



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

MEETING SUMMARY (DRAFT)

OCTOBER 14, 2022

All presentations from the meeting, and the approved August meeting summary, can be found at: <https://www.mwcog.org/events/2022/10/14/food-and-agriculture-regional-member-farm-policy-committee/>

DECISIONS AND ACTIONS:

- Short Term
 - FARM members approved the August meeting summary with a quorum.
 - Outstanding action item from FARM's August meeting is to send a letter to the region's Congressional delegation in support of the *Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act* (Childhood Nutrition Reauthorization).
 - FARM Members and stakeholders should review funding and support opportunities shared by USDA. Opportunities mentioned by Deputy Under Secretary Dean and Dr. Patty Bennett, Mid-Atlantic Regional Administrator for FNS, include:
 - Low-income residents, including in households participating in federal nutrition programs, are eligible for the Affordable Connectivity Program which provides monthly financial assistance to reduce internet charges. A comprehensive Outreach Toolkit is available at: <https://www.fcc.gov/acp-consumer-outreach-toolkit>
 - The second round of TEFAP Reach and Resiliency Grants is now open for TEFAP state agencies to apply.
 - TEFAP state agencies interested in applying should submit a Letter of Intent to FNS by Jan. 4, 2023
 - <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/reach-resiliency-grant>
 - USDA FY23 Farm to School Grant.
 - Application closes Jan. 6, 2023
 - <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/viewopportunity.html?oppld=343898>
 - Funding opportunities for WIC, FMNP, and SFMNP
 - Please see Dr. Bennett's presentation for more information
 - FARM should push for implementation of the *National Strategy on Hunger, Health and Nutrition*.
 - It should consider how the region's priorities from the Strategy can be included in priorities for the Farm Bill.
 - Supervisor Gross would like for FARM to hear from [Spring Forward](#) which is partnering on an indoor farming operation (microgreens, leafy greens) in Baltimore.
 - A priority of Spring Forward is building community wealth and employee

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ownership – an approach that FARM should be supporting in our region and one that Supervisor Gross would like to bring to Fairfax County.

CALL TO ORDER, MEETING SUMMARY APPROVAL, AND REFLECTIONS

- District of Columbia Councilmember Mary Cheh, FARM Chair, called the meeting to order at 11:03 am.
- Councilmember Cheh provided an update on a recent presentation that she provided to the COG Board with Councilmembers Rice and Stehle.
 - They shared some highlights from the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health.
 - They also asked the Board to consider a Resolution Endorsing the Federal Child Tax Credit and Universal Free School Meals for the known, positive impacts these policies have on food security.
 - Link to the Certified Resolution:
<https://www.mwcog.org/documents/2022/10/12/certified-resolution-r50-2022--endorsing-the-federal-child-tax-credit-and-universal-free-school-meals/>
- FARM members approved the August draft meeting summary with a quorum.
- Councilmembers Cheh and Stehle reflected upon the September tour of the Agricultural Reserve including the County's impressive decision to protect so much agricultural land. They thanked the tour organizers and Councilmember Stehle suggested that a farm tour become an annual event for FARM.

FIRST ANNUAL FARM POLICY COMMITTEE WITH THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Stacy Dean, Deputy Under Secretary for USDA's Food and Nutrition Service provided opening remarks.

- Dean oversees *USDA's Food and Nutrition Service Agency* – called FNS.
- FNS is one of 29 agencies and offices in USDA
- FNS works to end hunger and improve food and nutrition security through more than 15 federal nutrition assistance programs which together serve 1 in 4 Americans over the course of the year.
- FNS' national office is in Alexandria, VA
 - Half of FNS' employees are in this office.
- FNS has 7 regional offices across the country
 - DC, MD, and VA are in Mid-Atlantic Region
- *White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health* was held two weeks ago in DC.
- Numerous people came together at the recent conference (in-person and online), including members of the FARM Committee.
 - The Biden Harris administration released a national strategy that set out a pathway to achieve the goals of reducing hunger and diet related disease.
 - Also secured over eight billion dollars in public, nonprofit and private sector commitments.

- Echoed Secretary Vilsack's remarks that the conference was a big day, but much more important is what comes after it and what we do to execute on the vision.
- USDA wants to leverage the momentum from the conference to make lasting change.
 - Eager to work with partners and state and local governments, philanthropic sector, parents and community members, and so many others with a role to play in achieving goals.
 - Interested in what FARM thinks is the highest priority.
- Dean touched upon USDA's a several other recent priorities and actions at USDA, including its priority for Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry.
 - Agriculture, forestry and rural America are uniquely affected by a warm climate and positioned to be a meaningful part of the solution.
 - Partnerships for Climate Smart Commodities has already provided 2.8 billion dollars for 70 projects across the country.
 - Some of these cover the DMV area. And in a broad array of commodities.
 - USDA is also utilizing existing conservation programs like the Conservation Reserve Program and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program to help producers make their operations more resilient to climate change.
- USDA has invested more in Urban Agriculture to serve producers and cities.
 - People's Garden Initiative to expand community gardens nationwide
- USDA's Reconnect loans and grants programs provide funds to expand high speed Internet service in rural areas.
 - Reliable internet is critical to our lives and everyday services we use.
 - Program has distributed billions this year and received more through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.
 - Law also created the [Affordable Connectivity Program](#) that lowers Internet costs for families.
 - Provides eligible households up to \$30 dollars/month off their Internet bills and a one time, \$100 dollar discount on tablet, laptop or computer purchases.
 - Household is eligible for ACP if the household income at or below 200% of Federal Poverty Guidelines, or if a member participates in Medicaid, Free and Reduced Price Meals, SNAP, etc.
 - <https://www.affordableconnectivity.gov/> to check eligibility and sign up
 - USDA love to collaborate with FARM to get the word out.

Action Item: FARM Members and other stakeholders can find a comprehensive Outreach Toolkit at: <https://www.fcc.gov/acp-consumer-outreach-toolkit>

- USDA is committed to prioritizing equity.
 - Recognizes the damaging effects of systemic racism and discrimination that persists and USDA's history of not fairly distributing resources to all customers.
 - Committed to taking aggressive action to advanced racial justice and equity with multi-pronged approach.
 - Some examples include an equity commission to review programs and services and identify barriers to entry.
 - USDA also has an internal diversity, equity and inclusion and accessibility program and plan.

- Upholding civil rights and strengthening tribal relationships.
- Other work that FNS has done includes:
 - Expanded SNAP online to 49 states and the District of Columbia
 - Working to expand online ordering and transactions for WIC
 - Investing more in translating key nutrition, education, resources into other languages to incorporate and all of our nutrition education resources.
 - [Launched initiative](#) to expand the reach of emergency food network into remote, rural tribal, other low-income areas that are currently underserved by the federal food programs.
 - Virginia what was one of the first states to receive a grant in the 1st round
 - More funds will be made available.

Note: The second round of TEFAP Reach and Resiliency Grants is now open for TEFAP state agencies to apply. Link: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/reach-resiliency-grant>

SNAP, SCHOOL MEALS, AND REGIONAL AGRICULTURAL CONNECTIONS TO FEDERAL FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMS

Dr. Patty Bennett, Regional Administrator for FNS for the Mid-Atlantic Region, provided updates on key federal programs supporting food and nutrition in Metropolitan Washington including SNAP, WIC, school meals, and farmers market nutrition programs.

- Her presentation [is available here](#) and contains:
 - Important data on the reach of SNAP and WIC in DC, MD, and VA
 - Actions that DC, MD, and VA have taken to support expanded participation in school meals.
 - Upcoming funding opportunities for states and other partners to support food security.

Dr. Bennett explained the function of the Mid-Atlantic Office (MARO):

- Support states in implementing the nutritional assistance programs
- Provide oversight as stewards of taxpayer dollars - never seems to be issue of overspending
- Working with the individual states relative to whatever problems or challenges they're experiencing
 - All states working through how to serve customers going forward and finding best mix of in-person and virtual to meet needs
 - Hiring and retaining staff is a challenge being faced by states across the country, not just in this region
- MARO meets with MD advocates pretty regularly.
- Dr. Bennett encourages others to reach out – we all have a role in combatting hunger.
- Office working very closely with MD to improve access to nutrition programs for limited English-speaking households
- Dr Bennett reviewed school meal participation numbers for DC, MD, and Virginia and acknowledged expiration of waivers providing free meals to all students.
 - USDA/MARO are urging expanded use of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) by eligible districts and schools to provide free meals

- There has been expansion in DC, MD, and VA
- VA has expanded rapidly
- Several states across the country are working to pass legislation to provide free meals for all.

FARM Members raised the following points and questions for Dr. Bennett and her team.

- The SNAP redetermination process has been very complicated for MD participants and has had negative impacts on enrollment.
 - Advocates would prefer a simpler remote system, like the waivers, which were helpful during the pandemic.
- Skimming/stealing SNAP benefits is also a problem – this needs to be addressed preventatively and their needs to be a way for people who have had their benefits stolen to be reimbursed.
- How states are expanding access to free meals.
- Frustration that the federal government is not continuing to provide free meals for children.
- Sustained funding opportunities for expanding farm-to-school and local sourcing for food, including from marginalized producers to reduce the cost barriers for large school districts.
 - Dr. Bennett offered to follow up with Heather Bruskin on the FARM Committee to discuss this further.

NATIONAL STRATEGY ON HUNGER, NUTRITION AND HEALTH

- Vice Chair Rice led a discussion about the recent White House Conference and new [*National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health*](#) and emphasized the importance of ensuring that recommendations are implemented.
 - FARM needs to push for this.
 - Some of this will require legislation.
- Radha Muthiah was heartened by the whole of government approach to ending hunger.
 - Shared some of the ways in which Capital Area Food Bank will be expanding and scaling programs discussed at the White House and other conferences, such as its food as medicine partnerships.
 - Highlighted several significant commitments that were announced as a result of the conference.
- Hugo Mogollon noted an absence of discussion about where food comes from and sourcing at the conference.
 - As our region responds to the strategy, he hopes we will think about how we can integrate this with the strategy’s important goals.
 - FARM should consider how the region’s priorities from the strategy can be included in priorities for the Farm Bill.

STAFF, FARM WORK GROUP, AND MEMBER UPDATES

- Dalila Bolin at Food Works Group provided an update on the region’s application for a USDA Regional Food Business Center.
- Libby Garvey provided an update from the Catalytic Opportunities Work Group on its intent to work with a consultant with the support of Bainum Family Foundation.

- Heather Bruskin highlighted:
 - Upcoming [DMV Food Recovery Week](#)
 - The Food Policy Directors/Food Security Coordinators Work Groups' acceptance to a [new national Community of Practtice for food policy councils focused on working regionally.](#)
 - Release of the [Arlington County Food Security Strategic Plan.](#)
 - Montgomery County's work on a Strategic Plan to End Childhood Hunger.
- Supervisor Gross discussed the Philips School (in her District) and their connection to other projects, such as an indoor farm in Baltimore.
 - She would like for them to present to FARM.

REVIEW ACTION ITEMS AND ADJOURN

The next regularly scheduled FARM Policy Committee meeting is Friday, December 9th at 11:00 am.

FARM Members were encouraged to register for, and attend, COG's Annual Meeting in December.

Chair Cheh adjourned the meeting at 1:58 pm.

ATTENDANCE:

Mary Cheh, Chair, District of Columbia
 Craig Rice, Vice Chair, Montgomery County
 Jon Stehle, Vice Chair, City of Fairfax
 Amy Jackson, City of Alexandria
 Kate Kennedy, City of College Park
 Libby Garvey, Arlington County
 Penny Gross, Fairfax County
 Kenny Boddye, Prince William County
 Ruben Collins, III, Charles County (alternate)
 Cesar Cucufate, City of Laurel
 Maria Mackie, City of College Park (alternate)
 Tom Ross, City of Fairfax (alternate)
 Heather Bruskin, Montgomery County Food Council
 Jeremy Criss, Montgomery County Office of Agriculture
 Zachari Curtis, MAFRAC Advisory Board
 Meredith Ledlie Johnson, Virginia Cooperative Extension
 Kate Lee, District of Columbia Office of Urban Agriculture
 Radha Muthiah, Capital Area Food Bank
 Selena Mendy Singleton, Montgomery County Council (alternate)
 Hugo Mogollon, FRESHFARM
 Sara Pollock Hoverter, Georgetown University
 Victoria Treski, Bainum Family Foundation
 Chris Van Vlack, Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District
 Bridget Warren, Prince George's County Office of Food Security
 Michael J Wilson, Maryland Hunger Solutions
 Nick Stavely, FRESHFARM (alternate)

Steven Palmer, Office of Councilmember Cheh
Sharon Ledner, Office of Councilmember Rice
Kara Motosicky, FNS, Mid-Atlantic Region, USDA
Dalila Boclin, Foodworks Group
Elizabeth Borst, Virginia Community Food Connections and Virginia Fresh Match
Carla Cash, MAFRAC
Amy Crone, Market Link
DC WIC Office
Deb Dramby, Future Harvest
Tiffany Fitzgerald, DC Greens
Jennifer Freeman, Community FarmShare
Gretchen Greiner-Lott, Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation
Yessenia Gonzalez, Office of Delegate Danica Roem
Liliana Gomori-Ruben
Fatimah Hassan, M-NCPPC/Prince George's County Planning Department
Becca Hentges, Capital Area Food Bank
Pam Hess, Arcadia
Heather Hulsey, Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission
Melissa Jensen, City of Alexandria Food Security Coordinator
Amanda Koski
Hanna Moore, DC Department of Health
Maryland Food System Resiliency Council
Daniela Ochoa González, Regenerative Solutions
Philip Sambol, Oasis Community Partners and Good Food Markets
Elena Serrano, Virginia Cooperative Extension
Larry Shaefer, Schaefer Global Management, LLC
Maryam Taysir, Emerson Hunger Fellow
Isabella Dresser, Emerson Hunger Fellow
Six call-in participants

Speakers

Stacy Dean, Deputy Under Secretary, USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)
Dr. Patty Bennett, Regional Administrator, FNS, Mid-Atlantic Region, USDA

COG Staff

Chuck Bean
Steve Bieber
Christine Howard
Brian LeCouteur
Lisa Ragain
Lindsay Smith