



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

October 13, 2023  
10:00 A.M. - 12:00 P.M.  
MS Teams Virtual Meeting

### MEETING MINUTES – DRAFT

#### WELCOME, FARM MEMBER UPDATES, AND APPROVAL OF MEETING SUMMARIES

##### Councilmember Jon Stehle, FARM Chair

Chair Stehle called the meeting to order at 10:01 a.m. He shared member updates including announcing the new FARM Committee Vice-Chair, Council Member Zachary Parker, Ward 5, Council of the District of Columbia.

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

#### CAPITAL AREA FOOD BACK HUNGER REPORT

##### Radha Muthiah, President and CEO, Capital Area Food Bank

Radha opened by thanking COG and the FARM Committee members for their partnership. The CAFB has published a hunger and equity report every year since 2020. The report seeks to help improve the CAFB's Programming and also informs their Brighter Futures program which supports organizations across the DMV who are providing services outside of food assistance. This year's report is based on a study of nearly 5,300 residents and is statistically representative down to the county level. The report is open source and staff are willing to support partners who are interested in exploring the original data further.

Food insecurity has remained flat from 2022. Food insecurity rates remain high, 1 in 3 people in our region said they were food insecure at one point or another over the past year. By County, Arlington has the lowest rate at 17% and Prince George's has the highest rate at 45%.

There are three key drivers the report identified as keeping food insecurity rates high. Many people were impacted by a compounding of the 3 factors:

- Slow, inequitable recovery from the pandemic: Residents may be back at work but not at the same level; this is particularly true for food insecure households.
- Inflation: It has been persistently high for the past 18 months; wages that previously covered nutritional needs are no longer sufficient with higher food prices.
- Retraction of government benefits: Retraction of emergency allotments of SNAP benefits in March 2023 was particularly impactful.

##### Sabrina Tadele, Senior Director of Strategic Initiatives

Sabrina shared trends CAFB found in the report data:

- Food insecurity rates remain significantly higher for Black and Hispanic residents; approximately half of the Hispanic and Black populations screened food insecure versus 14% of the White population.
- Food insecure people are twice as likely to report chronic disease that limit their daily activities compared to food secure people (29% vs. 13%). Most of the chronic diseases reported were diet related.

- The child food insecurity rate is 1 in 10. This is lower than the general population rate; surveyors found that adults in food insecure households went hungry to ensure kids had enough to eat. Households with children are 60% more likely to be food insecure than households without children.
- The report found that the food insecure population is largely employed, educated, and middle class. Rates are high for income deciles (at least 20%) up to the 50% percentile or households earning \$120,000; this is also the average living wage for a household of four in the region. 76% of food insecure people are working. Over half have more than a high school diploma. 67% are above the poverty wage for their household size. 1 in 5 families making median income for our region are food insecure.
- The report found 46% of the food insecure population did not receive any support from the charitable food assistance network over the past year. The highest rate of residents not receiving food assistance was in Fairfax at 61% and lowest was in DC at 34%. This could be influenced by differences in cultural dynamics, infrastructure, and information availability across the region.
  - Steve Bieber inquired if CAFB has explored how mobility (access to transit and walkability) impacts food assistance uptake and noted that MWCOG has some grant funding to explore these interactions. Sabrina shared that CAFB asked several survey questions about transportation barriers amongst the unserved food insecure and can provide that data at the county level.

CAFB identified a few key findings to inform the work of food relief actors and other regional actors which are detailed in the report. Cutting across recommendations for the private, public, and social sector is the need to increase alignment between the thousands of available jobs and those who need living wages by upskilling the labor force.

#### Q&A:

*Heather Bruskin:* Could you speak to how respondents were identified, incentivized, and the sample size broken down by jurisdiction?

*Sabrina:* At least 750 people per county were surveyed. 5,200 per region. Survey info was weighted according to census data.

*Michael J. Wilson:* There was a lot of support during the pandemic: school meals, emergency allotments, support for food banks from across the country. Did the research take place after the pandemic support ended?

*Sabrina:* The surveying was done from May 1<sup>st</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup>. It asked over the last year to reflect on. Agree that those federal programs are very important and it's important to capture lessons learned from the pandemic.

*Radha:* CAFB wanted to do this survey annually to understand the impacts of addition and subtraction of supports. There was a significant difference from when the Farm to Food Bank program was operating to the drop off. If it hadn't been for the efforts in counties like Montgomery and Fairfax stepping in to fill the gap, these numbers would be much worse.

*Steve Bieber:* The region lost 350,000 or more jobs were lost in the region when the pandemic hit. More than 95% have been recovered. However, the numbers have stayed the same in terms of hunger. Perhaps we can use that data to add more context to info in the report. It tells a story about success of programs during the pandemic and the ongoing challenges we're facing now.

*Michael J. Wilson:* MD lost 21 million dollars per month in SNAP benefits when emergency allotments ended; this had impacts not only for low-income residents but also for the local economy.

*Chair Stehle:* The FARM Committee leadership is interested in authoring a letter to our congressional delegation on the Farm bill highlighting impacts like this.

*Libby Garvey:* The lessons learned are helpful. Diabetes and high blood pressure are also impacted by stress, losing your income and home is stressful. She hoped after we came out of the pandemic was hoping that we would have an aha moment about providing for basic needs of people. That hasn't happened. She would like to see COG do a lesson learned report on what supports worked well during the pandemic.



*Stephanie Hopkins:* Can you talk about the differences between your study and map the meal gap?

*Sabrina:* The Map the Meal Gap uses national census data (9-10 months old once they have access) and then takes about 9 months more extrapolating that data down to the census tract level using a proprietary formula. CAFB uses the same question set but has achieved different findings by applying it locally.

#### **REMARKS FROM DC FARM COMMITTEE VICE-CHAIR, COUNCILMEMBER PARKER**

##### **Councilmember Zachary Parker, Ward 5, Council of the District of Columbia**

Councilmember Parker is the new FARM Committee Vice-Chair for DC. CM Parker shared his excitement regarding work with the committee. He is very interested in the CAFB report findings and how food insecurity stretches across income bands. DC has increased SNAP benefits locally and CM Parker introduced a child tax credit bill earlier this year. The report makes it clear that this tax credit will also help to address food insecurity. CM Parker's is a new CM, sworn in in January, with an extensive background as an educator. His vision is for creating healthy communities; we all want to live in safe communities with green space and ample access to healthy food. He hopes to take resources back to the District and work to expand cooperative food access opportunities across our region.

#### **MONTGOMERY COUNTY STRATEGIC PLAN TO END CHILDHOOD HUNGER**

##### **Councilmember Gabe Albornoz, Chair of the Health and Human Services Committee**

##### **Heather Bruskin, Director, Office of Food Systems Resilience (OFSR)**

##### **Catherine Nardi, Program Manager, OFSR**

##### **Juan Cruz, Performance Management and Data Analyst, OFSR**

##### **Massa Cressall, Interim Executive Director, Montgomery County Food Council (MCFC)**

##### **Annamarie Hart-Bookbinder, RDN, Food Security Programs Manager, MCFC**

Heather from OFSR introduced the speakers. The recently released Montgomery County Strategic Plan to End Childhood Hunger, was spearheaded by Councilmember Albornoz along with a partnership between the County government, schools, local organizations, members of the General Assembly, and the MCFC. The MCFC managed this extensive project to produce 14 strategies to address the crisis of childhood food insecurity in the County.

*CM Albornoz:* Montgomery County (MoCo) had a strong food security and resilience team in place through organizations like the MCFC and Manna Food Bank. This strong infrastructure was tested in unimaginable ways during the pandemic. Additional public and private partners entered the space and during the pandemic they began collaborating and coordinating in real time. Leveraging this now institutionalized partner collaboration and pairing it with strong leadership and strategic planning has allowed them to set bold goals like ending childhood hunger. This is a national model. Funding and policy shifts will be required by the County, but they are committed.

*Heather:* Another example of MoCo's commitment to looking at work through a strategic, innovative, and systems-based lens is the creation of the OFSR. The office leverages the unique tools of government to streamline and coordinate cross-sector efforts to address food system challenges, with data-driven approaches rooted in equity and innovation.

*Massa Cressal:* MCFC is the primary connection point for businesses, nonprofits, residents, and government agencies around food system issues; they convene over 2,000 local partners. The food council brings expertise and insight from across the food system to address issues holistically. The council will be launching a childhood hunger collaborative to progress the work of the strategic plan.

*Heather:* One of the most significant challenges at local level is the lack of data to inform and evaluate strategies. The OFSR will be working on creating dashboards of local data so they can evaluate challenges and barriers at the neighborhood level. One challenge they see is that the federal standard that dictates eligibility for assistance programs is far lower than the cost of living in the county. There are tens of thousands of children whose households fall into this coverage gap. When household income is mapped at

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below 400% of the poverty level (the household self-sufficiency standard for MoCo) almost every area of the county is touched. The county is one of the most diverse in the country; any strategy pursued needs to consider language and transportation accessibility and diverse outreach strategies by trusted community partners.

*Annmarie:* The food council planned a similar role for the county's food security plan in 2017 and built on its expertise to author this plan. The recommendations were developed through strategic stakeholder brainstorming sessions based on several intervention pathways, surveying impacted residents, and resident listening sessions. The major barriers for residents included the high cost of living in the county, difficulties navigating the benefit application process, lack of awareness of where or how to request help, and lack of access to transportation.

*Heather:* The investments that are made at the county level need to address climate change, equity, and economic opportunity and maximize all existing federal, state, and local public, private, social sector, and philanthropic resources. The report identified strategies that strengthen the safety net, build income supports, invest in emergency food assistance and community food distribution, and advance care coordination including food-as-medicine programs.

*Catherine:* OFSR disseminated a food assistance provider survey to over 100 organizations. They found that 68% of organizations have been operating for at least 10 years. 14 providers had supported over 10,000 children in the last year with 4 supporting over 100,000. 16 provided services at a MCPS school.

*Annmarie:* In listening sessions for providers, MCFC found that food assistance providers derived benefits from partnering with the school system. Providers felt more confident they were serving the families most in need (schools helped them identify these families and they could use FARMS-rates) and they knew that families faced challenges in attending food distributions when they have small children—working with schools allowed them to circumnavigate these.

Staff from MCFC and OFRS gave detailed overview of several strategies, ranging from maximizing enrollment in federal benefit programs to creating a gardening grant program., Strategies are covered in detail in the report.

## Q&A

*Libby:* What is the greatest challenge you see?

*CM Albornoz:* The funding they received to stand up the strategy is going away this fiscal year. Another key partner here is philanthropy; he saw folks that were investing nationally started investing closer to home. He hopes to see that continue.

*Heather:* Resources are always a challenge. They are striving to shift systems and that work is slow and challenging and requires changes in operations and mindsets. There has to be funding for systems work as well as direct services.

*Steve:* COG would be interested in looking at the recommended actions in the report and looking at the strategies that are least complex, cost, and looking at impact. This might help others in local governments could identify strategies that were a good fit based on their capacity and budget.

*Heather:* The plan has 14 strategies; those presented today have been identified as immediately actionable by the county. These strategies aren't necessarily the lowest cost interventions but rather those that allow MoCo to take the work to the next level; they've already plucked the low hanging fruit.

## DC, MD, AND VA LEGISLATIVE PREVIEW

Members of area Hunger Solutions provided a high-level overview of what advocates and elected leaders are planning related to childhood nutrition, improving access to school meals, and food security for other residents such as seniors.

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### **LaMonika Jones, Director, DC Hunger Solutions**

DCHS is focused on advocating for:

- Give SNAP a Raise Amendment Act: this amendment was passed and funded this year. Starting in January and running through the end of FY 2024, DC will provide \$39M for SNAP Participants and \$20M for excluded workers.
  - This next push is to make this permanent non-lapsing funding.
  - DC lost an estimated \$14 million dollars per month when SNAP Emergency Allotments ended.
- No Senior Hungry Omnibus Amendment Act: DC has remained in the top 3 for older adult hunger for many years. This amendment will create a taskforce to focus on addressing the root causes of elevated hunger amongst older adults to develop resident-informed strategies.
- Universal School Meals Amendment Act: Introduced by CM Henderson earlier this year. School breakfast is free for all DC students. This will ensure lunch and after-school snack is additionally covered for all students.
- Fresh Starts Act: This act will require the Department of Corrections to improve food offerings for incarcerated residents. It will require meals to meet federal nutrition standards and align procurement policies with the Good Food Purchasing Program.

### **Michael J. Wilson, Director, Maryland Hunger Solutions**

MDHS has two primary advocacy pushes over the next year:

- Healthy School Meals for All: MD is using the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) across the state; they are hoping to leverage the 485,000 students who are already receiving free meals (MD eliminated the reduced-price category) to get to the entire 889,000 public school students.
- SNAP Benefits: On average, recipients receive \$6 per person, per day; this doesn't allow recipients to have a healthy diet. MDHS is interested in having a supplemental benefit for all recipients similar to New Jersey, where no household gets less than \$95 per household. There are 659,000 SNAP recipients across the state, so this would have a significant impact.

Other priorities include covering the administrative costs of Summer EBT and leveraging the state's farmers market programs.

### **Cassie Edner, Public Benefits Attorney and Director of Virginia Hunger Solutions, Virginia Poverty Law Center**

VHS is focused on:

- Increasing the SNAP minimum benefit. Their efforts are targeting individuals who are 60+ years old. VA lost 98 million dollars a month in SNAP benefits in the state after the end of emergency allotments.
- Healthy School Meals for All: Currently 65% of students in the state are receiving free school meals from CEP and/or Free and Reduced Priced Meals.
- Advocating for VA to meet the 50% admin cost for Summer EBT.
- Medicaid 1115 Waiver to fund Food-as-Medicine programs in the state.
- Finally, they are working to ensure the SNAP application process is as supportive as possible at the local DSS level.

## **FARM POLICY ACTIONS & ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **Hugo Mogollon, FRESHFARM**

Hugo shared that FRESHFARM has been awarded a prestigious and competitive inaugural \$500,000 Global Innovation Challenge grant from Citi Foundation. They will use the funding to expand their Pop-Up Food Hub, a decentralized, low-infrastructure food distribution model that brings produce from local farmers to



community organizations serving neighbors in under-resourced communities. They are eager to collaborate with partners across the region to ensure they maximize the impact of this award.

### **Chair Stehle**

Councilmember Stele recapped next steps and actions:

- THE FARM Committee will send members of Congress a letter advocating for maintaining funding for key programs that could be threatened during the appropriations process. Additionally, Chair Stehle wants to make sure our delegation knows we exist and thinks about us during the FARM bill drafting process. The letter will follow the priorities outlined in the FARM Committee's strategic plan. Chair Stehle encouraged members to send their priorities to the COG staff as soon as possible for inclusion in the letter.
- Chair Stehle reminded members that the next FARM meeting is scheduled for Friday, December 8 from 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. A format (virtual or hybrid) will be announced soon.

### **ADJOURN**

The meeting was adjourned by Chair Stehle at 12:01 pm.





**Attendees:**

- Allison Schnitzer
- Amy Cawley
- Andrew Friedson
- Annarose Kennedy
- Anne Wallerstedt
- Annmarie Hart-Bookbinder
- Brian LeCouteur
- Brittany Cook -MDEM-
- Carrol McBryde
- Cassie Edner
- Catherine Nardi
- Charise Liggins
- Cindy Gibson
- Danielle Castellano
- Danita Banks, (DOH)
- Dyson, Casey
- Gabe
- Heather Bois Bruskin
- Hugo Mogollon - FRESHFARM
- Jackie DeCarlo
- Jenna
- Jon Stehle
- Juan Cruz
- Julia Groenfeldt
- Kate Kennedy
- Katr Kennedy
- Kimberly Haun
- Kristin Tribble
- Kyra Cooke
- LaMonika Jones
- Lauren Marr (DOH)
- Ledlie, Meredith
- Libby Garvey
- Lisa Ragain
- Mamiko Vuillemin (OP)
- Maria Mackie
- Massa Cressall (Guest)
- Melissa Jensen
- Michael J. Wilson
- Michelle Caruso (she/her)
- Natalia Salazar-Lahera
- Radha Muthiah
- Randy Gibson
- Reana Kim (DC Greens)
- Riley Piva (HSEMA)
- Sabrina Tadele, CAFB
- Samuel Bonar (Council)
- Sara Hoverter (she/her)



- Seth Benton (VDACS)
- Shuman, Beth
- Singleton, Selena
- Stacey Evers
- Stephanie Hopkins
- Stuart Vermaak
- Timothy Enright
- Victoria Treski
- Wanika Fisher
- Yesy Amaya
- Zachary Parker (Council)

**MWCOG Staff**

- Christine Howard
- Steven Bieber
- Wyetha Lipford
- Sydney Daigle

