

COG AND THE FARM POLICY COMMITTEE

Presentation to the Chief Equity Officers Committee

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Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

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Montgomery County Food Council
FARM Member

March 24, 2022

Goals

- Provide an overview of the FARM Committee
- Share a local perspective from a FARM member: The Montgomery County Food Council
- Learn about the Chief Equity Officers Committee
- Explore opportunities for collaboration or future discussion



Regional Ag Work Group Visit to Potomac Vegetable Farm, September 2019. (Lindsay Smith/COG)

Short History: Food & Agriculture at COG

WHAT OUR REGION GROWS

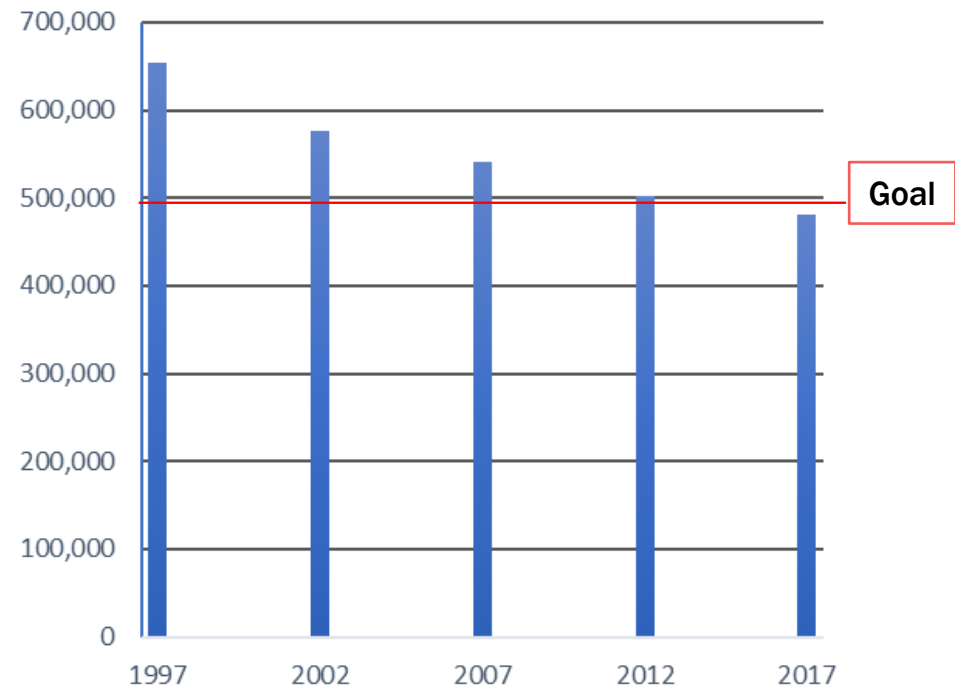
To Eat and Drink

Agriculture's Past, Present, and Future In and around the Metropolitan Washington Region

January 2019



COG Region Acres of Land in Farms 1997 to 2017



Left: The Regional Ag Work Group published *What Our Region Grows* for the second time in 2019. Right: Here is the geography that *What Our Region Grows* covers for many, but not all data points. The Regional Ag Work Group has long recognized that our foodshed is larger than the COG region.



COG expanded Agriculture Program with additional Regional Food Systems focus in 2016.

Convened stakeholders on issues like regional food system infrastructure and food policy.

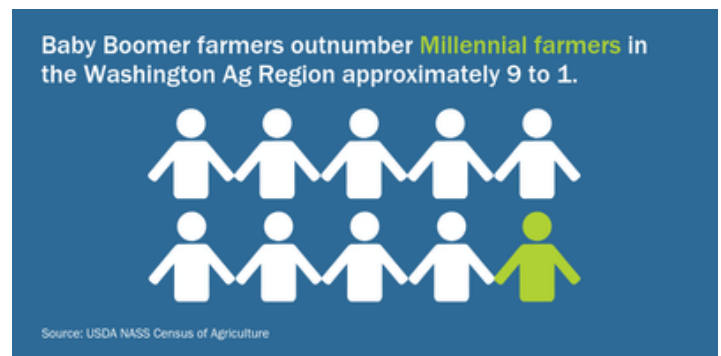


The Region's Food and Agriculture Future?

What kind of future do we want?

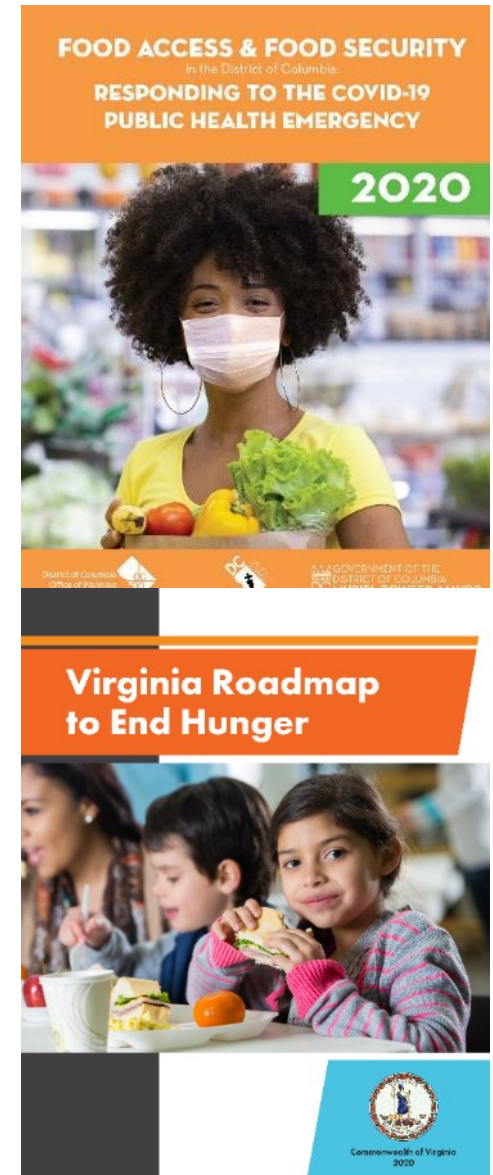
A lack of *regional* planning and coordination for:

- Food jobs/workforce
- Food security
- Access to local and regional foods
- **Emergency food response**
- Environmental benefits of agriculture

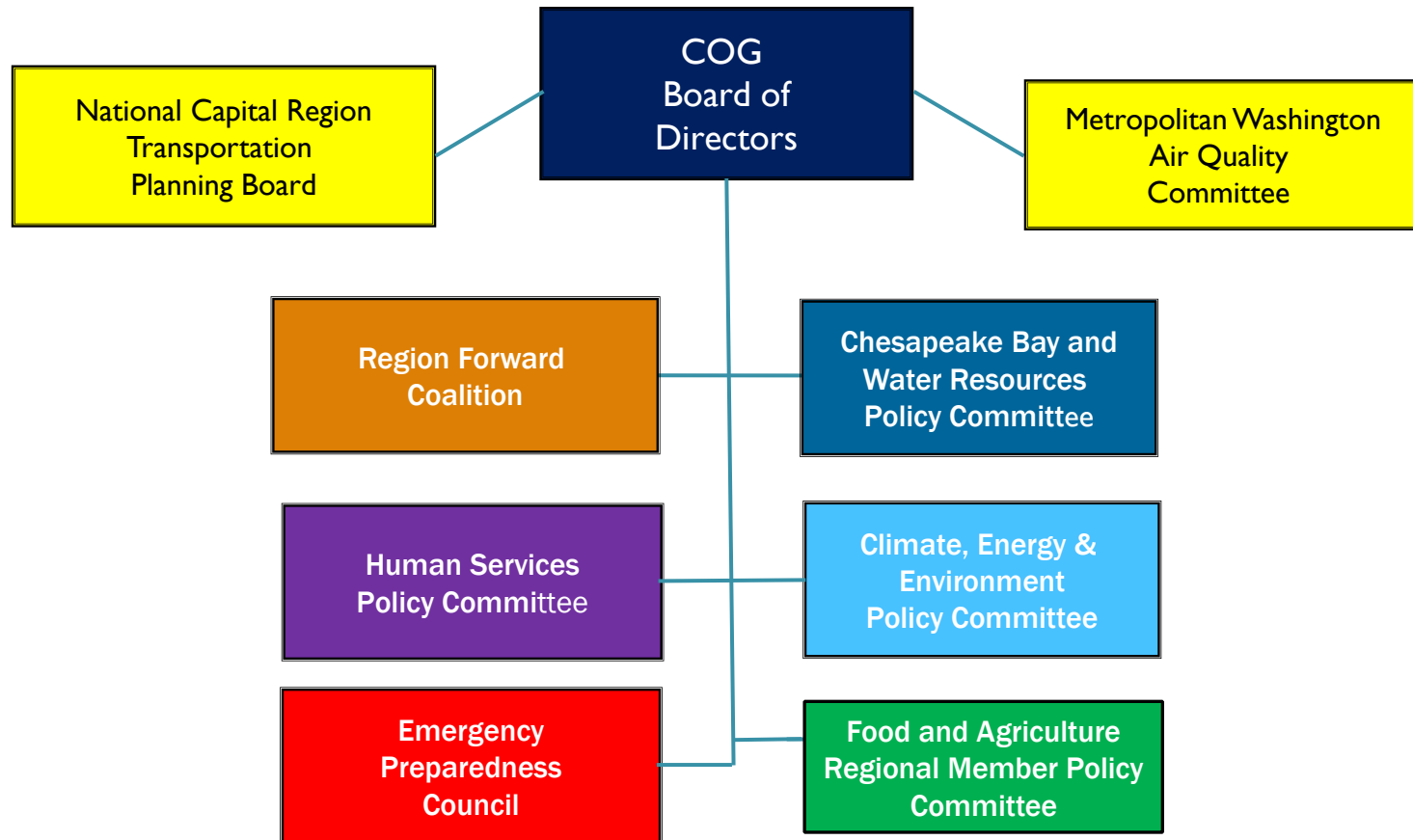


Food Insecurity in the COG Region

- Households with children, Black and Hispanic/Latino households disproportionately burdened
- SNAP is first line of defense against food insecurity
 - 50+% increase in participants between Jan 2020 and Jan 2022
 - Est 530,000+ residents enrolled (Jan 22)
 - Est \$113+ million in benefits (Jan 22)
 - Critical pandemic emergency allotments still in place, not clear how long additional funds to participants will continue
- Some providers (throughout region) reporting increased demand for emergency food



COG Policy Committee Structure



FARM Policy Committee

Membership:

- Members include elected officials and senior staff from local and state agencies and nonprofits.
- Expanding so all 24 COG member jurisdictions can participate.

Mission:

- To support the development of long-term regional direction and collaboration toward a more resilient, connected food and farm economy (food system) across urban, suburban and rural communities in the metropolitan Washington region that provides more of the region's food needs.

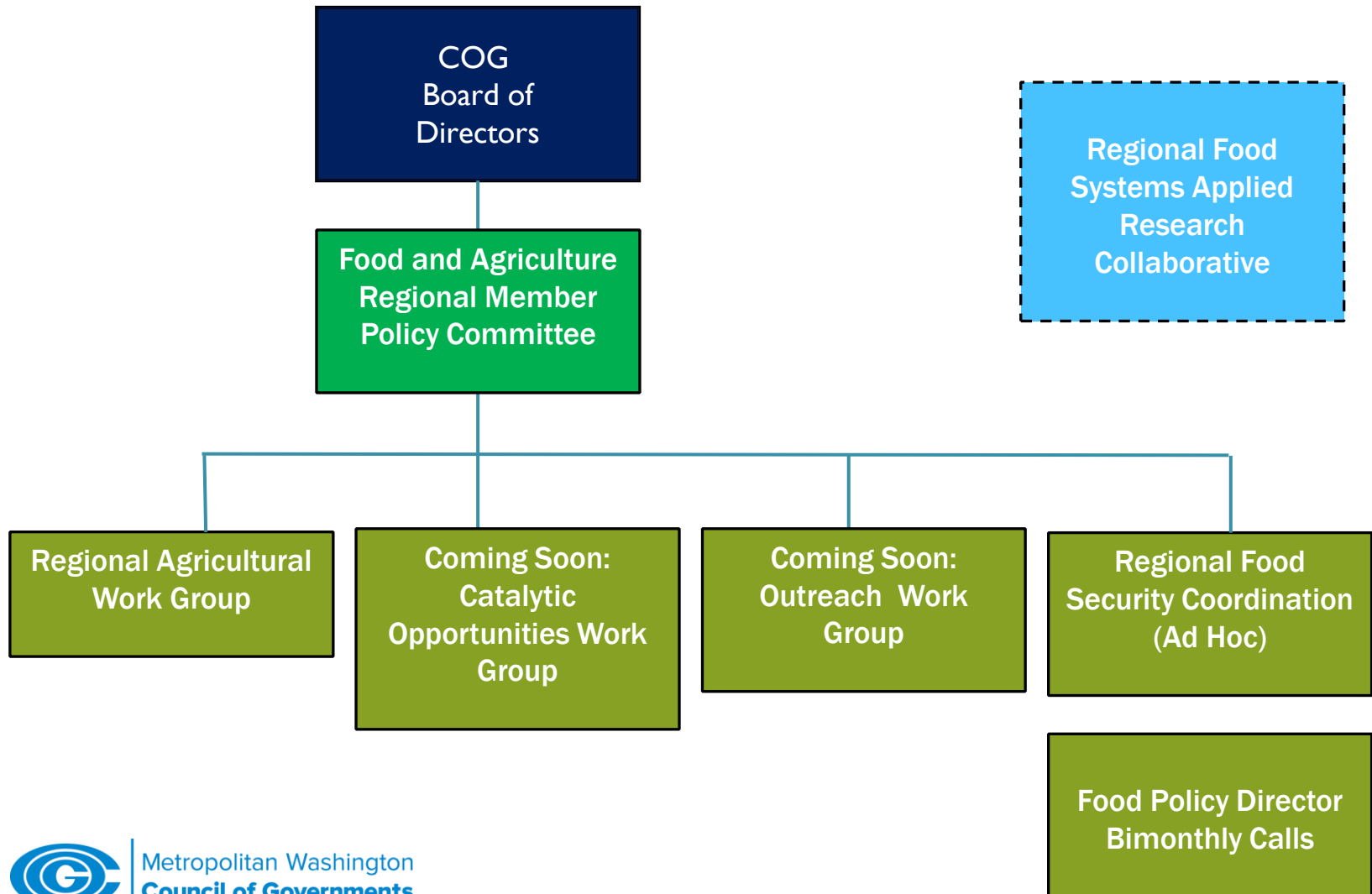
FARM Priorities

- Improving food security in the region
- Supporting Black, Indigenous, and people of color and small farmers
- Focusing FARM's work on farmland preservation, land use regulations, environmental sustainability, and resilience
- Improving and communicating regional food system data
- Leveraging procurement to support equity and the region's food and farm economy



Community Garden in Northwest Washington, D.C.. (Lindsay Smith/COG)

FARM Policy Committee Structure



FARM Takes Positions

- Provides input on food system issues to the COG Board
 - Board adopts legislative priorities annually
- Tracks legislation in the Maryland and Virginia General Assemblies, at the Council of the District of Columbia
- Provides limited input on state and federal legislation and other actions



February 24, 2022

The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro, Chairwoman
House Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Kay Granger, Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Patrick Leahy, Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Richard Shelby, Vice Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations

RE: Request for Extension of USDA Waiver Authority

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro, Chairman Leahy, Ranking Member Granger, and Vice Chairman Shelby:

On behalf of the [Food and Regional Agriculture Member \(FARM\) Policy Committee](#) of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG), we are writing to ask you to extend U.S. Department of Agriculture's nationwide waiver authority through the 2022-2023 school year.

As the association of local governments in the metropolitan Washington region, COG supports measures that will increase food security in the region. Given the impact of the ongoing public health crisis on families and children, continued flexibility is needed to meet students' nutritional needs.

The food security challenges facing our residents and schools mirror those seen nationally. COVID-19 has exacerbated food insecurity everywhere, and communities of color and households with children have been disproportionately impacted. In the Metropolitan Washington region, our schools' food and nutrition services divisions continue to have to pivot to provide healthy meals safely, all while grappling with supply chain challenges and labor constraints. The flexibility that USDA has provided to states and schools through waivers has been critical to enabling them to respond in innovative ways and ensure that those children experiencing food insecurity have access to quality meals. This needs to continue.

Reducing food insecurity is a central goal of the FARM Committee and one of COG's legislative priorities. We hope that USDA will continue to support schools and other sponsors beyond the end of June as we recover from the pandemic. We must ensure that they can continue to operate as seamlessly as possible to provide meals to students.

Please contact Lindsay Smith, COG's Regional Food Systems Planner, at (202) 962-3309 or lsmith@mwkog.org if you have any questions. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Mary Cheh
Chair, FARM Committee
District of Columbia

Craig Rice
Vice Chair, FARM Committee
Montgomery County, MD

Jon Stehle
Vice Chair, FARM Committee
City of Fairfax, VA

Work Program Notes

- Releasing *Healthy Food Access Compendium for Metropolitan Washington*
- Identifying top issues for meetings and discussion
- Setting up workshop for update to National Capital Farms
- Supporting Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Grant for Food and Water Resilience
- Arranging site visits
- Other planning notes



Visit to Takoma Park Silver Spring Community Kitchen in July 2018. Lindsay Smith/COG)

Discussion

- Local experiences and opportunities to center racial equity in food system policy
- Are there ways the FARM Policy Committee and Chief Equity Officers Committee can collaborate?
 - *Healthy Food Access Compendium for Metropolitan Washington?*



Chris Bradshaw, Executive Director of Dreaming Out Loud on the cover of Washington City Paper: The Food Issue, 2020. (Darrow Montgomery/Washington City Paper)

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Metropolitan Washington
Council of Governments

Resources

- *What Our Region Grows (2019)*

<https://www.mwcog.org/documents/2019/01/18/what-our-region-grows-farmers-market-farming-urban-agriculture/>

- *Chesapeake Foodshed Assessment (2019)* – University of Maryland

https://agmr.umd.edu/sites/agmr.umd.edu/files/files/documents/Hughes%20Center/2019__Chesapeake-Foodshed-Assessment_02.pdf

- *Hunger Report 2021: A Closer Look at the Changing Face of Hunger*
– Capital Area Food Bank

<https://www.capitalareafoodbank.org/blog/2021/06/23/hunger-report-2021-a-closer-look-at-the-changing-face-of-hunger/>



Resources (continued)

- Video: Councilmembers Cheh, Stehle and Rice on FARM Ad Hoc Committee Creation

<https://www.mwcog.org/newsroom/2020/09/17/cog-prioritizes-food-security-as-lack-of-access-increases-for-many-residents/>

- Video: 2021 FARM Ad Hoc Committee Farmer Roundtable

<https://www.mwcog.org/events/2021/4/9/food-and-agriculture-regional-member-farm-ad-hoc-advisory-committee/>

- Video: 2021 Land Access for Farmers Identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Meeting

Recording available to FARM members by request

- Video: 2022 Healthy Food Access at Farmers Market Meeting with The Capital Market. [Link to folder.](#)

Resources (continued)

- 21-Day Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge with Food Solutions New England (starts April 4th)

<https://foodsolutionsne.org/21-day-racial-equity-habit-building-challenge/>

- Kelly, et al. 2022, *An annotated bibliography on structural racism present in the U.S. food system* (9th ed.). Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems.

https://foodsystems.msu.edu/resources/structural_racism_in_us_food_system

- District of Columbia Food Policy Council

<https://dcfoodpolicy.org/racial-equity/>