



**FOOD AND AGRICULTURE REGIONAL MEMBER (FARM)
POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY (DRAFT)**

June 6, 2024

All presentations from the meeting, and the approved February meeting summary, can be found at:
<https://www.mwcog.org/events/2024/6/14/food-and-agriculture-regional-member-farm-policy-committee/>

DECISIONS AND ACTIONS:

- FARM members approved the February FARM Committee meeting summary.
 - Notes from the April USDA Forum were also provided to members.
- Meeting participants were encouraged to consider and share the call for nominations for USDA's Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Federal Advisory Committee.
- Staff will send members and stakeholders additional information on [USDA's Composting and Food Waste Reduction Cooperative Agreements \(CFWR\)](#)
- A FARM member recommended that COG and FARM work on regional collaboration on food waste prevention and composting infrastructure.
- The next FARM meeting is scheduled for Fri, August 9th, 2024, from 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. and is virtual only.

MEETING SUMMARY

WELCOME AND MEMBER REFLECTIONS ON 2024: LEARNING AND NEXT STEPS

Councilmember Jon Stehle, FARM Chair

Council President Andrew Friedson, FARM Vice Chair

FARM Committee Chair Jon Stehle called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m. He introduced the agenda, highlighting the focus on building on lessons learned from previous meetings and forums.

Chair Stehle reflected on the positive synergies and alignment between USDA's priorities and the FARM Committee's goals, expressing appreciation for the successful forum at USDA headquarters on April 12th. Members shared takeaways from the forum, including discussions on urban agriculture, food waste, and challenges faced at the federal, state, and local levels in the agricultural sector.

Sydney Daigle, Regional Food System Consultant to the FARM Policy Committee, shared feedback from the Regional Aggregation and Distribution Summit, including member's enthusiasm for the format and small group discussions. She highlighted the main themes from a follow-up survey, including the desire to connect with specific individuals, convene around specific topics like cold storage and grain aggregation, and access to more grants and resources to support the work.

USDA'S OFFICE OF URBAN AGRICULTURE AND INNOVATIVE PRODUCTION'S OVERVIEW AND PROGRAMMING

Jon Stehle, FARM Chair

Brian Guse, Director, Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (UAIP), NRCS, USDA

Nina Bhattacharyya, Senior Technical Specialist and People's Garden Initiative Coordinator, UAIP

Sean Potts, Management and Program Analyst, UAIP

Chair Stehle set the stage for USDA's presentation, emphasizing the significance of urban agriculture operations and the challenges posed by zoning regulations across the region. Director Brian Guse, [Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production \(UAIP\)](#), provided an overview of his office's work and introduced his team members, Nina Bhattacharyya and Sean Potts.

Director Guse explained the USDA's deliberate decision not to define urban agriculture, instead using "urban" as a relative description. He emphasized the office's support for a variety of urban agricultural operations, from community gardens to indoor farms, and highlighted the responsibilities of their office, including administering technical assistance programs, grants, and engaging with external stakeholders.

Mr. Potts provided an overview of the Composting and Food Waste Reduction cooperative agreements (CFWR) including their objectives, eligibility criteria, and funding details. Mr. Potts also shared specific examples of CFWR projects in the region, highlighting the diverse strategies being implemented.

Ms. Bhattacharyya presented The People's Garden Initiative, a network of over 1,700 community gardens across the country. The initiative aims to showcase the work of community gardens, provide resources, and offer educational opportunities. She emphasized the educational component of the initiative, which includes teaching the public about resilient local food systems and sustainable practices. Additionally, she highlighted a partnership with the Extension Foundation to create an online platform for sharing information and resources with their network of gardens.

Ms. Bhattacharyya also discussed an initiative mandated by the 2018 Farm Bill, the State and Local Policies Project, which focuses on identifying best practices to facilitate urban agriculture through state and municipal ordinances and policies. The project involves partnerships with USDA agencies and external partners, including Vermont Law and Graduate School's Center for Agriculture and Food Systems, to develop resources and support for urban and innovative producers. Currently, partners are engaged in the creation of advisory groups and conducting in-depth scans of policies that impact agriculture in urban communities across the country.

Ms. Battacharyya wrapped up the presentation by encouraging attendees to reach out to [USDA Service Centers](#) in their area, shared additional resources from their office, and invited questions. Director Guse offered to have their staff participate in community events and engage with local groups to promote outreach. Chair Stehle thanked speakers before facilitating Q&A. He highlighted the need for action and mentioned ongoing communication with local authorities to drive initiatives forward.

Chris Van Vlack, Urban/Ag Conservationist, Loudoun County Soil and Water Conservation District, expressed interest in learning more about the CFWR and Director Guse directed him to work with Mr. Potts. They shared that this is the last year supplemental funding will be provided through the

Recovery Act and encouraged members to apply.

Director Guse and Mr. Potts highlighted a newly launched, whole of government, effort to tackle the issue of food loss and waste, the [National Strategy for Reducing Food Loss and Waste and Recycling Organics](#). Caroline Howe, Director of the DC Food Policy Council, proposed a collaborative, regional approach for food waste prevention and composting infrastructure and suggested coordinating applications for grants. She recently participated in ReFed's annual conference held in Baltimore.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT & DISCUSSION: FACILITATING URBAN AGRICULTURE INNOVATIONS IN PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MARYLAND

Andrew Friedson, FARM Vice-Chair

Takisha James, Mayor, Town of Bladensburg

Kim Rush Lynch, Urban Agricultural Conservation Planner/Program Manager, Prince George's County Soil Conservation District Office

Margaret Morgan-Hubbard, Founder & CEO, ECO City Farms

Vice Chair Friedson introduced Mayor James, Kim Rush Lynch, and Margaret Morgan Hubbard, leaders in urban farming in Prince George's County. They discussed their work in advancing urban agriculture, including lessons learned, challenges in planning, zoning, permitting, regulatory issues, good neighbor relations, and financing.

Mayor James shared the history of a community health initiative that led to the creation of Bladensburg's, and Prince George's County's, first official urban farm on privately owned land. She emphasized the benefits of the program, including resident and municipal employee benefits and cultural engagement, and stressed the need for ongoing municipal support for the long-term success of urban producers.

Ms. Rush Lynch provided an overview of the support and challenges for urban agriculture in Prince George's County, highlighting the role of various stakeholders such as USDA's Office of Urban Agriculture, the Prince George's Soil Conservation District Office, and local elected officials. She discussed the impact of advocacy efforts, legislation, incentives, and the need for education and collaboration to address neighbor perceptions and code enforcement issues.

Ms. Morgan Hubbard highlighted her nonprofit's, ECO City Farms, 20-year journey of urban farming, emphasizing the need for collaboration and sharing experiences to expand the initiative. She highlighted ECO's work around creating compost outposts, restoring the environment, and building vibrant communities through urban agriculture. Their efforts also involve policy work, advocacy, and the establishment of an incubator farm to support aspiring urban farmers.

FARM OUTREACH UPDATES

Jon Stehle, FARM Chair

Hugo Mogollon, Executive Director, FRESHFARM

Chair Stehle encouraged members to stay apprised of congressional progress on the Farm Bill and to review newly released frameworks by the Senate and House minority parties. He shared that a Congressionally Delegated Spending Request COG submitted on behalf of the FARM Committee was included in the region's Senate Delegation's requests for funding.

He also mentioned the upcoming 25th anniversary of National Farmers Market Week and urged

participants to promote the event in their jurisdictions. Mr. Mogollon emphasized the need for substantive support for farmers markets beyond the celebration week, suggesting ideas such as creating farmers market permits, accessing grants for small businesses, and being consulted and compensated for public services provided by farmers markets.

Beth Sastre, Commercial Horticulturist, Loudoun County, Virginia Cooperative Extension, brought attention to the growing issue of non-H2A agricultural workers feeling marginalized as H2A workers were increasingly brought in with contracts and benefits. The speaker urged the group to consider ways to support these long-term workers who had contributed to food production in the United States.

ADJOURN

Jon Stehle, FARM Chair

Chair Stehle shared details about upcoming events and adjourned the meeting on time. The next regularly scheduled FARM Policy Committee meeting (virtual only) is Friday, August 9th.

FARM ATTENDANCE

Jon Stehle, Chair, City of Fairfax
Andrew Friedson, Vice-Chair, Montgomery County
Caroline Howe, DC Office of Planning, DC Food Policy Council
Carrol McBryde, Town of Bladensburg
Chris Van Vlack, Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District
Danielle McKinney, City of Greenbelt
Heather Bruskin, Montgomery County Office of Food System Resilience
Hugo Mogollon, FRESHFARM
Katie Stevens, Frederick County
Laura TeKrony, Loudoun County Board of Supervisors
Libby Garvey, Arlington County
Meredith Ledlie Johnson, Virginia Cooperative Extension
Tara Clemons Johnson (alternate), Montgomery County Council
Tom Gordy, Prince William County Board of Supervisors
Victoria Treski, Bainum Family Foundation Consultant

PARTICIPANTS

Amanda Cather	Ester Waldroup (MCFC)
Amy Cawley	Eva Lucia Lifsec
Annika La Fave, MDEM	Gretchen Greiner-Lott
Beth Sastre	Harrison Palmer, MDA
Bria Hamlet	Jamie Baxter
Brittany Cook -MDEM-	Jim Feather
Carly Aubrey	Jocelyn Tidwell, Maryland SNAP-Ed
Carol Jones	Jon Berger
Cordova, Alex - OSEC, MD	Kate Schneider
Dave (Future Acres)	Kim Jaramillo
Debbie Tropp	Lauren DeSimone
Ellie Bomstein (she/her)	Lauren Marr
Emily Landsman (FOUA)	Lorien MacAuley, PhD

Margaret Todd
Mark Powell, MDA
Martin Proulx -MD Dept. of Ag.-
Megan McPherson
Michelle Edwards, RRRRC
Nardi, Catherine
Pamela Montesinos
Piper Phillips Caswell
Piva, Riley (HSEMA)
Rachele Franceschi
Samuel Bonar (Council)
Samuel Wilson

Sara Santa Cruz
SELENA
Shelby Watson-Hampton
Stacey Evers
Stephanie Hopkins
Steve McHenry
Tanea Browning, Councilor | Central Point
Oregon
Timothy Enright
Tucker, Rebecca
Wendy Nevett Bazil
Willie Woode

SPEAKERS

Does not include FARM members

Brian Guse, Director, Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (UAIP), USDA
Nina Bhattacharyya, Senior Technical Specialist and People's Garden Initiative Coordinator, UAIP
Sean Potts, Management and Program Analyst, UAIP
Takisha James, Mayor, Town of Bladensburg
Kim Rush Lynch, Urban Agricultural Conservation Planner/Program Manager, Prince George's Soil
Conservation District Office
Margaret Morgan-Hubbard, Founder & CEO, ECO City Farms

COG STAFF AND CONSULTANTS

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