



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

August 13, 2021

LINK TO ALL MEETING PRESENTATIONS AND MATERIALS:

<https://www.mwcog.org/events/2021/8/13/food-and-agriculture-regional-member-farm-ad-hoc-advisory-committee/>

DECISIONS AND ACTIONS:

- Short Term
 - FARM will finish the state FY22 food security budget briefing with remarks from the Maryland Department of Agriculture at its next meeting.
 - FARM Members and meeting participants were asked to continue to provide input to the Healthy Food Access Policy Compendium for Metropolitan Washington.
 - COG will contact local jurisdictions on proposed steps to institutionalize and fund the FARM Committee following a successful presentation at the COG Board retreat, and ahead of formal action by the Board.
- Medium and Long Term
 - Chair Cheh requested interim reports on the DC HSEMA-led food and water resilience project.

WELCOME, CALL TO ORDER, AND ROLL CALL

Councilmember Mary Cheh, FARM's Chair, called the meeting to order at 11:03 am.

RECAP OF PREVIOUS MEETING, MEETING SUMMARY APPROVAL, NEW MEMBER WELCOME

Chair Cheh welcomed two new members to the FARM Committee: Radha Muthiah, CEO of Capital Area Food Bank, and Zachari Curtis, Operations and Resource Director at Dreaming Out Loud, and Advisory Board Member, Mid-Atlantic Food Resilience and Access Coalition. Ms. Muthiah and Ms. Curtis briefly introduced themselves to the Committee.

Chair Cheh also recapped the last meeting. In June, FARM amended its bylaws to add two additional members actively working to improve food security. She also reminded members about presentations from Ms. Muthiah, Christopher Bradshaw at Dreaming Out Loud, and the Government Finance Officers Association. FARM approved the committee's draft FY22 Work Program and Budget and invited more input on the work program. At Supervisor Gross's request, several updates were made to reinforce the need to work on farmland preservation and examine changes that can be made land use regulations and Zoning to support agriculture.

Members approved the June meeting summary.

COG LEADERSHIP RETREAT REPORT AND NEXT STEPS

FARM Vice Chairs Craig Rice, Jon Stehle, and Chair Cheh reported out on their presentation to 35 of their colleagues from around the region on the COG Board at its July leadership retreat. The presentation was very positively received and there were a lot of questions underscoring the importance of food security and other food and agriculture issues. The Board unanimously expressed support for their request to make the FARM Committee a permanent one and to create a new, member-supported, regional fund to support this.

COG Board Chair and DC Councilmember Robert White asked FARM's Chairs how the Committee will measure success. The Chairs talked about the importance of creating benchmarks in the future and encouraged members to think strategically about FARM's priorities and what it will work on – there is a lot that the COG Board would like for FARM to do. President Collins echoed how well the presentation went and reflected on how FARM could also help to make agriculture an on-going legacy in Charles County as it has been traditionally.

As a follow-up action, COG staff will send letters to the Chief Administrative Officers of COG member jurisdictions. The letters will share proposed steps to fund the FARM Committee ahead of the formal action by the Board expected at its September meeting to make the committee permanent and establish the fund.

From the chat via FARM member, Chris VanVlack: Our board (in Loudoun County) is considering a purchase of development rights program and a Zoning ordinance to protect prime agricultural soils. Letters of support for both would be helpful.

HEALTH, WELLNESS, AND FOOD SECURITY: ENGAGING HISPANIC/LATINX COMMUNITIES IN FAIRFAX COUNTY

Carla Paredes-Gómez, Community Health Specialist at the Fairfax County Health Department, [presented](#) on her experience working with colleagues, Hispanic/Latinx community members, and numerous partners (i.e. other government agencies, schools, nonprofits, businesses, etc.) during the pandemic to provide COVID-19 screenings, vaccinations, and wrap-around support for basic needs like emergency food and rental assistance.

The success of this community outreach has been driven by developing relationships over the last decade and using a variety of community engagement and communication strategies, and a diverse set of communications platforms, messaging in Spanish, etc. Ms. Paredes-Gómez noted the popularity of WhatsApp in the Hispanic community.

Several FARM members expressed interest in connecting with Ms. Paredes-Gómez to work together, including to continue to spread the word about the availability of culturally appropriate food assistance. Ms. Paredes-Gómez took questions on who coordinates food assistance at the County-level and confirmed that her department does outreach on WIC and makes referrals for SNAP.

FARM HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS POLICY COMPENDIUM PREVIEW

Debbie Noymer, MPH Candidate at the Milken Institute School of Public Health at George Washington University has been leading the research and drafting of FARM's *Healthy Food Access Policy Compendium* which was requested by the Chair earlier this year. Ms. Noymer [shared a policy visual](#) and asked members to participate in an interactive exercise to provide any corrections and updates to what her findings on healthy food access policies and programs created in Metropolitan Washington during the last 10 years.

FARM members and meeting participants were asked to continue to share information with Ms. Noymer over

the next few weeks. FARM Member, Professor Sara Hoverter, offered her time for further input and thinking through elements of the compendium.

BRIEFING: REGIONAL FOOD AND WATER RESILIENCE CATASTROPHIC PREPAREDNESS GRANT

Mark Scott, Critical Infrastructure Specialist with DC's Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency (DC HSEMA) [briefed the committee](#) on the progress of DC HSEMA's food and water resilience project covering the National Capital Region (NCR). Mr. Scott reviewed key questions that the project is addressing, major tasks, and where there are points of intersection with the FARM Committee (i.e., expanding the local food economy will improve resilience during disruption by moving the supply closer to the demand). He also shared some preliminary analysis on food and beverage manufacturing in the region, analysis of food flow into the region, and some observations on the impact of COVID-19 on food security and supply chains.

The pandemic exacerbated existing food insecurity as shown by the DC Food Policy Council and CAFB. The commercial food supply was mostly resilient in the face of disruption. At the beginning of the pandemic, stores had food, however, a driver shortage and very consumer high demand, led to some shortages. There's a need to build partnerships in and outside of the region given where major food supply chains for the NCR originate and with other communities on the East Coast like Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New Jersey. In terms of planning for the future, we have robust emergency plans for the region but there is some additional work to do to improve food resilience and response. This includes more partnership building between government agencies, food assistance providers and the private sector.

Mr. Scott concluded his remarks by asking for questions and feedback on what the FARM Committee might need from the project.

FARM members had a number of comments, including:

- The need to consider large scale disruptions in the national food system for produce, staples, and protein in light of water shortages, food safety problems in California Central Valley.
- Defining "disaster" is important. Baltimore saw this after the murder of Freddie Gray, during the civil disturbance: residents couldn't "just go to the grocery store."
- The importance of ensuring internet access for the most food insecure as an important consideration for addressing a food emergency (to enable online purchasing)
- Desire for the report to identify geographic areas and subpopulations that could be disproportionately impacted by disaster (as we've seen during COVID) and how we prevent that
- "There are times when the EBT vendor has technical issues, and they can't access their benefits at retailers. It then becomes a challenge to communicate with SNAP participants, as well as SNAP retailers. It's a kind of an emergency - even though and can be of a short duration – an hour, a day, etc."

Chair Cheh asked COG to send all questions in the chat to Mr. Scott. She also requested interim reports on the project to know what kind of disruptions are being contemplated, emergency preparedness measures, etc. which will help FARM provide feedback.

FY22 FOOD SECURITY FUNDING IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, MARYLAND, AND VIRGINIA

District of Columbia

Ona Balkus, Food Policy Director for the District of Columbia, provided an update on some of DC's food security priorities in the FY22 budget. More background can be found [in this supporting handout](#) that Ms. Balkus shared during her remarks. The handout shows the Mayor's proposed funding which hasn't changed with the recent budget approval by the DC Council. Highlights include:

- Funding that prioritizes low-income communities where there is low access.
 - Only 3 of DC's 79 grocery stores are in Wards 7 and 8, there is a significant grocery gap but at the same time, these are the communities where SNAP participation is the highest.
- DC will invest \$54 million over the next 2 years into a new Food Access Fund largely from American

Rescue Plan (ARP) funds.

- Based on DC's Neighborhood Prosperity Fund which has funded 5 grocery stores under construction in Wards 7 and 8.
- Will expand access, particularly to capital dollars for small, medium, and large grocery stores, and sit-down restaurants in Wards 7 and 8.
- Support for the Nourish DC Fund, focused on supporting DC resident-owned fresh food retailers and food businesses, and providing more flexible grants, loans, and technical assistance.
 - Nourish DC funds will be matched 2:1 by Capital Impact Partners (a CDFI), resulting in a total investment of \$12 million over the next two years.
- East of the River Leasing Strategy will move several DC agencies to Wards 7 and 8. This, along with a newly announced Tax Increment Financing (TIF) tool, will bring a new grocery store to Ward 7.
- Supermarket Tax Incentives Program. The funding didn't increase but this 20-year-old program has established new geographic boundaries where grocery stores can locate and get the incentive.

Virginia

Heidi Hertz, Assistant Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry for Virginia, provided an update on the Commonwealth's investments to support food security which fall under three milestones:

First, on July 1, Virginia's new fiscal year started, and several new laws went into effect. There was also a recently approved budget and allocation of ARP funds. Finally, Governor Northam's out-going budget is under development which will include consideration of future food security investments. Agriculture is VA's largest private sector industry, so the Secretary of Ag and Forestry brings this lens to food access work. Highlights:

July 1

- Creation of Virginia Agriculture Food Assistance Program to help charitable food assistance organizations offset costs of getting local food into their networks. FY22 allocation using CARES Act funds: \$600,000. An additional \$1 million in ARP funds was just added.
- Virginia Food Access Investment Fund (VFAIF) assists with healthy food financing in underserved communities using the Equitable Food Oriented Development approach. VFAIF awards grants to communities and community representatives to provide healthy food retail. Allocation: \$2 million
- Expansion of broad-based Categorical Eligibility for SNAP participation.
- Mandate that if a school system or a school is eligible for the after-school meal program through the Child and Adult Care Food Program, that they are required to either provide that this, or partner with an organization that can.

Approved Budget with ARP Funds

- Virginia version of the Farmers to Families Food Box Program with priority to provide and purchase Virginia products for the boxes. Allocation: \$9 million
- Funds to support shelf-stable purchasing needs that food banks have/will have: \$5 million
- Using CARES Act money, launched [Unite Us](#). Referrals are made to Virginia's food-based organizations and food pantries, however, data systems don't necessarily "talk to one another." A new investment will bring the food banks into the network and help connect them to healthcare providers who have been doing the two-question food insecurity screener.
- For FY23, funds also allocated to support the VA Federation of Food Bank's 7 partners to assist with infrastructure needed to bring in fresh, healthy local food for distribution. Allocation: \$10.5 million.

Maryland

Rachel K. Sledge, Assistant Director of Government Affairs at the Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) provided a short overview of investments to support food security. Highlights from her remarks:

- In 2020 and 2021, partnered with MD Department of Health to use CARES Act money to distribute more than \$20 million to nonprofit feeding partners which included the Maryland Food Bank, Capital Area Food Bank, Moveable Feast Food and Friends, and the Salvation Army.

- This funding ensured that food was delivered to people who were immunocompromised or living with medically prescribed diet, to people who were in quarantine, and that local food pantries were able to access the resources they needed via the umbrella of the major food banks.
 - For FY22, anticipate additional allocation of several million dollars to be provided in these areas again to support the multi-agency response.
- SNAP funding increased during COVID-19 with the issuance of the maximum allotment to all recipients based on the household size.
- MD continues to operate P-EBT.
- MD also has a Summer SNAP program for children who typically receive free and reduced meals during the school year.
 - Benefits for June, for June, July, and August.
 - Participating children also scheduled to receive a benefit in December during the break.

Due to insufficient time, FARM members were asked to place any questions in the chat. Remarks from the Maryland Department of Agriculture on budget priorities were scheduled for a future meeting.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND ADJOURN

From the chat, via FARM Member Ona Balkus: The DC Food Policy Council and Office of Planning recently released a study on best practices for building a centralized kitchen facility in DC. Link report and virtual launch: <https://dcfoodpolicy.org/reports/centralized-kitchen-study/>

Chair Cheh announced the joint session on BIPOC Farmers and Land Access meeting. A reading list will be provided. She will meet with the Vice Chairs to determine the feasibility of holding FARM's next meeting in-person, on a farm and requested that members share any feedback they may have on this with COG.

Chair Cheh thanked everyone for their participation and adjourned the meeting at 1:01 pm.

ATTENDANCE:

Mary Cheh, Chair, District of Columbia
Jon Stehle, Vice Chair, City of Fairfax
Craig Rice, Vice Chair, Montgomery County
Amy Jackson, City of Alexandria
Reuben Collins, Charles County (alternate)
Matt de Ferranti, Arlington County (alternate)
Tom Ross, City of Fairfax (alternate)
Ona Balkus, District of Columbia Food Policy Council
Hugo Mogollon, FRESHFARM
Radha Muthiah, Capital Area Food Bank
Zachari Curtis, Dreaming Out Loud
Kate Lee, Office of Urban Agriculture, District of Columbia
Chris Van Vlack, Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District
Sara Hoverter, Georgetown University
Rachel Clark, Office of Councilmember Cheh (alternate)
Nick Stavely, FRESHFARM (alternate)

Michael J Wilson, Maryland Hunger Solutions
Julie Oberg, Maryland Department of Agriculture
Heidi Hertz, Virginia Office of the Secretary of
Agriculture and Forestry

Other Participants

Carla Gomez-Paredes, Fairfax County Health Department
Rachel K. Sledge, Maryland Department of Human Services

Mark Scott, DC HSEMA
Debbie Noymer, George Washington University
Kristin Tribble, Office of Councilmember Rice
Allison Schnitzer, Montgomery County Food Council
Stephanie Hopkins, Arlington County Department of Human Services
Gretchen Greiner-Lott, Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation
Vanessa Calaban, Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA)
Anna Sierra, MEMA
Erica Martin, Bainum Family Foundation
Aisha Salazar, Virginia Cooperative Extension
Tom McDougall, 4P Foods and Mid-Atlantic Food Resilience and Access
Coalition
Rebecca Gates, Northern Virginia Food Rescue
Brandon Engle, Office of MD Senator Katie Hester

COG Staff
Christine Howard
Lindsay Smith
Steve Bieber
Tom Gates
Brian LeCouteur
Julie Mussog