



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE REGIONAL MEMBER AD-HOC COMMITTEE (FARM)

MEETING SUMMARY (DRAFT)

FEBRUARY 12, 2021

LINK TO ALL MEETING PRESENTATIONS AND MATERIALS:

<https://www.mwcog.org/events/2021/2/12/food-and-agriculture-regional-member-farm-ad-hoc-advisory-committee/>

DECISIONS AND ACTIONS:

- Short Term
 - Update FARM on USDA's position on providing free meals to all students rather than going through the free and reduced meals (FARMs) program.
 - Draft a letter of support for a regional USDA GusNIP grant application from FRESHFARM and partners (e.g. Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission, Virginia Fresh Match) to increase healthy food access at farmers markets in DC, MD, and VA.
 - FARM Members are requested to share any information they may have about applications from member jurisdictions and potential conflicts by March 2, 2021 with Lindsay Smith at lsmith@mwcog.org
 - *Postscript:* Since the February meeting, staff has learned that Virginia Fresh Match will also submit a GusNIP application in addition to being a partner on the FRESHFARM application.
 - Several FARM members would like to hear about strategies to enroll college students in SNAP (they are newly eligible) at a future meeting (via WebEx chat box).
 - FARM members should promote [USDA grant opportunities in local and regional food systems](#).
 - More money provided by Congress for 2021 with reduced match requirements
 - RFPs/RFAs will come out this spring for many programs
- Medium and Long Term
 - Support recommendations from meeting speakers from USDA (page 2) and Virginia (page 3) for supporting school meal participation
 - Consider recommendations from FRESHFARM, Maryland Market Money Program, and Virginia Fresh Match (page 6) for supporting healthy food access for low-income customers and farmers
 - FARM should learn from other places to provide more permanent infrastructure for outdoor farmers markets; leveraging its knowledge of planning and zoning.

1. WELCOME, CALL TO ORDER, AND ROLL CALL

Councilmember Mary Cheh called the meeting to order shortly after 11 am.

2. FARM COMMITTEE, RELATED UPDATES, AND MEETING SUMMARY APPROVAL

President Reuben Collins, Charles County Board of Commissioners provided an update on the recently concluded *Leaning into 2021: More Equitable, More Resilient* Town Hall series.

- President Collins reinforced importance of institutionalizing equity in how government operates. Not enough to just talk about it, need to dedicate resources. Charles County has hired a Chief Equity Officer
- Equity is relevant to the discussions FARM is having. President Collins joined FARM because he cares about how food insecurity impacts the County's growing community.
- The county must also ensure equity in its agricultural activities as with any other government initiative.

Link to Town Hall Series: <https://www.mwcog.org/newsroom/2021/02/04/town-halls-help-leaders-strategize-on-equity-resiliency-and-inclusion-equity/>

Members approved the summary of the January 2021 FARM meeting.

3. FOOD SECURITY: SCHOOL MEALS

School meals are a critical source of nutrition for many of our region's children. During COVID-19 they have been available to all youth under 18 years old, however, participation rates have been much lower than when students are in the classroom.

Patty Bennett, Regional Administrator, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), Mid-Atlantic Region, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), shared that a priority for the new USDA Deputy Under Secretary Stacy Dean is to focus on how FNS is partnering with states: listening, asking those questions about what's needed, and what's working and not working.

Dr. Bennett and her team offered these **recommendations for increasing school meal participation**:

- Communication via robocalls: they do provide important information
- Social media and text messages, emails, working with local media to announce the availability of meals and how to get them
- Virtual town halls again with key officials discussing the importance of child nutrition
- Making meal pickups available at different locations "meeting people where they are"
- Have school food, service staff, or volunteers on the bus to help distribute meals
- Provide bulk meal pick up options so that parents don't need to pick these up every day
- Collaborating with housing authorities to deliver meals to children
- When school is back in session and there is classroom delivery, provide some grab and go to students using on hallway kiosks

Dr. Bennett also reviewed some key programmatic changes and on-going flexibilities as a result of recent Congressional action:

- The Consolidated Appropriations Act passed in December included a 15% increase for SNAP benefits through June and also extend Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) to childcare.
 - The American Rescue Plan (ARP) would extend 15% increase to SNAP beyond June.
- The ARP proposes another investment in WIC, and resources for restaurants to feed American families and to keep restaurant workers on the job.
 - [Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition](#) has secured a grant on how to create a protocol for online shopping for WIC participants.
 - There will be a five-state online WIC pilot
 - *Postscript: In FY2022, there will be a competitive grant process and implementation is expected to begin during this same year. Dr. Bennett's team will be in touch with the state agencies in the Mid-Atlantic to be sure they know about this opportunity when it comes out.*

- DC, MD, and VA are all in the process of submitting their Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) plans, or will be updating their P-EBT plans, following the most recent guidance from USDA.
 - *Postscript: [As of a March 2, 2021 update](#) from USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, Virginia's P-EBT plan had been approved for school year 2020-2021. The [Virginia Department of Social Service's website](#) will have the most up to date information on implementation.*
- More SNAP online shopping is coming. Food Lion has been added as a retailer for MD and VA.
 - *Postscript: [List of approved retailers by state](#), last updated on March 4, 2021.*
- USDA anticipates record funding for farm-to-school grants in 2021. Additionally:
 - Results from the 2019 Farm to School Census will be available this spring.
 - A new program to train state trainers to help farmers to build capacity for marketing their products to schools is underway. The Mid-Atlantic's training is scheduled for December.

Dr. Sandy Curwood the Director of the Office of School Nutrition Programs, Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) emphasized the importance of school meals given how integral they are to supporting student education, nutrition, and nutrition education, environmental sustainability, and local communities.

- Virginia has 132 school divisions and many other non-school community sponsors of meal programs.
- VDOE did a brief study comparing October 2019 meal participation to October 2020 participation.
 - Not every school division is suffering from a decrease in participation.
 - School divisions with lower numbers of students eligible for free and reduced meals (FARMS) had much higher participation - between 80% and 180% participation between those periods.
 - Unfortunately, data shows that schools with the most vulnerable populations and higher FARMS rates, did not have this same success. This is something VDOE trying to address: What are the best practices? What can we do to support those school divisions and community sponsors to make sure that equitable access is available?
- With the flexibilities and waivers USDA provided, VA's schools can offer meals to every child.
 - Every school division has a robust meal program in place. Many are also operating the At Risk After School Program.
 - Offering multiple meals at one time and has shown to be very effective.
 - Families can pick up (or be delivered in some cases) multiple days' worth of meals including for weekends.
- Now is really good time for innovation in meal service
 - VA is looking at the opportunity to train and transition out of work hospitality industry staff into school nutrition.
 - These programs are more permanent and offer full-time staff positions.
- In an average year, \$425 million federal dollars support VA's school meal programs
 - Working on the *Virginia Food for Kids Campaign* to make sure as many dollars stay in state as possible
 - Also work with partners to north, south, etc., because sometimes regional food systems are just as important

Recommended actions for FARM members. Be supportive by making sure school divisions, administrators, faculty, and superintendents understand how important ensuring that all children have equitable access to school meals is, and that schools are seen as foundational to supporting the community.

- There is a slide in summer in education and with on-going stress of pandemic, ensuring that students are nourished and that there is wellness component to instruction is essential.
- In VA, schools work with food banks and other community partners to get the word out using social media, robocalls
- P-EBT is critical but does not supplant meals
- School meals are available to all children, irrespective of income

Robyn Douglas, Manager, of Nutrition, Compliance, and Partnerships in Food and Nutrition Service at DC Public Schools provided a local operator's perspective on meal service.

- DCPS operates about 116 schools with about 50,000 students. Of these about 75% of buildings qualify for Community Eligible Provision (CEP).
 - In a CEP school, all students are provided with free meals given that a certain number qualify for them.
- DCPS has three food service management operators.
 - It contracts with Sodexo Magic (majority of school meals), DC Central Kitchen, and DCPS self-operates about 8 buildings.
- DCPS currently has about 50 open active meal sites where its operating under emergency Summer Food Service Program.
 - Three schools are operating under the National School Lunch Program because they do not meet income qualifications.
 - All of operators been including regional foods, especially produce throughout pandemic.
 - Most open meal sites provide three-day meal kits for breakfast and lunch
 - Select sites provide produce bags under the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program.
 - Select sites adding in snack and supper
 - DCPS started seven-day meal kit from all of its self-operated sites last month with a seven-day market box that includes breakfast, lunch and supper.
 - Seen tremendous growth in this category, doubling and tripling participation numbers with this item
- DCPS typically serves also 10 million meals per school year. Right now at 1.8 million meals.
 - Decline in participation attributed to inability of parents to come and pick up meals, or not wanting children to pick up meals because of concerns about neighborhood safety.
 - Been working with partners who serve as a proxy for signed up families to help deliver market boxes to residential complexes.
 - Opened a few additional sites that are not at schools.
- Another need DCPS has identified is for adult meals.
 - During the summer DCPS was able to provide free adult meals.
 - This opportunity ended in September, but need was still clear.
 - Working with a restaurant called Medium Rare and its Feed the Fridge Program to have something for adults who come to pick up meals for their kids.
- To get the word out, DCPS has been working with the Mayor's office to announce programs, posting on school and citywide websites, and reaching out to school communities directly through social media campaigns.
 - It's still is a challenge.
 - There is a digital divide and literacy issues in some communities.
 - Working day-to-day on how to get the word out, especially to neediest communities.

- Even though DCPS does not administer P-EBT, because the same students who qualify for FARMs qualify, DCPS gets hundreds of calls per day seeking information on the program's status.
 - Been working with Office of the State Superintendent and DHS to make sure next roll out is smoother and on communication.
 - Also working to continue to get students enrolled in FARMs so they can qualify for P-EBT, despite the fact that school meals been free this year.
 - Launched a campaign last week and had over 700 applications come in during that time.
 - DCPS been working around the clock to process applications so that when P-EBT funds become available, qualifying students will get them.

Julia Gross, Anti-Hunger Program Associate for Child Nutrition at Maryland Hunger Solutions offered these remarks.

- Been incredible to see hard work and dedication of FNS departments this past year. Always want to thank our hunger heroes, the school system.
 - Seeing some great creativity in Maryland also.
 - Seven-day meal kits have been a huge hit.
 - In smaller, more rural districts, porch drop offs and mobile meals, using the best routes have been among best practices.

Additional notes on P-EBT:

- There's been an increase in funding levels as part of an Executive Order.
 - Funds for breakfast, lunch and a snack are included, so maximum benefit now \$6.80/day.
- Excited about ability for states to use simplifying assumptions to be able to reach the most kids.
 - It will be a big challenge for states and school systems to deal with the hybrid school models and make sure that kids are being covered for the days that they are out of school.
 - Benefit levels will look different state by state and region by region.
 - It will be different for students based on their school schedule.
 - Maryland Hunger Solutions wants to be sure that this communication is clear and pushed once MD's P-EBT plan approved.
 - Families and children need to understand tie between their schedule and benefit level, know when funds coming, and for what time period.
 - For kids under 6 years old, an exciting simplifying assumption is that all children in SNAP households will be deemed as enrolled in a cover childcare facility.
 - This is important because data is harder to collect from childcare than schools, so if children are in a SNAP household, or their childcare facility is in an area where a school is closed, or with reduced hours, they can be considered eligible for P-EBT.

Vice Chair Rice asked where the USDA is in terms of commitment to providing free meals to all students, instead of having them go through the free and reduced meals (FARMs) program.

- Dr. Bennett believes this is under discussion at USDA and FNS but doesn't believe there are easy answers. She will take this back.
- Focus of American Rescue Plan is on ensuring that children are eating now, knowing that we have to be looking down the road into the future.
- Chair Cheh is concerned about outreach right now and seamlessness of summer service to ensure students covered all year.
 - Would like to connect these issues to farm-to-school and procurement in later meetings.

4. FOOD SECURITY AND FOOD SYSTEM RESILIENCE: EXPANDING HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS AT THE REGION'S FARMERS MARKETS

Hugo Mogollon, the Executive Director of FRESHFARM and Board President of the Virginia Farmers Market Association, started this portion of the meeting.

- FRESHFARM is third largest farmers market organization in the US, runs 32 farmers markets in MD, DC, and VA.
- Sometimes we have impression that farmers markets are just fun, isolated events when actually they're very important part of the food system.
 - Markets are one of the best ways for farmers to earn money directly from the consumer and retain a 100% of revenue. When farmers sell into the food chain, on average they get 19 cents/dollar.
 - More than 8,000 farmers markets nationwide, USDA calculated they make \$1.5 billion dollars.
 - Farmers markets are incubators for food businesses and also generate neighborhood benefits.
 - See FRESHFARM's study with Market Umbrella on the \$6.6 million dollar economic impact of the Silver Spring Farmers Market.
- Farmers markets are very different.
 - Some are independent farmers markets, others are run by organizations like FRESHFARM, some local governments run and own farmers markets, others are run by nonprofits, for profit businesses, etc.
 - Estimate more than 80 farmers markets in the region, an average a farmers market is making \$700,000 dollars a year in revenue for farmers – a total of about \$60 million dollars.
- Markets have been affected by the pandemic. Concerns about keeping farmers and shoppers safe brought some restrictions or regulations.
 - Jeff O'Hara's paper has shown that markets have experienced declines in revenue of up to 79% due to Covid, however, farmers markets have been key in a moment when our food system has been tested by shortages of meats and other food products.
 - These are short value chains and hyperlocal models that have been critical alternative for farmers and consumers.
 - Despite Covid-19, FRESHFARM's markets have created \$15.5 million in revenue for agricultural products and created food access opportunities at a time of growing food insecurity.
- Food insecurity is growing in the region
 - Farmers markets have been accepting federal benefits for more than 10 years.
 - This year at FRESHFARM, more than \$300,000 spent with SNAP, WIC, and other vouchers.
 - This represents purchases in amounts of \$45/year per senior with senior farmers market checks and \$30/year in WIC checks per family.
- Some markets are also working to create models for communities affected by systemic racism.
 - Produce Plus is one of the collaborations FRESHFARM has with the city.
 - FRESHFARM also has a program to get food directly from the farmers at the farmers markets and to pack it for home delivery.
 - Distributed food from more than 7,000 people, especially families affected by closing of childcare facilities.

Opportunities to work regionally:

- Policy changes
- Support markets to keep bringing federal resources to the region with grants like GusNIP
- Expand food access in ways that incentivize farmers and reduce the policies around permits

- For small businesses and small businesses owned by people of color, important to offer affordable insurance and licenses to reduce this barrier that keeps people from selling a farmers markets
- Support needed for infrastructure
- Local governments should work with their regional farmers market associations

Nick Stavely the Farmers Market Program Manager at FRESHFARM briefly discussed the GusNIP grant application.

- Metropolitan Washington is a unique area which makes food access and food supply issues unique in some ways.
- FRESHFARM seeks to establish a regional SNAP incentive program network across farmers markets and CSAs in the Metropolitan Washington region, working with the State of Maryland - including Baltimore city - and FRESHFARM and other partner markets throughout DC and in Northern Virginia.
- Putting together a USDA GusNIP grant application to:
 - Create incentive program reciprocity between participating SNAP outlets so that customers can use matching fund incentives from Virginia Fresh Match, DC Fresh Match, and Maryland Market Money across state lines to bring more ease of use to SNAP customers.
 - Support the existing incentive programs (e.g. Virginia Fresh Match, DC Fresh Match, and Maryland Market Money) with incentives, staff time funding, efforts to standardize data collection and financial reporting structures, an additional SNAP processing capacity with stipends for updated technology and additional staffing for small markets.
 - Improve customer experience around program language like “match,” “bonus,” or “incentive” while facilitating collective work on outreach and marketing efforts to make sure that markets, SNAP, and incentives are all as easy to use as possible.

Working with markets and other partners in the area. Welcome interest in additional partners.

Juliet Glass, the Maryland Market Money External Relations Coordinator at the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC), has been working on food system issues in the region since 2009 and offered the following:

- Works with the Maryland Market Money Program (MMM) which is housed under SMADC.
 - MMM previously was a food access program created by the now disbanded Maryland Farmers Market Association.
- There's no overarching organization in MD that runs manages the state's 145+ farmers markets.
 - Diverse markets structures including nonprofits, cooperatives, for profits, markets run by cities, counties, and universities, etc.
 - Sizes range from just 3 to upwards of 80 vendors per market.
 - Markets are in rural, suburban, and urban settings
- Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) has farmers markets program limited to marketing and the farmers market federal nutrition benefits programs
 - Stepped up during COVID-19.
 - On April 15th Governor Hogan declared farmers markets essential business, like a grocery store
 - MDA issued guidelines for operating farmers markets safely during the pandemic
 - Caveat is that markets have to defer to local health departments.
 - Some markets in MD were unable to operate during the pandemic
 - Other markets had police called by those who thought they were violating large public gathering restrictions

- Took quite a few months to get things ironed-out
- MMM slide shows the statewide program can have a pretty big economic impact on a number of stakeholders.
 - Any market in MD can apply to participate.
 - Funding divided each season among farmers markets
 - 35 markets participated last season.
 - Majority of participating markets are in or adjacent to low access, low income areas.
 - MMM meeting need for fresh, local food
- Funding always been a struggle but MMM fortunate to create numerous public, private partnerships.
 - In 2019, Maryland General Assembly created the Farms and Family Fund, a grant program to support incentive programs at farmers markets with a baseline of \$100,000 dollars.
 - MMM has also been lucky to have robust funding from Prince George's and Montgomery counties.
 - Also has funding from Garrett County and Baltimore City has a line item in their budget.
- Incentive programs are a “win win” for everyone. Each incentive dollar works 3 times, it helps:
 - Customers increase their purchasing power eat healthy food
 - Farmers markets diversify and increase their customer base
 - Farmers by increasing their revenues
 - They create a more robust, resilient food system.
 - Farmers market incentives are not the newest thing in funding landscape, but they're incredibly hardworking programs and an effective way to help people.
- Ms. Glass explained how farmers market incentive/benefit/match programs works at the market for the customers, market managers, and farmers to make these transactions, referencing several ppt slides that show steps involved.
 - There is an administrative cost to running the programs.
 - There is an additional step for administering federal farmers market nutrition programs.
 - A lot of work goes into operating a farmers market and incentive programs – they don't just happen – but there's a lot of thought and bookkeeping behind it.

Elizabeth Borst the Executive Director, Virginia Community Food Connections and Co-Lead, Virginia Fresh Match confirms that these speakers like to talk about fresh food access and farmers markets more than anything – appreciate the opportunity to have FARM hear some of the challenges everyone faces.

Virginia background:

- 350 farmers markets
- Agriculture is number one industry, so there are a lot of outlets
- At this time, 108 farmers markets in VA are authorized to accept SNAP
 - About 75 markets are working collaboratively to provide nutrition incentives
- Biggest barrier to expansion of healthy food incentives for low-income customers is capacity.
 - A lot of VA farmers markets are very small, run by either volunteers or part time staff.
 - Adding an extra layer of a program, like SNAP and nutrition incentives can be a big lift but saw amazing results this past year in markets offering these programs
 - New white paper shows how markets have been resilient in face of the challenges
 - 41% increase in SNAP usage at farmers markets which has also included the P-EBT cards and doubling of shoppers' dollars with incentive programs
 - Families receiving a tremendous amount fresh fruits and vegetables this way

- Virginia Fresh Match (VFM) provides additional benefits specifically for fresh fruits and vegetables.
 - Currently working collectively through a GusNIP grant which requires that the matching funds only be used for fresh fruits and vegetables.
 - VFM is a voluntary network of farmers markets and small retail stores that have been working together to build capacity and a bigger collaborative impact for a number of years.
 - Provides a lot of resources and support to encourage markets and retail partners to offer nutrition incentives.
 - Going forward will work to try to incorporate different types of outlets into this system, direct marketing, farm stands, etc. to take more of a food systems approach
 - All of these programs are aligned and can't work in isolation if they're going to be successful.
- Huge impact this year, a 265% increase at some markets in the use of SNAP match
 - Tremendous amount of appreciation on the part of farmers who have had a tough year.
 - From a customer perspective, Ms. Borst shared a quote from a shopper she was in contact with
 - "... As a single mother with no income if they didn't do this and supply to match, we'd go hungry. We moved in with my mom and that takes care of housing but I'm still responsible for providing all the essentials for myself and my children. It helps so much without WIC, SNAP, and the match, I would not have been able to make ends meet."
 - Programs might seem kind of like just a nice thing to do but they're fundamentally important for a number of reasons.
- With nutrition incentive programs in place like VFM, more possible.
 - VFM focuses a lot of SNAP right now but imagine Medicaid, veterans, head start, etc. incentives all that can run through the same basic system, as well as Produce Prescription Programs that can be layered on top of these of the basic programs.
 - Farmers markets represent local food anchors in community and they're often overlooked.
 - Although emergency food has is taking a predominant role, many residents have EBT cards and need to connect to healthy food.
 - Incentive programs are a pretty simple, proven way to connect those benefits with local farmers and to build capacity in the local food system.
- Appreciate consideration giving to farmers markets as part of the food access and security solutions in the community.
 - Greater advocacy and support for these types of market programs to leverage other programs together with the SNAP match would be helpful
 - Can use all the promotional support and investment support that that you can provide
 - For example, in Fredericksburg, where Ms. Borst runs some programs, they've gotten a lot of locality support, it's made a huge difference in ability to extend reach of programs
- VA had some amazing wins legislatively.
 - Last year, Virginia Food Access Investment Fund approved
 - Being implemented for the first time at the Virginia Department of Agriculture.
 - Uses an equitable, food-oriented development approach to investment
- Chair Cheh thanked presenters and said she would like to have continued dialogue about ways that farmers markets can work within the region to further these food access goals.
 - Asked FARM members if they had any questions about the regional GusNIP application.

- With no questions and several expressions of support from FARM members from across the region in the chatbox to support the application, asked COG staff and members to determine if any potential conflicts with applications from COG member governments.
- There will likely be applications from other organizations, possibly in the region but the concern is conflicts with any COG member jurisdiction applications.

Recommended Action: COG will determine if there's a conflict, however, finding none, the consensus in the chat and comments is to write a letter of support for the FRESHFARM, regional USDA GusNIP application.

FARM Members had a lively discussion about a range of farmers markets issues, including:

- How to incentivize more year-round farmers markets in the region
 - Infrastructure, like more covered market stalls would be helpful to doing so
- Season extension and helping residents understand that some crops are available almost year-round and markets like onions, apples, potatoes, and the impact purchasing these and other items at markets could have
- The role of value-added products liked baked goods in attracting interest and customers
- Markets as important opportunities for socializing, walking, and learning about a range of sustainability issues

Other recommended actions that emerged from the conversation included:

- Libby Garvey suggested that FARM think about how it can learn from other places to provide more permanent infrastructure for outdoor farmers markets; leveraging its knowledge of planning and zoning.
- Jeff O'Hara at USDA AMS strongly urged FARM to promote [USDA grant opportunities in local and regional food systems](#).
 - More money has been provided by Congress for 2021 with reduced match requirements.
 - Good partnerships and collaborations make for strong applications.
 - RFPs/RFAs will come out this spring for many programs
 - New poultry and meat processing program that will require no match for 2021 and a one-to-one match following this

5. LEGISLATIVE AND LOCAL UPDATES, DISCUSSION AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair asked FARM Members to reflect on any actions taken related to the last meeting, and to share news about local food and agriculture policy and program developments. Several legislative updates were also provided.

Via Ona Balkus

- The DC Food Policy Council has announced its 2021 Priorities: <https://dcfoodpolicy.org/2021-dc-food-policy-priorities/>
- DC has also announced the **FY21 DC Local Equity, Access and Preservation Funds (DC LEAF)** which includes the Nourish DC Fund to support locally-owned small food businesses in communities where disinvestment and systemic racism have left such communities underserved by grocery and more. Link: <https://communityaffairs.dc.gov/publication/fy2021-dc-local-equity-access-and-preservation-funds-dc-leaf>

Chair Ann Wheeler shared that Prince William County has opened a state-of-the-art composting facility to service the county and the region. She asked the group to consider synergies to connect the facility to local farmers.

- Lindsay Smith will follow-up with COG's Recycling Committee Coordinator, John Snarr on this topic.

Every year the committee hosts a compost update. The Prince William facility has been on the agenda several times.

COG Updates

- Regional Food Access and Food Security calls held on Thursdays at 4 pm will resume in March. COG welcomes FARM member input on topics.
- There's been an increase to the FEMA cost share for emergency food to 100% by Executive Order: <https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20210203/fema-statement-100-cost-share>
- Planning for Emergency Food Distribution in Cold and Inclement Weather Meeting resources: <https://www.mwcog.org/events/2021/1/28/planning-for-emergency-food-distribution-in-cold-and-inclement-weather/>

Legislative Updates

Assistant Secretary Hertz provided updates on the bills in the Virginia General Assembly that were included in the legislative tracker sent to members before the meeting. A few of these updates included:

- HB 1820 would expand eligibility for SNAP in the Commonwealth. Salaam Bhatti at Virginia Poverty Law Center [wrote a recent Op-Ed](#) on this important legislation.
- Action to increase funding for the Virginia Food Access and Investment Fund (VFAIF) is also moving ahead in the General Assembly. The first-ever VFAIF grant round accepting applications until April 30, 2021. Please share this opportunity: <http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/marketing-food-access-investment-fund.shtml>
- Progress and identified funding for HB 2203: Virginia Agriculture Food Assistance Program and Fund. This may have an initial funding level of \$600,000 to connect farmers with food assistance organizations and food insecure communities.

Julia Gross at MD Hunger Solutions provided brief updates on HB 0101 (Charkoudian): SNAP Heat and Eat Program, HB 0891 (Davis) Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program and SB 0723 (Hester) Maryland Food System Resiliency Council. There is still time to provide testimony for all of these bills.

- Jeremy Criss noted MD Farm Bureau's support for the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council bill in the chat.
- Catherine Nardi provided a link to the Montgomery County Food Council's sign-on letter (Feb 12 deadline) for this bill in the chat.

Chair Cheh will share legislation that she'll be introducing to address senior hunger in the District and legislation on climate and food production at a future meeting.

Other Announcements, Discussion, and Resources

- The National Anti-Hunger Policy Conference is March 16th to 18th. Link: <https://www.antihungerpolicyconference.org/>

7. ADJOURN

Chair Cheh thanked everyone for their participation; noting she has another to do list from today's meeting and appreciates the sharing best practices that other jurisdictions might investigate and adapt. She reminded members that FARM is moving to a bimonthly schedule with the **next virtual meeting on Friday, April 9th at 11:00 am.**

The meeting was adjourned at 1:00 pm.

ATTENDANCE:

Mary Cheh, Chair, District of Columbia
Craig Rice, Vice Chair, Montgomery County, MD
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)
Tom Ross, City of Fairfax (alternate)
Ona Balkus, District of Columbia Food Policy Council
Catherine Nardi, Montgomery County Food Council (alternate)
Jeremy V. Criss, Office of Agriculture, Montgomery County
Heidi Hertz, Assistant Secretary for Agriculture and Forestry for Virginia
Meredith Ledlie Johnson, Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) (alternate)
Conaway Haskins, VCE
Kate Lee, Office of Urban Agriculture, District of Columbia
Hugo Mogollon, FRESHFARM
Sara Pollock Hoverter, Harrison Institute for Public Law, Georgetown University
Victoria Treski, Bainum Family Foundation
Rachel Clark, Office of Councilmember Cheh (alternate)

Other Participants

Arlee Harris, Office of Supervisor Kershner
Sharon Ledner, Office of Councilmember Rice
Dr. Patty Bennett, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)
Dr. Sandy Curwood, Virginia Department of Education
Robyn Douglas, DC Public Schools
Julia Gross, Maryland Hunger Solutions
Elizabeth Borst, Virginia Community Food Connections and Virginia Fresh Match
Juliet Glass, Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC)
Nick Stavely, FRESHFARM
Jeff O'Hara, USDA
Alex Cordova, USDA
Aisha Salazar, VCE
Kim Haun, Arlington County Department of Parks and Recreation
Stephanie Hopkins, Arlington County Department of Human Services
Rebecca Gates, Prince William Food Rescue/GPW Food Council
Niki Zoli
Alethea Etinoff
Elizabeth Ferrante, FRESHFARM
Megan Bluthardt, Baltimore Metropolitan Council (BMC)
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