Forward Vision & Framework include equity emphasis areas.



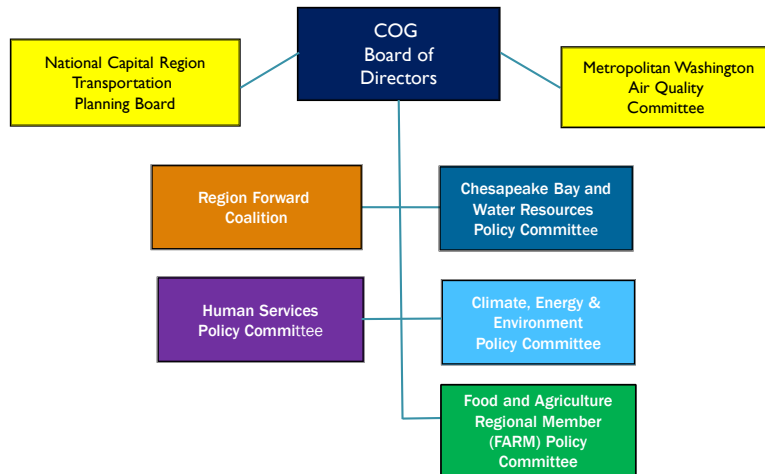
[2021 COG Press Release](#)

Hub for Regional Partnership

- Elected officials
- City and county managers
- Police, fire chiefs, and emergency managers
- Housing directors
- Environmental experts
- Transportation planners
- Local government staff
- Private, nonprofit partners



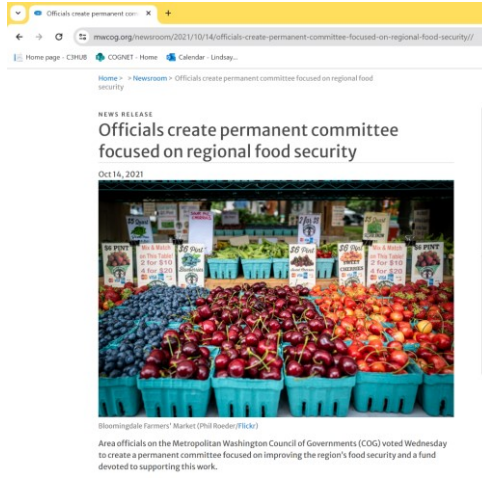
COG Policy Committee Structure



- The Board of Directors is the Council of Governments' governing body and is responsible for its overall policies and the approval of its work program and budget.
- The board takes action on committee recommendations, discusses current and emerging regional problems, and develops priorities and focus areas for the organization.
- Board members are appointed each year by COG's local governments and representatives from the Maryland and Virginia state legislative delegations. The current board consists of 34 members—the majority are elected officials.

FARM Committee History

- FARM is newest Policy Committee of the COG Board
 - 2020: Ad Hoc committee formed
 - 2021: Permanent committee established
 - Certified Resolution R35-2021
 - New, member-supported FARM Fund created to finance permanent committee support



[2021 COG Press Release](#)

Why was FARM created?

- Elevated regional food insecurity.
- Pandemic's impact on food access and the supply chain.
- Work was underway to assess establishing a permanent committee to oversee and support COG's food and agriculture work prior to COVID.
 - COG's Regional Agricultural Work Group started meeting in 2005.
 - Programming expanded to food systems through USDA's Food LINC program in 2016.



FARM Policy Committee members learn from Linda Lewis, one of the owner operators of the largest table-crop producing farms in Montgomery County, MD as part of the Agricultural Reserve tour in 2022. (Lindsay Smith/COG)

Food Insecurity in the COG Region


- COVID-19 exacerbated an on-going crisis.
- Households with children, Black and Hispanic/Latino households are disproportionately burdened
- The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provided critical support.
 - 40% increase in participants Jan 2020 to Nov 2022
 - Emergency Allotments ended in March 2023
 - Region's emergency food assistance providers were seeing increases in demand prior to this.



The Washington Post
DYNAMIC ISSUES

Omicron's threat to D.C. hunger relief: Volunteer shortages

By Kyle Saccoccio
January 6, 2022 at 10:56 a.m. EST



Volunteers pack boxes to be shipped as part of the Greenery Plus vendor program at the Capital Area Food Bank in D.C. on March 16, 2020. (Craig Hodder for The Washington Post)

When the pandemic hit in March 2020, the subsequent lockdown threw millions of American families into hunger, including across the Washington region.

One of many headlines on the spike in need for food assistance. (The Washington Post)

- During and following the pandemic, at least four COG member jurisdictions created new positions in local government to provide on-going, increased support from the public sector to address food insecurity in their communities.
- These staff members are members of one of FARM's Work Groups.
- Sadly, this crisis continues.
- Funds made available during the pandemic to increase the impact of policies and programs (i.e. free school meals, increases in SNAP, the Child Tax Credit) have been reduced a great deal.

CAFB 2023 Hunger Report

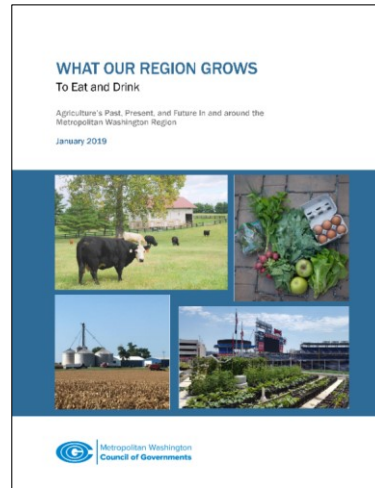
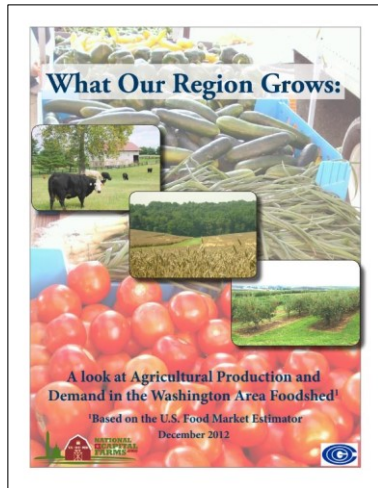
- Food insecurity levels remained flat from what Capital Area Food Bank (CAFB) found in 2022.
- Rates vary across the region.
- As a whole, 1/3 of the region experienced food insecurity at some point in the prior year.
- Inequitable economic recovery from the pandemic, inflation, and the retraction of government benefits are keeping food insecurity rates high.

Summary and image from CAFB's [third annual Hunger Report](#).



- Direct report link: <https://hunger-report.capitalareafoodbank.org/report-2023/>
- Highly recommend for additional background on food insecurity in Greater Washington and some proposed strategies to address it.
- Reminder from the report that “unemployment rates do not reflect full-time vs. part-time employment, underemployment, or if a worker has given up job-searching.”

Agriculture, Farms, and Farmland



COG's *What Our Region Grows* reports were led by the Regional Agricultural Work Group and published in 2012 and 2019. The 2019 report findings also supported the creation of COG's FARM Policy Committee.




10

- A key product from from the Regional Ag Work Group is the What Our Region Grows reports.
- Immensely helpful to have local experts working in farming, agricultural business and market development, soil conservation, cooperative extension, etc. at the table to provide local insights into federal data. And to provide local data where standardized federal data does not exist or may not fully capture what is happening in the region's local food economies.
- <https://www.mwcog.org/documents/2019/01/18/what-our-region-grows-farmers-market-farming-urban-agriculture/>
- Continued declines in land in farms, farms, and farmers (with some exceptions) is a challenge in an area that continues to urbanize and grow with multiple demands for land.

1945	Acres Farmed
Charles	174,486
Frederick	346,305
Montgomery	247,018
Prince George's	194,231
District of Columbia	1,854
Alexandria	Last reported post-Civil War?
Arlington	826
Fairfax	127,915
Loudoun	305,117
Prince William	130,176
Independent Cities of Virginia	106,880
COG Region	1,527,928
Maryland (All)	4,199,859
Virginia (All)	16,358,072

Land In Farms (acres)	2012	2017	2022
Charles	46,659	41,021	47,747
Frederick	181,512	188,576	188,832
Montgomery	63,493	65,537	69,759
Prince George's	32,607	34,399	32,892
Arlington	36	5	3
Fairfax	7,856	5,937	3,616
Loudoun	134,792	121,932	110,133
Prince William	35,638	22,874	20,388
COG Region	502,593	480,281	473,370
Maryland (All)		1,990,122	1,978,036
Virginia (All)		7,797,979	7,309,687

COG's Region Forward Goal is to maintain more than 497,500 acres of land in farms.



Source: U.S. Census of Agriculture

- The USDA conducts the Census of Agriculture every 5 years.
- 2022 data was released in February.
- Best source of farm data to look at the agricultural sector across different states and counties.

What Our Region Grows (2019)

- Farming is a difficult business
 - On-going decline in number of farms, land in farms, overall production levels.
 - Growth in small acreage farms
 - Majority of region's producers farm part time
 - Lack of diversity/representation in farm population
- Harder to rely on region's food production to meet our needs, mostly driven by population growth



Montgomery County Ag History Farm Park, Derwood, MD.
(Lindsay Smith/COG)

- This slide shows some of the concerning, general trends in the region.
- 2019 What Our Region Grows was published prior to release of 2017 Census of Agriculture.
- It uses federally collected data from 2012 or close to it, from NASS and USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS)
- It also draws from the SARE-funded It Takes a Region project for methodology and data to calculate the region's theoretical degree of self reliance (e.g. how much food production it can rely on itself for).
- It also includes locally collected data from 2017/2018 for every large jurisdiction in the COG region, including data on urban agriculture, farmers markets and more.
- FARM is starting to scope the next *What Our Region Grows* report.
- COG staff has several data questions for USDA.
- Staff benefited greatly from conversations with one of our region's USDA NASS state statisticians for the 2019 report.

FARM Policy Committee Mission

To support the development of long-term regional direction and collaboration toward a more secure, equitable, resilient, connected food and farm economy (food system) across Metropolitan Washington's urban, suburban and rural communities to provide more of the region's food needs.



13

Photos left to right:

Greater Regional Supply Chains Studies Summit in June 2019.

Several important studies and assessments are posted on the Summit's website:
<https://www.mwcog.org/events/2019/6/24/greater-washington-regional-food-and-agriculture-supply-chain-studies-movement-summit/>

Tour of Moon Valley Farm in Woodsboro, MD (Frederick County). Spring 2023.

<https://www.moonvalleyfarm.net/>

Tomatoes from Deep Roots Farm in Upper Marlboro, MD (Prince George's County) and Dicot Farm in Waldorf, MD (Charles County) in July 2021. Dicot Farm closed around the end of 2021.

<https://www.deeprootsfarm.us/>

Photo Credit: COG

FARM Leadership and Members

- Currently chaired by Councilmember Jon Stehle (City of Fairfax, VA)
- Councilmember Zachary Parker (District of Columbia) and Council President, Andrew Friedson (Montgomery County, MD) are Vice Chairs
 - Leadership rotates on a two-year cycle.
 - DC, MD, and VA are always represented.



FARM Committee virtual meeting in 2021: Members and speakers (COG)

FARM member roster is provided in the meeting packet.

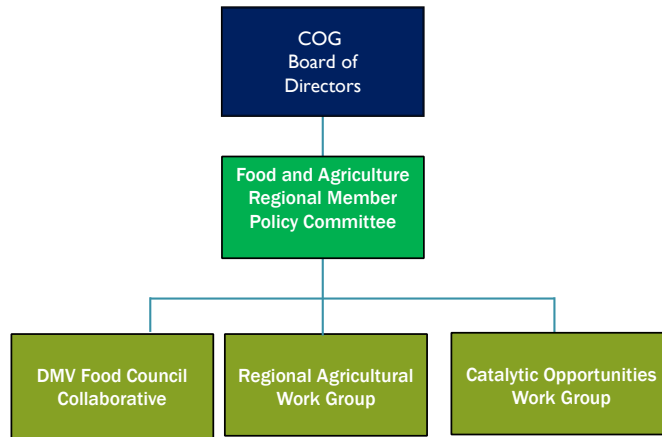
FARM Priorities

- Improving food security in the region
- Supporting Black, Indigenous, and People of Color and small farmers
- Focusing FARM's work on farmland preservation, land use regulations, environmental sustainability, regional food system infrastructure, and resilience
- Leveraging procurement to support equity and the region's food and farm economy
- Improving and communicating regional food system data and leading practices



The FARM at Kelly Miller in Washington DC's Ward 7. (Lindsay Smith/COG)

FARM Policy Committee Structure



FARM Work Groups



Numerous DMV Food Collaborative members reviewed and edited FARM's *Healthy Food Access Policy Compendium*

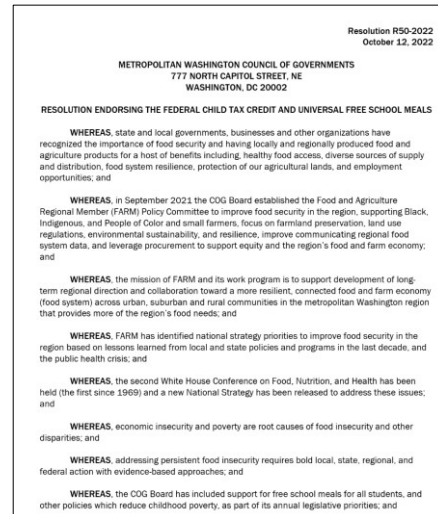
17

- Members are technical experts in their fields from local and state government and some nonprofits.
 - Several Regional Ag Work Group and FARM members are farmers.
 - Overlapping membership on FARM Committee.
- DMV Food Collaborative met annually prior to pandemic, now no less than bimonthly
- Work Groups are co-hosting upcoming Regional Aggregation & Distribution Summit.

- At certain points during the pandemic, what would become the DMV Food Collaborative, met several times a month.

FARM Takes Positions

- FARM provides limited input on state and federal legislation.
- All positions must conform to the COG Board's annually adopted legislative priorities.
- FARM has asked the COG Board to consider a Resolution affirming key positions.
 - Example (right): In 2022 the Board adopted a Resolution in support of the Federal Child Tax Credit and Universal Free School Meals.



Certified Resolution R50-2022 - Endorsing the Federal Child Tax Credit and Universal Free School Meals

- Federal legislative outreach is directed to Congressional Committee leadership and the region's Congressional members in MD, DC, and VA.
- FARM has weighed in multiple times at the federal and state levels to promote healthy school meals for all, adequate funding for SNAP, and to support the Child Tax Credit.
- Staff collaborates with partners tracking food security and resilience legislation in the Maryland and Virginia General Assemblies, the Council of the District of Columbia.

2023 - 2024 Milestones

- Completed two-year Strategic Plan.
- Supported state, federal legislation to increase food security and resilience.
 - B25-0035, Universal Free School Meals Amendment Act of 2023 (District of Columbia)
 - Child Tax Credit (CTC) in The Tax Relief for American Families & Workers Act of 2024
 - Preparing letter to Congress on Farm Bill priorities to submit in coming weeks.



Fairfax and Loudoun County-based Potomac Vegetable Farms at the Takoma Park, MD Farmers Market. (Lindsay Smith/COG)

2023-2024 Milestones (continued)

- Held a joint meeting with the MD Food System Resiliency Council (MD FSRC) on a multi-year FEMA-funded food and water resilience project.
 - Led by DC HSEMA
 - Project has mapped key parts of the supply chain for the grocery industry.
- Held our Second Annual Farm Tour, hosted by Loudoun County.
 - Several USDA AMS staff joined.

Right: Loudoun County May 2023 Farm Tour (COG)



- DC HSEMA stands for the District of Columbia's Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency.
- HSEMA secured a Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Planning Grant and a subsequent implementation grant from FEMA to enhance planning and capacity to respond to catastrophic food and water incidents in the National Capital Region and the Mid-Atlantic.
- CNA is the lead project consultant.
- COG administers the grant and provides some technical support.
- The project includes a regional, GIS data gathering and maintenance initiative to collect and analyze all food assistance providers in the region.

Looking Ahead

FARM Committee and Work Group efforts for the remainder of 2024 include:

- Continued implementation of FARM's Strategic Plan and learning from members about their priorities and needs.
- Regional Food Aggregation & Distribution Summit in mid-May.
- Scoping, developing (and redeveloping) partnerships to start the next *What Our Region Grows* report.
- Holding our Third Annual FARM Tour, hosted in DC.
- Continued support and partnership with state-based efforts that advance FARM's mission.
- Researching and securing funding to increase FARM's capacity.
- Incorporating learning from the Catalytic Opportunities Work Group into future programming.

Regional Food Aggregation & Distribution Summit in mid-May.

- This is also part of DMV Food Collaborative's participation in the [Regional Food Policy Council Project](#) co-hort.

Scoping, developing (and redeveloping) partnerships to start the next *What Our Region Grows* report

- Desire to include more of the supply chain.

Other COG Committees

COG's Solid Waste and Recycling Program

- Recycling Committee meets every other month.
 - Comprised of local government staff from across the region.
 - Nonprofit, private sector participation
- **Thurs, Sept 19th: Annual Compost Update**



DC's Food Waste and Composting Collection Pilot.
(Lindsay Smith/COG)

Steve Bieber

Water Resources Program Director
(202) 962-3219
sbieber@mwkog.org

Christine Howard

Environmental GIS Analyst IV
(202) 962-3366
cdhoward@mwkog.org

Brian LeCouteur

(advisor)
Principal Environmental Planner
/ Urban Forester / Agricultural
Programs Manager
(202) 962-3393
blecouteur@mwkog.org

Lindsay Smith

Regional Food Systems Planner
(202) 962-3307
lsmith@mwkog.org

Sydney Daigle

Regional Food Systems Consultant
sydney.daigle@gmail.com

mwkog.org

777 North Capitol Street NE, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20002



Contact information for project staff