

# VISION AND FRAMEWORK FOR WHAT OUR REGION GROWS IMPLEMENTATION

**COG CBPC AG TASK FORCE  
JULY 2019 UPDATE**

## SUMMARY

We will create a new model for regional collaboration that leverages data, best practices, and expertise to drive policy change and investment to improve the resiliency of Greater Washington's food system.

## VISION

Our goal is a more resilient, connected food and farm economy across urban and rural communities in Greater Washington that provides more of the region's food needs: a disruption of current trends. This transformation to prepare for an uncertain food future will result in workforce development, economic growth, and environmental, health, and cultural benefits. An increased number of diverse food and agricultural enterprises will be more visible, supported, and celebrated by residents, leaders, and visitors of all kinds.

## GOALS

- Create a Regional Commission<sup>1</sup> to oversee the thorough implementation of the recommendations in *What Our Region Grows* in support of a profitable, diverse food and farm economy that can play a greater role in enhancing the region's quality of life, growing our economy, mitigating climate change, and improving water quality.
  - Establish Greater Washington as a national model of *regional* collaboration; too often food system efforts are limited to local and state boundaries.
- Provide an on-going forum to share best practices and inspire policy changes needed locally and regionally to improve food security for all residents, build market demand for local food, and promote new beneficial practices like regenerative agriculture.
- Support farmland in the Greater Washington Region to ensure viability and growth for current and next generation farmers while also capitalizing on existing assets (i.e. rooftops and vacant buildings, knowledge economy) for urban agriculture to help food and farm enterprises position themselves for coming supply chain and market shifts.
- Support school programming in preparing students for careers in agricultural related fields, including food security, and educating children about the benefits of healthy eating.

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<sup>1</sup> Maryland's diverse, [25-member Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education](#), the "Kirwan Commission" has been recommended as a potential model for multi-sector membership which would include COG members.

## **MILESTONES**

### **(SAMPLE) NEAR TERM**

Identify members for a Regional Commission and solidify a funding strategy by April 2020.

Food and farm policy and programs environmental scan. Use findings from *What Our Region Grows* for a broader scan of major policies, programs, and key stakeholders in the Greater Washington Region supporting the development of the region's food and farm economy by March 2020.

Provide a three-year inventory of COG members' own surveys of their farmers, food businesses, food assistance organizations, etc., to promote member-to-member sharing of best practices and to determine the value of encouraging standardized data collection on key metrics.

Include an in-depth overview of the ways in which public schools, institutions of higher learning, and partners are engaged.

Reference national and international best practices that could benefit local communities and the region.

Comprehensive Plan assessment. Provide an overview of policies supportive of food and agriculture in comprehensive plans in the COG Region. Identify national best practices and resources for comprehensive plan updates.

### **(SAMPLE) MEDIUM TERM**

Co-host regional forums on farm viability, land preservation, next generation farmers, and food and agriculture supply chain infrastructure needs in the Washington Agricultural Region.

Provide an on-going forum to address funding and financing for food system improvements with a focus on resiliency and expanding opportunity in equitable and inclusive ways.

Identify opportunities for local legislative action to support identified needs.

Pinpoint opportunities for synergistic action at COG and with other regional partners on key issues related to food, health, land use, emergency preparedness, climate, waste, jobs, and water.

Commission and implement a Strategic Plan for Agriculture.

Evaluate the accomplishments of the Regional Commission at the five-year mark.

## **BACKGROUND AND REGIONAL AGRICULTURAL TRENDS**

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) Chesapeake Bay Policy and Water Resources Committee's (CBPC) established an Ag Task Force in the spring of 2019 to assess regional capacity to implement the recommendations in *What Our Region Grows*. Recommendations from the first report, published in 2012, languished due to lack of implementation capacity.

New data shows that the region has dropped below its sustainability goal for maintaining nearly a half million acres of land in farms. At a time of heightened interest in local food and farming, healthy eating, sustainable agriculture and soil health, the region continues to experience declines in farms and farmland.

**Now is the time to act.**

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COG staff interviewed the six local government elected officials who are volunteer members of the Ag Task Force in April 2019.<sup>2</sup> Initial interview findings indicate enthusiasm for COG taking a lead role as a convener for measurable, near to longer term strategic action on behalf of the region's food and farm economy. Interviews are continuing with regional leaders, and a final report will be completed by the end of the summer.

The philanthropic grants supporting COG's food and agriculture work will expire in the early FY2020. Program funders will want to know what next steps COG will take to identify sustainable program support and the region's food system. *Our funders have a vested interest in catalyzing a program that can ultimately be sustained by other funding streams.*

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<sup>2</sup> CBPC Ag Task Force Members include: Craig Rice (Montgomery County), Penny Gross (Fairfax County), Libby Garvey (Arlington County), Kai Hagen (Frederick County), Amy Jackson (City of Alexandria), and Jon Stehle (City of Fairfax).