



## FOOD AND AGRICULTURE REGIONAL MEMBER AD-HOC COMMITTEE (FARM)

### MEETING SUMMARY (DRAFT)

DECEMBER 11, 2020

#### LINK TO ALL MEETING PRESENTATIONS AND MATERIALS:

[HTTPS://WWW.MWCOG.ORG/EVENTS/2020/12/11/FOOD-AND-AGRICULTURE-REGIONAL-MEMBER-AD-HOC-COMMITTEE-FARM/](https://www.mwco.org/events/2020/12/11/food-and-agriculture-regional-member-ad-hoc-committee-farm/)

#### DECISIONS AND ACTIONS:

- Short Term
  - Draft a letter to share with the USDA transition team that outlines challenges related to implementation of federal nutrition benefit programs to support food security in the region; noting how program changes during Covid-19 both hampered and expanded access.
  - Recommend minor amendment to food security legislative priority to include regional farmers and food businesses. Incorporate necessary changes to punctuation and style.
- Medium and Longer Term
  - Gather a list of food related legislative priorities across the region
  - Explore creating a 'food bank' to share capital for infrastructure/funds for new farmers
  - Compile a list of regional procurement standards that prioritize food security, sustainability, and equity
  - Expand upon existing resources (such as the Southern Maryland Development Commission) to create a series of outreach materials/webinars for new farmers; inviting agencies to share and discuss their programs.

#### 1. WELCOME, CALL TO ORDER, AND ROLE CALL

Councilmember Mary Cheh called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m.

#### 2. FARM MEETING SUMMARY APPROVAL

Members approved the summary of the 2020 November FARM meeting.

#### 3. FARM COMMITTEE INTRODUCTIONS

Several FARM Members that were unable to attend the November meeting provided brief introductions highlighting their interest and background in food and farming issues. Heidi Hertz, Assistant Secretary for Agriculture and Forestry (Virginia), Kate Lee, Director of Urban Agriculture (District of Columbia), and Supervisor Caleb Kershner (Loudoun County) introduced themselves.

#### 4. COG 2021 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Monica Beyrouiti Nuñez, COG's Government Relations Supervisor, provided a high-level overview of the Legislative setting process. The COG Legislative Committee voted to send the two priorities posted below for COG Board to approve at their January 13, 2021 meeting.

Members supported the initiatives and stated that they align with priorities across several jurisdictions. Several changes to punctuation and style were recommended to the priorities. A suggestion was raised to include a focus on supporting regional farmers in the food security priority.

Councilmember Mary Cheh also suggested that it would be helpful to gather a list of related legislative priorities across the region to share with the FARM committee members.

##### COG 2021 Legislative Priorities

- **Increase Food Security and Promote Healthy Food Access**  
Amidst growing food insecurity across the region, lack of clarity on the timing of additional, needed federal relief for vulnerable families and individuals, and uncertainty about when the Childhood Nutrition Reauthorization Act may be taken up again; support federal, state and local initiatives to increase food and cash assistance to residents in need, increase participation in programs among eligible residents, and streamline program administration. Increase funding for the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP). Enhance and expand the Women Infants and Children (WIC) Program, federally funded school meal programs, and other programs that improve food access for vulnerable low-income individuals and families in the region.
- **Support Small and Medium-sized Farmers, Food Entrepreneurs, and Restaurants**  
Support strengthening programs that advance regional food systems development, on-farm conservation, connections between farmers and consumers of all income levels, especially programs that provide incentives to help low-income residents access healthy local food. Support renewed relief for restaurants and food businesses, and efforts to address long-standing food system inequities faced by black, indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) farmers and food business owners.

#### 5. FARM 2021 MEETINGS AND PROPOSED FORMAT

The FARM committee will continue to meet on the second Friday of each month, moving to every other month after February's meeting. The meetings will be starting at 11:00 a.m.

The 2021 meeting schedule - 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Friday, January 8<sup>th</sup>  
Friday, February 12<sup>th</sup>  
Friday, April 9<sup>th</sup>  
Friday, June 11<sup>th</sup>  
Friday, August 13<sup>th</sup>  
Friday, October 8<sup>th</sup>

#### 6. FARM PRIORITIES DISCUSSION AND NEXT STEPS

Following up on some questions raised at the December meeting, in terms of a compendium of resources there are a number of existing databases but further research is needed to verify if there is one pertaining to the Chesapeake region on food access and security. It was also noted that to align and take advantage of existing COG programs, the regional agriculture workgroup will reconvene in 2021.

This workgroup along with members from the bi-weekly food access and food security calls will provide additional technical expertise to FARM members throughout the year.

The Chair led a discussion about Committee priorities, emphasizing the need to prioritize near and long-term objectives. Members agreed to work on the following priorities:

### Food Security

- Maximize participation in federal nutrition programs; share best practices for implementation and outreach
- Advocate regionally for federal relief and recovery funding
- Reduce barriers to food access at farmers markets

Members discussed that a short-term goal of the committee could be to create a letter to share with the USDA's transition team. The letter could outline how federal nutrition programs have been implemented in the region and where there have been challenges. This could include how some of the changes made during COVID have both hampered and expanded access, and where there may be changes that should be continued.

COG is providing input to the incoming administration's transition teams and could work with the FARM committee to incorporate these efforts into a broader COG communication. The FARM Ad Hoc Committee also discussed writing a standalone letter on food and agriculture issues, or using an op-ed to communicate the Committee's views.

COG staff indicated letter would be subject to internal review for consistency with the legislative priorities. The process for developing an Op-Ed was also described.

The Chair recommended that FARM both craft its own letter and incorporate information on food security issues into a broader letter. Several FARM members were asked and offered to assist.

- Additional comments and suggestions from members
  - Create a list of regional farmers markets
    - The MD Dept of Ag's Maryland's Best website <http://marylandsbest.net/> provides a searchable database for farmers markets (and other ways to connect with local farmers and watermen)
    - List of farmers markets from the Maryland Department of Agriculture [https://mda.maryland.gov/maryland\\_products/Documents/2020-Maryland-Farmers-Market-Directory.pdf](https://mda.maryland.gov/maryland_products/Documents/2020-Maryland-Farmers-Market-Directory.pdf)
    - Explore not only reduced barriers to food access at farmers markets but rather reduced barriers to farmers market access
    - Note that one of the upcoming biweekly food security and food access calls will focus on the subject of farmers markets/access
  - Include school meals as a priority and work with Congress to ensure funding across all jurisdictions – schools have been deeply impacted by the crisis and
  - Food security as food access and economic access but also food security as it relates to the agriculture systems and infrastructure regionally.
  - Online SNAP (1) extending the expansion of the online SNAP pilot after the public health emergency and (2) expanding authorized vendors, including more small businesses and farmers markets
  - The link to the Virginia Roadmap to End Hunger <https://feedva.org/connect/roadmap-to-end-hunger/>
  - Support of food businesses/culturally diverse businesses
  - DC Food Economy Study: <https://dcfoodpolicy.org/reports/food-economy-study/>

- CFN Blueprint for Community Ownership Report:  
<http://www.chesapeakefoodshed.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/COEP-FinalReport.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2axsduKoUPIXEzL7fa3gJ19QxumamQNbNduCUDToBK5QHmaYkCzo15cag>

## Agriculture

- Increase opportunities for BIPOC farmers, address barriers to land ownership
- Identify and address barriers to processing and distribution of local products
- Help small farmers access capital, infrastructure, and markets to grow their enterprises (individually or cooperatively)
- Increase gardening opportunities (e.g., community gardens, school gardens, backyard chickens)
- Comments and additional suggestions from members:
  - Future Harvest and both Virginia and Maryland Extension all have good farmer (including beginning farmer) education and networking programs. Likewise, Farm Bureau in MD and VA have Young Farmers programs
  - The Montgomery County Office of Agriculture works with Montgomery Countryside Alliance and their Lank Link program to help connect beginning farmers with landowners interested in having someone produce food on their farms.
  - Access to land is one of the biggest issues for expanding local food production in the region.
  - There's increased interest in farming in Charles County from more diverse groups of people and more is needed to help people get started.
  - Explore urban agriculture opportunities such as rooftop or indoor farms
  - Create a 'food bank' to share capital for infrastructure/funds for new farmers
  - FARM should expand upon existing resources (such as the Southern Maryland Development Commission) to create a series of outreach materials/webinars for new farmers; inviting agencies to share and discuss their programs.
  - MARBIDCO just started offering a "Small Acreage Next Generation Farmland Acquisition Program" for both farm and easement conservation purchases to help beginning farmers by farms of 10 to 49 acres in size. This program is available throughout Maryland.
  - Loudoun County was featured on PBS's "Real Virginia" show with a segment on the reestablishment of our Purchase of Development Rights Program.

## Food Procurement and Purchasing

- Support local farmers and BIPOC farmers through targeted institutional and government procurement
- Explore and share procurement standards for sustainability, health, equity, local purchasing
- Comments and additional suggestions from members:
  - Obtain best practices for institutional purchasing for K-12 schools, universities, and hospitals
  - Research if there are best practices around setting purchasing targets sourcing from BIPOC farmers.
  - The Maryland's Farm to School program looks at local food procurement.
  - Research the Entrepreneurs of Color Fund; they have been working with large public institutions (universities/hospitals) about shifting procurement to BIPOC owned businesses. Link: <https://wacif.org/eoc/>
  - 4P Foods has experience in establishing sourcing relationships with large universities, DCPS (Sodexo Magic) and others and would have great insight. Potential also for building in BIPOC targets in those contracts
  - There are a number of military installations in the region, and we may want to consider what the bases are doing in this arena. The Northern Virginia Regional Commission has

been working with Belvoir, Quantico, and Myer/Henderson Hall on joint purchasing for road salts.

- The Districts Urban Ag Infrastructure RFA will be released in early January making \$120K of city funds available to support farm development
- COG has a Chief Procurement Officers Committee that can serve as a resource to explore cooperative purchasing/shared resources

#### Data

- Develop listing for the COG region on direct markets (farmers markets, farm stands, CSAs, food access programs)
- Develop regional food assistance GIS layer in NCR GDx
- Organize compendium of food access/food security programs and resources across the region

#### 7. LOCAL UPDATES, ANNOUNCEMENTS AND ADJOURN

- Prince George's County Councilmember Sydney Harrison discussed [the Prince George's County Healthy Kids' Meals Bill \(CB-071\)](#), the first of its kind in the nation. [Link to story](#) in *The Washington Post*.
- Montgomery County passed a special appropriation for \$12.8 million dollars to continue funding for food security initiatives through June 2021
- The next Biweekly Metro DC Food Access and Food Security Call is scheduled for December 17th at 4 pm. – contact COG staff for the meeting link.
- The next FARM meeting is scheduled for January 8, 2021 from 11 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

#### ATTENDANCE:

Mary Cheh, Chair, District of Columbia

Jon Stehle, Vice Chair, City of Fairfax

Gilbert (BJ) Bowling III, Charles County

Libby Garvey, Arlington County

Penny Gross, Fairfax County

Sydney J. Harrison, Prince George's County, MD

Amy B. Jackson, City of Alexandria

Caleb A Kershner, Loudoun County, VA

Ann B. Wheeler, Prince William County, VA

Ona Balkus, District of Columbia Food Policy Council

Heather Bruskin, Montgomery County Food Council

Jeremy V. Criss, Office of Agriculture, Montgomery County

Heidi Hertz, Assistant Secretary for Agriculture and Forestry for Virginia

Conaway B. Haskins III, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Commonwealth of Virginia

Kate Lee, Office of Urban Agriculture, District of Columbia

Hugo Mogollon, FRESHFARM

Sara Pollock Hoverter, Harrison Institute for Public Law, Georgetown University J

Julie Oberg, Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, State of Maryland

Victoria Treski, Bainum Family Foundation

Chris Van Vlack, Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District

Michael J. Wilson, Maryland Hunger Solutions

Rachel Clark, Office of Councilmember Cheh (alternate)

Reuben B. Collins II, ESQ, Charles County (alternate)

Tom Ross, City of Fairfax (alternate)

**Other Participants**

Kim Haun, Arlington County Department of Parks and Recreation

Stacey Carey, Office of Supervisor Kershner

Charles Sasscer, Univ of Maryland, Prince George's County

Aaron Tolson, Prince William Food Rescue/GPW Food Council

Steve McHenry, Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO)

Caroline Rankin, Fairfax County Government Food Assistance Committee

Stacey Evers, Fairfax Food Council

Dawn MJ Hyman, One Fairfax, Office of the County Executive

**COG Staff**

Lindsay Smith

Monica Beyrouiti Nunez (COG Executive Office)

Steve Bieber

Tom Gates

Christine Howard (Host)

Brian LeCouteur

Steve Walz