
**FOOD AND AGRICULTURE REGIONAL MEMBER (FARM) POLICY
COMMITTEE**

MEETING SUMMARY (DRAFT)

DECEMBER 8, 2023

All presentations from the meeting, and the approved October meeting summary, can be found at: <https://www.mwcog.org/events/2023/12/8/food-and-agriculture-regional-member-farm-ad-hoc-advisory-committee/>

DECISIONS AND ACTIONS:

- FARM members approved the October FARM Committee meeting minutes.
- Members thanked out-going FARM Vice-Chair Kate Kennedy for her service.
- Members approved sending FARM's recommended changes to food and agriculture priorities to the COG Board's Legislative Committee for consideration in COG's [2024 Legislative Priorities](#).
- The next FARM meeting is scheduled for Fri, Feb 9, 2024, from 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

WELCOME, FARM MEMBER UPDATES, AND MEETING SUMMARY APPROVAL

Councilmember Jon Stehle, FARM Chair

Chair Stehle called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m.

Vice-Chair Kate Kennedy announced that she was stepping down from the FARM Policy Committee with the end of her term on the College Park City Council. FARM members shared their gratitude for her service and well-wishes. Chair Stehle asked for volunteers for a new Maryland-based Vice-Chair.

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

2023 FARM BILL STATE OF PLAY

Hannah Quigley, Policy Specialist, National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC)

Mae Stevens, Senior Vice President, Banner Public Affairs

Ms. Quigley shared marker bills that overlap with FARM's priorities for the Farm Bill including the Local Farms and Food Act, the Supporting Urban and Innovative Farming Act, and the Healthy Food Financing Initiative Reauthorization Act. She reinforced NSAC's focus on addressing climate change and resilience through conservation programs and shared talking points advocates can use in the absence of a marker bill.

Ms. Stevens shared that there was an extension passed for the current Farm Bill. It will now go through September 30, 2024. Most of the Farm Bill has already been written; the major holdups are around SNAP, commodity, and conservation programs. Both speakers spoke to the twenty billion dollars of Inflation Reduction Act funding focused on conservation programs; Republicans have advocated for moving the funding out of USDA programs to fund the Farm Bill.

Ms. Stevens shared that Congress will be on recess in August and she does not expect much progress to happen in September and October due to appropriations bills and elections; a final bill

will need to be ready for the beginning of August for the Farm Bill to pass in 2024. Republicans have urged for a new one-year extension if they do not hit the deadline. The challenge with that is that negotiations will have to start over due to retirements and changes amongst top negotiators in Congress.

Regarding the FARM Committee priorities, Healthy Food Financing and Urban Agriculture Production grants are not controversial and are expected to be funded, however, there isn't a lot of information about where negotiations stand. LAMP has bipartisan support and is not controversial either, but no information has come out about whether it will be included. The other priorities are controversial and will be a harder lift.

FARM Member Libby Garvey asked how we can best affect the Farm Bill. The speakers advised getting involved in lobby days, ensuring the Congressional delegation hears regularly from constituents on our priorities, and inviting in-district staff to events related to FARM's Farm Bill priorities.

Threats to SNAP were discussed. These included tighter work requirements, efforts to take SNAP produce incentive program funding from general SNAP allotment funds, and efforts to cap the minimum allotment for SNAP.

Chair Stehle encouraged members to stay engaged in the FARM Committee's Farm Bill advocacy and shared that it will be a regular feature of meetings moving forward.

2024 COMMITTEE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Councilmember Jon Stehle, FARM Chair

Sam Bonar, Ad-Hoc Legislative Committee Chair & Constituent Services Coordinator, Councilmember Zachary Parker, Ward 5, District of Columbia

Sam shared that several FARM member volunteers met to review and update past FARM Committee legislative priorities. For recommended updates to the 2023 priorities, members drafted language to incorporate cash assistance for families, expanded state and federal Child Tax Credits, critical pandemic era support programs that should be sustained, and revenue generation from strategies like extreme wealth taxes. Members also discussed community wealth building strategies that can support small farmers and community-wide healthy food access.

Process oriented strategies were also discussed by the committee to support FARM's advocacy efforts, including developing messaging materials that emphasize the economic benefits of priorities and leveraging partnerships with municipal leagues.

FARM member discussion following Sam's remarks included language and strategies to address farmland loss to development pressure across the region. Members also brainstormed how to support the committee's advocacy efforts. Ideas shared included prioritizing face time with elected officials, designating policy committee members with expertise in different areas of food system that can make decisions on behalf of staff, creating a public actions tracker tool that includes submitted testimony, power mapping, and creating internal communication systems. Organizations suggested as models included the Americans of Conscience Checklist, Montgomery County Food Council, the Virginia Food Access Coalition, and the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council.

Chair Stehle shared that the next step is taking recommended revisions on priorities to COG Board's Legislative Committee for discussion, changes, and approval. This language, along with other COG priority areas, goes to the COG Board for approval.

Chair Stehle called a motion to send the revised priority language for 2024 to the COG's Legislative Committee for consideration; it passed unanimously.

LOCAL ANNOUNCEMENTS & FARM POLICY ACTIONS

- **Overview of Nutrition Navigator Site**, *Victoria Treski, Director of Food Security Initiative, Bainum Family Foundation & Michelle Caruso, Director of Policy and Partnerships, Montgomery County Food Council*

The Bainum Family Foundation's Nutrition Navigator Site (formerly the Food Learning Navigator) relaunched with The Food Trust during the pandemic, during which many of the food education and job training sites listed on the original map closed. The relaunched map includes several types of programs including healthy food retailers, nutrition education and health screening, opportunities to stretch food budgets (e.g. SNAP and WIC incentive programs), and job training programs (culinary training opportunities). Emergency food assistance is not on the site.

The Montgomery Food Council is providing communication and outreach support for the Nutrition Navigator site. They hosted a training on the site for organizations that would like to be listed, it can be viewed on their YouTube Channel [here](#). Organizations and programs that need additional support can reach out to info@mocofoodcouncil.org.

The tool is live and can be viewed at www.map.thefoodtrust.org.

- **Future Harvest Annual Conference Overview**, *Grace Leatherman, Executive Director, Future Harvest - The Chesapeake Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture*

Future Harvest is a membership non-profit that serves sustainable and regenerative farmers in the Chesapeake Region. They focus on education, networking, advocacy, and research for their farmers. They are meeting at The Hotel in College Park on January 18-20th. There will be over 30 hands-on workshops, pre-conferences, and keynote speakers with an expected 500+ attendees. This is the first year the conference will feature an urban farming track. Attendees are a mix of farmers and food system advocates, ranging from enthusiastic consumers to farm service providers. The conference provides a valuable and unique opportunity for elected officials and advocates to hear directly from farmers about their work and needs. Additional details (and registration) can be found at www.futureharvest.org/2024-conference

- Rachel Jones from Maryland Department of Agriculture shared on behalf of Secretary Kevin Atticks that MDA is working with the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council to examine what's required for increased cold storage and on-farm organic recycling.
- Francesca Costantino announced that the Virginia Association of Biological Farming is holding their Annual Conference in Roanoke from January 19th-21st. Register and find out more at <https://vabf.org/>.
- The December *COG Think Regionally Podcast* features members of the FARM Committee discussing food security in the region. Listen to it [here](#).
- Chair Stehle shared that the City of Fairfax has awarded a grant to PathFinder Kitchen to run a pilot program providing culinary arts training in underutilized restaurant kitchen space as a pathway to employment.
- Heather Bruskin shared that Montgomery County Council is considering a special

appropriation request to fund strategies in the county's *Strategic Plan to End Childhood Hunger* that they presented to the FARM Committee in October.

- The next FARM meeting is scheduled for Friday, February 9 from 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned by Chair Stehle at 11:51 am.

ATTENDANCE

Jon Stehle, Chair, City of Fairfax

Kate Kennedy, City of College Park

Andrew Friedson, Montgomery County

Libby Garvey, Arlington County

Charise Liggins, City of Laurel

Heather Bruskin, Montgomery County Office of Food System Resilience

Rachel Jones, Maryland Department of Agriculture

Victoria Treski, Bainum Family Foundation

Meredith Ledlie Johnson, Virginia Cooperative Extension

Sara Pollock Hoverter, Georgetown University

Chris Van Vlack, Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District

Sam Bonar, Office of Vice Chair Parker, Council of the District of Columbia

Natalia Salazar, Montgomery County Office of Agriculture

Brian Alexander, Capital Area Food Bank

Francesca Constantino, Virginia Association of Biological Farming

Jocelyn Tidwell, M.Ed - SNAP-Ed MD State Office

Carla Cash, MAFRAC

Ester Waldroup, Montgomery County Food Council

Gretchen Greiner-Lott, Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation

Ashley Sharp, Resurgence Brand Inc.

Casey Dyson, Food and Friends

Riley Piva, DC Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency

Stephanie Hopkins, Arlington County Government

Stephanie Lansing, University of Maryland, MD Food System Resiliency Council

Susan Eisendrath, Zero Waste Montgomery County

Tim Enright, ALIVE!

Yuki Kato, Georgetown University

Robin McClave, American University

Elisa Solomon, Fairfax County Government

Harrison Palmer, Maryland Department of Agriculture

Alisa Brooks, Fairfax County Government

Annarose Kennedy, Manna Food Center

Four call-in participants

SPEAKERS

Does not include FARM members

Hannah Quigley, Policy Specialist, National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition (NSAC)

Mae Stevens, Senior Vice President, Banner Public Affairs

Michelle Caruso, Director of Policy and Partnerships, Montgomery County Food Council

Grace Leatherman, Executive Director, Future Harvest

COG Staff and Consultants

Steve Bieber
Heidi Bonnaffon
Sydney Daigle
Christine Howard
Wyetha Lipford
Lisa Ragain
Lindsay Smith