

# **FARM POLICY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAM & BUDGET FY 2023**

A collaboration between the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' members and local, state, and regional food and agriculture stakeholders.

**July 1, 2022 - June 30, 2023**

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## FARM POLICY COMMITTEE BACKGROUND

Following nearly one year of work as the Food and Agriculture Regional Member (FARM) Ad-Hoc Committee, in October 2021 the COG Board of Directors adopted [Resolution R35-2021](#). This Resolution made the FARM Committee a permanent policy committee of the Board and established a Regional Fund (beginning in FY23) to support its work.

Resolution R35-2021 reaffirmed the need for a regional committee to address food insecurity, exacerbated by the public health crisis, to oversee implementation of the [What Our Region Grows](#) report recommendations; and to support a more resilient, connected food and farm economy in Metropolitan Washington.

Resolution R35-2021 charged the FARM Policy Committee with:

1. Improving food security in the region
2. Supporting Black, Indigenous, and People of Color and small farmers
3. Focusing FARM's work on farmland preservation, land use regulations, environmental sustainability, and resilience
4. Improving and communicating regional food system data
5. Leveraging procurement to support equity and the region's food and farm economy

## FISCAL YEAR 2022 HIGHLIGHTS

In FY22, FARM transitioned from its ad hoc committee status to a permanent policy committee. Beginning in calendar year 2022, all COG member jurisdictions can appoint members to the committee. This has expanded FARM's membership and reach. Additional highlights are summarized below.

### DELIVERABLES

During FY22 the FARM Committee, its Work Groups, and support staff, completed or initiated the following:

- A regional farmers market list for Metropolitan Washington - available in National Capital Region Geodata Spatial Exchange (NCR GDX) Emergency Food Resources GIS Layer - which includes information about programs available to support food access for low-income residents. (Completed Fall 2021)
- *The Healthy Food Access Policy Compendium for Metropolitan Washington* highlighting federal, state and local policies supportive of food security, food access, nutrition, and regional food system development. (Completed Summer 2022)

- This landscape assessment is available at:  
<https://www.mwcog.org/documents/2022/06/10/healthy-food-access-policy-compendium-for-metropolitan-washington/>
- Developed the scope of work and secured a consultant for a redesign of [National Capital Farms.org](#). (Completed Spring 2022)
  - COG's Regional Agricultural Work Group members are currently completing a survey to inform an upcoming workshop.
  - On Tuesday, August 16<sup>th</sup>, members of the Regional Agricultural Work Group and COG staff will participate in a consultant-led workshop to solidify priorities for the redesigned site. This will inform a subsequent scope of work and contract for web design work.

## POLICY OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

Last fall, several members of the FARM Committee volunteered to review COG's food and agriculture legislative priorities ahead of the Chair's meeting with colleagues on COG's Legislative Committee. COG's Legislative Committee makes recommendations to the Board for consideration and adoption. FARM members and staff recommended expanding these priorities from two to four. This recommendation was supported by the FARM Committee, the Chair, and ultimately, the COG Board.

COG's adopted legislative priorities on food security, food system resilience, farming, and workforce can be found on page seven of its [2022 Legislative Priorities](#).

Guided by these legislative priorities, COG staff created a legislative tracker for the FARM Policy Committee covering DC, MD, and VA. Using this tracker and other sources of information, FARM provided several letters on federal and state proposed programs, policies, and budget items important to the region during FY22. FARM's outreach included:

- January 2022: Letter of Support for HR 5724 - White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, Hunger, and Health Act.
  - The White House will hold the national Conference on Nutrition, Hunger and Health this September.
- January: Letter in Support of MD SB 121 – Farm to Food Security Act
  - Passed, with amendments.
- February 2022: Request to Congressional Appropriators for Extension of USDA Waiver Authority through the end of school year 2022-2023.
  - Failed to be included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2022.
  - Some (more limited) waiver authorities were extended through the Keep Kids Fed Act in June.
- March 2022: Letter in Support of funding for Virginia Fresh Match (VFM) and the Virginia Food Access and Investment Fund (VFAIF) in the Reconciled Budget for the 2022 to 2024 Biennium.
  - VFM is included in Virginia's budget for 2022 to 2024.
- May 2022: Joint letter of support from the Chesapeake Bay and Water Resources (CBPC) and FARM policy committees to the USDA for the Chesapeake Resilient Farms Initiative (proposed by the Chesapeake Bay Commission and partners)
- July 2022 (initiated June 2022): Stakeholder feedback letter to the White House Conference on Nutrition, Hunger, and Health for priorities to be included in a new national strategy.

- The FARM Policy Committee's letter is available via this COG News Release: <https://www.mwcog.org/newsroom/2022/07/21/dc-area-officials-urge-white-house-to-include-food-security-priorities-in-new-national-strategy/>

COG staff acknowledges and appreciates the leadership and work of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council, Virginia Food Access Coalition, as well as numerous other individuals and ad hoc coalitions involved in monitoring and analyzing proposed legislation in DC, MD, and VA which also informed COG's legislative tracking.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

The FARM Committee continues to be led by founding Chair, Councilmember Mary Cheh (District of Columbia) and Vice Chairs, Councilmembers Craig Rice (Montgomery County) and Councilmember Jon Stehle (City of Fairfax).

FARM is comprised of elected officials and subject matter experts in food and agriculture from DC, MD, and VA. It currently has 26 regular members and 11 alternates. Now that FARM is a permanent policy committee of COG, it is updating its Bylaws to include information on terms for members and committee leadership.

In March, FARM's Chair and Vice Chairs – FARM's Executive Committee – led a new member orientation.

During this fiscal year, the Chair also requested that FARM form several new work groups to continue advancing FARM's priorities between meetings. FARM's new Work Groups include Outreach and Catalytic Opportunities. COG's bimonthly meetings of food policy directors and food policy coordinators continued, and several Regional Agricultural Work Group meetings were held.

The Catalytic Opportunities Work Group has drafted a charter for the group and the Regional Agricultural Work Group is expected to in FY23 to guide priorities and activities.

In June, FARM successfully held its first hybrid meeting with in-person and virtual attendees. FARM continues to meet bimonthly.

The Chair and Vice Chairs – FARM's Executive Committee – continue to periodically meet to review progress toward committee goals and priorities.

## **REGIONAL COORDINATION**

The FARM Policy Committee, its Work Groups, and staff continue to support regional coordination to share information, highlight promising practices, and be responsive to emerging food security-related needs and issues in the region.

### **FARM Meetings**

In FY22, FARM held six regular bimonthly meetings, a joint meeting with CBPC on Land Access for Farmers Identifying as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, a New Member Orientation, and a

meeting to collect feedback from members on FARM's letter on the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health.

Meeting presentations and approved summaries for FARM's FY22 meetings [are available here](#)

## **Work Group Meetings**

### **CATALYTIC OPPORTUNITIES WORK GROUP**

The Catalytic Opportunities Work Group is comprised of six FARM members and one FARM member representative. Members represent elected officials and subject matter experts from across the region.

The Work Group has determined that it will work at the intersection of two of the FARM Policy Committee's current priorities: Supporting Black, Indigenous, and People of Color and small farmers and leveraging procurement to support equity and the region's food and farm economy. The group met virtually on two occasions in FY22, and several members met with staff and one another. In FY22, two members took the lead on developing a Charter for the Work Group to affirm mission, priorities, and activities.

### **OUTREACH WORK GROUP**

The Outreach Work Group is comprised of two FARM members and has met several times to outline activities, gather information on federal legislation from Congressional staff, and to develop a recommendation for a FARM Policy Committee invitation to the USDA's Mid-Atlantic Regional Office for a meeting in FY23.

### **REGIONAL AGRICULTURAL WORK GROUP**

The Regional Agricultural Work Group is COG's oldest Work Group, formed over 15 years ago. The Regional Agricultural Work Group is currently represented on the FARM Committee by several members, including two founding members of the Work Group. The Work Group is comprised of food and farm technical assistance providers including agricultural marketing specialists, Cooperative Extension staff, Soil Conservation District staff, urban agriculture and other local government staff, food policy directors and staff, and more.

In FY22, the Work Group met in December and June on four occasions. Most meetings were virtual, however, in June, the Work Group resumed in-person meetings with a field visit to The Urban Farm Incubator (managed by ECO City FARMS) and Forested, both in Prince George's County.

### **FOOD POLICY DIRECTORS**

The region's Food Policy Directors are also represented on the FARM Committee and started meeting more frequently during COVID-19 to informally share information, potential resources, and emerging best practices on emergency food coordination, policies, and programs. In FY22, the group had five calls with food policy directors and staff, food security coordinators, food security advocacy organizations, and large food assistance providers engaged in food security coordination.

This included a larger group call in January to discuss the impact of the Omicron variant on emergency food assistance needs and provider response, and a call in March to learn about next steps for the Mid-Atlantic Food Resilience and Access Coalition (MAFRAC).

## **Regional Food Security Coordination Calls**

COG also continued its regional food security coordination calls, started close to the onset of COVID-19. Five calls were held on the following topics:

- Changing federal support for housing and food assistance (August 2021)
- Metro DC school meals update with food and nutrition service directors and staff (October 2021)
- 2022 food security legislative preview for DC, MD and VA (November 2021)
- Healthy food access at DC, MD, and VA farmers markets with featured speakers from The Capital Market (February 2022)
- A Metro DC Food Policy Directors Roundtable (March 2022)

## **Additional Regional Coordination Activities**

### *Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Project on Food and Water Resilience*

COG staff continue to support the Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Project on Food and Water Resilience Project led by the District of Columbia's Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEMA). This FEMA-funded project has undertaken supply chain analysis, restoration planning, and more, for critical food and water infrastructure in the region. Staff participated in project team meetings, assisted with external outreach and coordination with other COG committees, contributed subject matter expertise, and provided grant reporting and administration assistance. The HSEMA project lead briefed the FARM Committee on this effort in FY22. Support for this project is on-going.

### *Applied Research Collaborative meetings*

In partnership with the Harry R Hughes Center for Agroecology, an affiliated corporation of the University of Maryland (UMD), staff convened researchers for two meetings from UMD, Virginia State University, Virginia Tech, Howard University, Georgetown University, George Washington University, the University of the District of Columbia, Johns Hopkins University's Center for a Livable Future, and Cooperative Extension in MD and VA to discuss the need and value of an applied food systems research collaborative for the region. New connections were made which will lead to new research proposals, and opportunities to leverage expertise in the region to inform learning and decision-making. There was interest in a collaborative, but scheduling challenges and capacity constraints were such that this question may be revisited in FY23.

### *Support to COG members and participation in local and state Work Groups and Coalitions*

COG staff continued to participate in a range of local work groups and coalitions, as well as one-on-one and small group conversations to provide technical assistance and remain current on local and state-level concerns and milestones. In FY22, staff concluded their service on the Prince George's County Food Security Task Force when the group, led by Councilmember Todd Turner and staff from the Institute of Public Health Innovation, finished its work and presented its final report to the Prince George's County Council. Staff also participated in the Communications and Coordination

Subcommittee of the Maryland Food Resiliency Council. An example of member outreach was the coordinated presentation that staff developed with the Maryland Food Bank, FARM, and DC HSEMA on food security and resilience for the Charles County Board of Commissioners in March.

## **FISCAL YEAR 2023 PRIORITIES AND ACTIVITIES**

In fiscal year 2023, the FARM Committee will build on FY22's initiatives and deliverables, deepen connections between Work Groups and the FARM Committee, welcome new committee leadership and members, expand its relationship with the research community, and continue to serve as a convener on food security issues and concerns, as well as opportunities to support regional food system equity, investment, and resilience.

FARM will complete a high-level mid-year assessment of the work program to refine select activities for the third and fourth quarter of the fiscal year.

Major activities are listed by FARM priority. Activities are also coded by which part of the food system they may impact.

### **IMPROVING FOOD SECURITY**

FARM will use the *Healthy Food Access Policy Compendium for Metropolitan Washington* to further focus committee activities, including policy outreach and education, to promote policies which increase food security.

The Compendium provides a means to help discuss local and regional needs, and solutions, with local, state, and federal partners. It is intended to be a living document and has already informed FARM's feedback on the White House Conference on Nutrition, Hunger, and Health.

This document, conference outcomes, identified FARM priorities, and feedback from Work Groups will help to refine planning for FARM's food security work, especially during the third and fourth quarters of this fiscal year.






FARM will also continue to elevate and support local, state, and regional opportunities to address food insecurity through the creation and implementation strong federal, state, and local programs.

It will continue to convene regional stakeholders to build partnerships, share best practices, and respond to emerging food security and food access needs in Work Group meetings and periodic regional food security coordination calls. Staff will continue to serve as a liaison to local, state, and regional partners with similar priorities for improving food insecurity through coordination and policy (e.g. local food policy and food security coordination bodies, the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council, the Virginia Food Access Coalition, etc.)

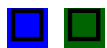
Staff will also continue to support DMV Food Recovery Week in October and participate in the DC Food Recovery Work Group.

Staff will continue to support the Food and Water Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Project, led by the District's Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency, with technical expertise and outreach support. It will collaborate with the COG's Department of Homeland Security and Public



Food System Element	Production	Processing	Aggregation and Distribution	Access and Consumption	Recovery and Waste Resources
Symbol					

Safety to engage the region’s emergency managers, and other partners, on key food security issues. Staff will also work with food assistance providers, emergency managers, and other subject matter experts to produce a guide for food pantries and food banks to prepare for emergencies. This builds off the Capital Area Food Bank and Connected DMV *Emergency Food Relief Playbook*.



## SUPPORTING BLACK, INDIGENOUS, PEOPLE OF COLOR AND SMALL FARMERS

In FY23, FARM’s Catalytic Opportunities Work Group will be supported to implement its defined mission and Work Program. It will work at the intersection of two of the FARM Policy Committee’s current priorities: Supporting Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and small farmers and leveraging procurement to support equity and the region’s food and farm economy.






The Catalytic Opportunities Work Group will recommend how FARM can disaggregate the term “BIPOC” to more accurately discuss the barriers and opportunities faced by different farmers of color. It is expected to outline the current situation for Black American, American Indigenous, Latino farmers and other farmers with a history of race-based social disadvantage in the region and identify opportunities to make tangible progress on FARM priorities. It will do so through case study research and consultation with subject-matter experts to identify local barriers and opportunities to equitable participation in the local food economy. The work group will focus on gaining a thorough understanding of the situation facing Black American farmers first. It will brief FARM members on findings and make on programmatic and policy changes to advance priorities.

COG staff will work with FARM Committee, Work Groups, and stakeholders to frame identified FARM priorities – such as supporting BIPOC farmers - through unparalleled federal funding opportunities for food system transformation. Staff and FARM will budget time and financial resources to assist with proposal development.

In addition, COG staff is working with the Regional Agricultural Work Group to expand membership; increasing participation among local government and Extension staff, and BIPOC organizations and technical assistance providers. Staff will work with FARM and the staff-level Regional Agricultural Work Group to establish coordination between the two.

Staff will work with the funding to community to provide information on local and regional food system issues and opportunities. It will also continue to serve on the annual conference planning committee for Future Harvest, the region’s sustainable agriculture organization.



Food System Element	Production	Processing	Aggregation and Distribution	Access and Consumption	Recovery and Waste Resources
Symbol					

## FOCUSING FARM’S WORK ON FARMLAND PRESERVATION, LAND USE REGULATIONS, ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY, AND RESILIENCE

COG staff and members of the Regional Agricultural Work Group will provide FARM with a brief update to the 2019 *What Our Region Grows Report* which includes the latest available Census of Agriculture data available (2017) and 2022 local data updates on issues like protected farmland acreage and land access programs. It will include a high-level assessment of needs and opportunities related to farmland preservation and land access to protect future food supply, promote healthy soils for economic and environmental benefits (e.g. water, climate), etc.

Staff will work with FARM members, the Catalytic Opportunities Work Group, and Regional Agricultural Work Group to identify programming, educational and engagement opportunities, based on the summary. It will highlight opportunities for land preservation to redress past harm and disparities in land access for BIPOC farmers, opportunities to increase land access for young farmers, and build a relationship with the Chesapeake Bay Program to leverage regional land use data and expertise.

COG staff will work across departments to align opportunities to address a shared goal for livability and sustainability in the region: maintaining land in farms. This could take the form of a workshop for planning and other local government staff on farmland preservation and opportunities to examine land use regulations to be more supportive of food and farming across urban, suburban, and rural communities.








## IMPROVING AND COMMUNICATING FOOD SYSTEM DATA

The Regional Agricultural Work Group will continue to work with COG staff and its consultant to relaunch the National Capital Farms website and brand. The relaunch and social media campaign will also drive more traffic to food and farm resources in COG member jurisdictions.

As a part of this effort, staff will create a DMV food and agriculture calendar for National Capital Farms, the FARM Committee, and local and regional partners. This project will provide an opportunity to work with FARM to consider a unified calendar to commemorate and showcase BIPOC farmers, small farmers, and food system infrastructure in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia. An example could be a proposal to establish urban agriculture month in October in DC and MD to coincide with VA’s commemoration.

Staff will continue to support the development and maintenance of the NCR GDX regional Emergency Food Resources GIS layer. In the first quarter, staff will outreach to local and state colleagues for

participation in the Food and Water Resilience Summit, including a session to determine support needs and standard operating procedures for maintaining this GIS layer. It will work with the HSEMA-

Food System Element	Production	Processing	Aggregation and Distribution	Access and Consumption	Recovery and Waste Resources
Symbol					

led project team, select COG Work Groups, FARM and COG members, and NCR GDx staff to implement findings.

Staff will continue to raise awareness about the region’s [Equity Emphasis Areas](#) and promote their use in food system data analysis and visualization.

Interested FARM members and staff will also undertake continuous assessment of emerging opportunities to promote and engage in applied research and food system data improvement among external partners, such as the region’s colleges and universities, FARM, and other partners.

Staff will identify opportunities to work with partners to develop and resource applied research projects where there is regional member need and interest and participate in regional research study advisory boards as time permits. Staff can provide periodic ad hoc support to researchers in Metropolitan Washington supporting applied research through informal convenings if requested.



## LEVERAGING PROCUREMENT TO SUPPORT EQUITY AND THE REGION'S FOOD AND FARM ECONOMY

In addition to the Catalytic Opportunities Work Group’s efforts, COG staff will continue to participate in the DC Good Food Purchasing Program Coalition in FY23.



## FARM MEETING SCHEDULE

Per the schedule below, **2-hour bimonthly FARM Committee Meetings** are generally scheduled for the **2nd Friday of the month that the committee convenes, from 11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.** Several additional meetings may be added.

FARM Members are also invited to attend COG's Annual Meeting in December.

Date	Draft Description
8/12/2022	Webinar only
9/9/22	FARM Member visit to Montgomery County's Agricultural Reserve
10/14/2022	FARM Committee Meeting
12/9/2022	FARM Committee Meeting
2/10/2023	FARM Committee Meeting
4/14/2023	FARM Committee Meeting
6/9/2023	FARM Committee Meeting

## WORK GROUP MEETINGS

The **Catalytic Opportunities Work Group** will meet next in late August. Among other questions, the Work Group will be asked if it would like to set a regular meeting schedule or continue to meet on an ad hoc basis.

The **Outreach Work Group** meets on an ad hoc basis and is currently working on building its relationship with USDA to establish an annual meeting with the FARM Policy Committee.

Members of the **Regional Agricultural Work Group** will meet in mid-August to work on the update to the National Capital Farms website. A goal for FY23 is to offer at least two in-person meetings for information exchange, learning, networking, and Work Group business. Additional virtual meetings may be offered, and the Work Group will develop and consider a charter to guide future work, including membership expansion.

Bimonthly **Food Policy Director Calls** will resume in September or October. These are informal networking and information sharing calls with food policy directors and staff, food security coordinators, and large food assistance providers engaged in food security coordination. This group will continue to welcome new members as local food security coordinator staffing increases. In FY23, the group may determine interest and feasibility in collaborating on a training workshop for the broader food security community.

## REGIONAL FOOD SECURITY COORDINATION CALLS

Periodic one-to-1.5-hour virtual meetings, generally be scheduled for the third or fourth Thursday of the month from 3:30 or 4:00 to 5:00 p.m.

Approximately five coordination calls are proposed for FY23. Increasing partner collaboration to co-host and promote calls, and recruit speakers and participants, is a goal.

An in-person gathering will be considered for FY23 to facilitate networking and recognize milestones.

### Fiscal Year 2023 Topics

- 2023 Food Security and Resilience Legislative Preview(s)
- Emergency Preparedness for Food Assistance Organizations

### Proposed Topics for FARM and Work Group Feedback

- Exploring the Enhanced Mobility Program and Grants for Older Adults and People with Disabilities
- School Meals and Nutrition
- Centering Lived Experience in Food Security Policy and Programs
- Roundtable with Food Assistance Providers
- Strategy to Address Childhood Hunger in Montgomery County
- Food as Medicine: From Programs to Policy in Metropolitan Washington
- Regional Farmers Market Workshop or Metro DC Regional Farmers Market Nutrition Incentives Coalition Update
- Food systems staffing in local government

## FY 2023 FARM BUDGET

During FY22, COG’s Board created the member-supported FARM Fund to finance the FARM Committee’s work, beginning in FY23.

The FARM budget for FY 2023 includes funding for a full time FARM Committee Coordinator, several other COG staff who support FARM and its Work Groups, and a college intern. The budget also includes programmatic funds to support meeting expenses, speaker fees, and limited travel. Staff recommends that additional funds be budgeted for contractual assistance to develop special meetings or events, contribute to regional initiatives, or to provide grant writing support.

COG’s Regional Agricultural Initiative was the recipient of two philanthropic grants in FY22. These grants are not reflected in the budget below but are being leveraged to redesign and relaunch the [National Capital Farms website](#) to raise the profile of the region’s food and farm economy. National Capital Farms will also showcase COG member jurisdictions and state resources to connect with farmers and support a more equitable, resilient food system.

BUDGET EXPENSES	
Fiscal Year 2023	
FARM Coordinator, COG Staff, and Intern Support	\$293,000
Meeting expenses/speaker fees/travel/misc	\$10,000
Contractual assistance	\$22,602
Total	\$325,602

Revenue will be primarily derived from COG member contributions to a new regional FARM fund. Proposed FY23 contributions were presented to the COG Board as part of its consideration to make the Board permanent and create the new fund. It approved recommended contribution levels in October 2022 as part of [Resolution R45-2021](#).

These recommended contribution levels were shared with FARM at its June meeting as part of the FY23 Elements, Priorities, Levels of Effort, and Proposed Budget document.

Projected revenue for FY23 if all members contribute is \$325,602.

In the future, recommended fund contributions, based on population with a maximum cap for large jurisdictions, will be reviewed by the FARM Committee every year prior to presentation to the COG Board as part of COG's annual budget.

### **Staff Role**

In FY23, COG staff will support the FARM Committee, Work Groups, and other partners in the following ways enumerated in the preceding pages and Appendix A. It hopes to expand staffing capacity somewhat to support FARM and increase its impact.