FOOD AND AGRICULTURE REGIONAL MEMBER (FARM) POLICY COMMITTEE

MEETING SUMMARY (DRAFT)

JUNE 10, 2022

All presentations from the meeting, and the approved April meeting summary, can be found at: <https://www.mwcog.org/events/2022/6/10/food-and-agriculture-regional-member-farm-policy-committee/>

DECISIONS AND ACTIONS:

* Short Term
	+ FARM members approved the April draft meeting summary with a quorum.
	+ FARM will send a letter with feedback on priorities for the strategy that will be released at the September White House Conference on Hunger, Health, and Nutrition.
		- FARM’s Executive Committee scheduled a special one-hour meeting on Monday, June 27 at 10 am to discuss FARM’s letter to the White House.
	+ FARM will revisit Bylaws changes and FY23 FARM Work Program at a future meeting. COG Staff will reformat the work program to indicate where proposed activities fall relative to parts of the food system.
	+ Councilmember Rice released The Healthy Food Access Policy Compendium for Metropolitan Washington. FARM members will provide any final feedback on the document by Friday, July 1st to staff.
* Medium Term
	+ The FARM Committee should create a template letter that can be shared with local governments and markets to request that SNAP and other benefits be accepted when members and other stakeholders need something to reach out with.
	+ There was discussion about the need for encouraging universal language around benefit acceptance and other programs at markets. The FARM Committee could create a sign for markets. (Please see more detail in the summary below.)

Welcome, Call to Order, RolL Call, and Meeting Summary Approval

Montgomery County Councilmember Craig Rice, FARM Vice Chair, called the meeting to order at 11:10 am. Vice Chair Rice welcomed everyone to the FARM Committee’s first hybrid meeting held at the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments.

* Among FARM Members, speakers, and other food system stakeholders:
	+ 17 participated in-person
	+ 42 participated virtually for some or all the meeting

Decision: FARM members approved the April draft meeting summary with a quorum.

FARMERS Market VISIT REPORT OUT

FARM Members Meredith Ledlie Johnson and Libby Garvey shared their recent visits to farmers markets in Virginia.

* There was discussion about some of the barriers that still exist for low-income residents to access markets and to use federal nutrition benefits to purchase food. And what steps FARM could take to address this.
* Making sure that everyone can use benefits across the region as easily as possible, is one reason that FARM exists. All residents should have a high-quality experience.
* Penny Gross shared that the farmers market at Mason District Park does accept SNAP but that setting up this option did take some time.
* Heather Bruskin shared that the Montgomery County Food Council does SNAP outreach at the Crossroads Farmers Market to help ensure that residents are maintaining their benefits and that others who may be eligible can sign up.
* Heather also shared that Maryland has updated its agreement with the federal government so that SNAP benefits can now be accepted at on-farm markets, such as Lewis Orchards. This can be helpful for food access in rural communities.
* Ona Balkus shared that the District of Columbia has an online map of farmers markets and transit routes. Link: [https://dcfoodpolicy.org/resources/data-maps/](https://dcfoodpolicy.org/resources/data-maps/%09)
* Lindsay Smith shared that there is regional GIS layer for farmers markets and benefits acceptance that resides with NCR GDX. This information could be updated and shared with members.

**Action Items:**

* The FARM Committee should create a template letter that can be shared with local governments and markets to request that SNAP and other benefits be accepted when members and other stakeholders need something to reach out with.
* There was discussion about the need for encouraging universal language around benefit acceptance and other programs at markets. The FARM Committee could create a sign for markets.
	+ Staff recommends an update from FARM members Hugo Mogollon or Nick Stavely on the Regional Farmers Market Incentive Coalition at the next meeting.
	+ FARM supported the creation of the coalition with a letter of support for the USDA grant that was awarded to support this,
	+ They can share how this idea will be implemented and where there may be opportunities for FARM to engage to provide additional support.

BRIEFING: MARYLAND AND VIRGINIA LeGIslation Sessions AND Budget Highlights from MD, VA, and the District of Columbia

FARM heard from the following speakers [who provided presentations](https://www.mwcog.org/events/2022/6/10/food-and-agriculture-regional-member-farm-policy-committee/) with their remarks:

1. Eddie Oliver, Executive Director, Federation of Virginia Food Banks
2. Anna Sierra, Chief Development Officer, Maryland Department of Emergency Management, (MDEM)
3. Steve McHenry, Executive Director, MARBIDCO
4. Ona Balkus, DC Food Policy Director
* Speakers highlighted some wins for food security and wrap around support programs and services, urban agriculture and composting, and land preservation.
* They also shared updates on measures that did not pass the MD and VA General Assemblies and some priorities for next year.
* Anna Sierra introduced Brittany Cook, the new Food Resilience Specialist at MDEM, who joined participants at COG for the meeting.
* FARM Committee Members asked questions about:
	+ How the new legislation, that requires Virginia institutions of higher education provide information on SNAP to students, will be implemented.
	+ MARBIDCO’s Next Generation Farmland Acquisition Programs (Virginia does not have something comparable), including if there is a lot of use of these programs in COG’s MD jurisdictions that are more proximate to DC.
	+ More details on DC’s Fresh Food Access Fund to incentivize grocery store development in Wards 7 and 8, including any requirements on pricing or affordability.
	+ DC’s investments in food education, planned uses for a Centralized Processing facility, and more details about the new farm and community space in Ward 8, [The Well at Oxon Run](https://www.dcgreens.org/thewell).

Release of the Healthy Food Access Policy Compendium for Metropolitan Washington AND OTHER FARM COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Councilmember Rice released the long-awaited Healthy Food Access Policy Compendium for Metropolitan Washington. Link: <https://www.mwcog.org/foodpolicy>

* Michael J Wilson shared that the Outreach Work Group is thinking about actions that will impact DC, MD, and VA.
	+ It has settled on two to share successes and challenges related to key federal programs:
		- Developing a relationship with Congressman Robert Scott in Virginia, the Chair of the House Education and Labor Committee which oversees federal legislation on school meals.
		- Establishing a relationship with USDA’s Mid-Atlantic Regional Office which oversees implementation of all federal nutrition programs.
* Zachari Curtis shared background on how the Catalytic Opportunities Work Group came to focus on policy solutions needed to improve institutional procurement opportunities for Black farmers who are descended from slavery.
	+ The Work Group has met twice to date and includes members who farm, or work with farmers.
	+ It is working on a charter to outline intentions, goals, and research questions.
* Jeremy Criss updated FARM on the September visit to the Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve.
	+ The tour will start and end at the [Montgomery County Agricultural History Farm Park](https://montgomeryparks.org/parks-and-trails/agricultural-history-farm-park/) in Derwood where there is free parking and restrooms.
	+ FARM will visit four farms on the east and west sides of the Ag Reserve.
	+ There will be a boxed lunch.
	+ The group will tour in a County RideOn bus and there will be space for about 35 people.
* Jeremy also provided an update on Montgomery County’s use of MARBIDCO programs – it is a very valuable partnership that has assisted in getting resources to small and medium sized farmers in the county.

**Action Items:**

* FARM will revisit Bylaws changes and FY23 FARM Work Program at a future meeting. COG Staff will reformat the work program to indicate where proposed activities fall relative to parts of the food system.
* FARM members are asked to provide any feedback on the Healthy Food Access Policy Compendium by Friday, July 1st to Lindsay at lsmith@mwcog.org

WHITE HOUSE Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health

Shelby Luce, Health Legislative Assistant, Office of Congressman Jim McGovern provided an update on planning for the upcoming [White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition and Health](https://health.gov/our-work/nutrition-physical-activity/white-house-conference-hunger-nutrition-and-health), scheduled for September.

* Conference has been in the works for many years.
* FARM supported recent legislation to establish the conference.
* The White House is conducting outreach through a range of listening sessions and has [also released toolkits](https://health.gov/our-work/nutrition-physical-activity/white-house-conference-hunger-nutrition-and-health/share-your-ideas-and-stories) for those who would like to host their own listening sessions.
* Shelby Luce emphasized the importance of hearing from regional partners on what’s working on the ground, where there are local efforts that need more support, etc.
* The effort is being led by the Domestic Policy Council (DPC) at the White House.
	+ It is working with an interagency task force of 12 federal agencies that will be reviewing all feedback.
	+ The interagency task force will determine what is in the Action Plan that will be released at the conference in September.
* She suggested that the FARM Committee consider top federal priorities in a letter.
	+ This may include COVID-era waivers that should be kept, local models that need more support, etc.
	+ She anticipates letters from coalitions will be prioritized somewhat over individual feedback but that does not mean that local jurisdictions shouldn’t also submit comments, particularly if these will provide other requests or ideas than FARM’s letter.
	+ The interagency task force is taking private meetings and Ms. Luce could connect a spokesperson from this group to the Task Force.
* FARM members requested more information on who is reviewing the feedback submitted, how decisions are being made, and if there are community partners represented among decisionmakers on the Action Plan.
* The September event isn’t where work ends – implementation will require continued engagement and partnership.

**Action Items:** FARM will send a letter with feedback on priorities for the strategy that will be released at the Conference.

* It will use its letter to the USDA Transition Team from 2020 as a starting point.
* Ona Balkus and Tazeen Ahmad from the Up 2 Us Foundation offered to assist with the letter.
* Councilmember Rice encouraged members to provide feedback to Lindsay on priorities as soon as possible for inclusion.
* The letter will also be transmitted to Congressman McGovern’s office.

USDA Food System TransformATION FRAMEWORK ANNOUNCEMent

* Alex Cordova, Community Development Specialist, Office of Partnerships & Public Engagement. United States Department of Agriculture briefed the group on USDA’s recent framework for “transforming the food system to be fairer, more competitive, and more resilient.”
* Announcement link: <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2022/06/01/usda-announces-framework-shoring-food-supply-chain-and-transforming>
* Four goals of the framework:
	+ **Building a more resilient food supply chain that provides more and better market options for consumers and producers while reducing carbon pollution:**
	+ **Creating a fairer food system that combats market dominance and helps producers and consumers gain more power in the marketplace by creating new, more and better local market options:**
	+ **Making nutritious food more accessible and affordable for consumers:**
	+ Emphasizing equity
* These investments are spread across a range of USDA programs in the form of increased, and new, funding opportunities.
	+ These are the result of major Covid-relief bills and the American Rescue Plan Act.
	+ Investments have been occurring for the last year and will likely continue into next year.
	+ USDA is eager to get funds deployed.
	+ There is the risk that Congress will take some of these funds back. Recission has already occurred to fund other national priorities.
	+ Waivers and flexibilities impacting some of these programs will be expiring
* **Two important grant opportunities which are currently open** are the GusNIP Program (supports nutrition incentives, produce prescription programs, and more) and USDA’s Urban Agriculture grants.
	+ GusNIP Produce Prescription Program (RFA responses due June 30, 2022):

Link: <https://www.nifa.usda.gov/grants/funding-opportunities/gus-schumacher-nutrition-incentive-program-produce-prescription>

* + Urban Agriculture Grants (due August 2nd): <https://www.usda.gov/topics/urban/grants#2022-funding>
* It’s critical to try to align these generational opportunities with what is happening at the state-level and locally.
	+ Capacity and the availability of technical assistance to apply for grants is a need and concern.
	+ It’s critial that these funds do not reinforce existing food system inequities, but that the framework’s goals, including emphasizing equity, are met.
* Members raised concerns about USDA’s use of the term “nutrition security” - we need to remain focused on poverty as the driver of food insecurity – and how and where food system workers are included in the framework.

Review Action Items and AdJourn

* Staff will send action items and presentations next week.
* FARM’s Executive Committee has scheduled a special one-hour meeting on Monday, June 27 at 10 am to discuss FARM’s letter to the White House and priorities for FY23 work.
* The next regular FARM Committee meeting is Friday, August 12th at 11:00 am.

Councilmember Rice asked for a motion to adjourn at approximately 1:10 pm and thanked everyone for their in-person and online engagement.

Thank you to [DC Central Kitchen’s Catering team](https://dccentralkitchen.org/catering/) for catering a delicious lunch.

ATTENDANCE:

Craig Rice, Vice Chair, Montgomery County

Libby Garvey, Arlington County

Amy B Jackson, City of Alexandria

Penny Gross, Fairfax County

Maria Mackie, City of College Park (alternate)

Tom Ross, City of Fairfax (alternate)

Kate Stewart, City of Takoma Park

Marybeth Connelly, City of Falls Church

Ona Balkus, District of Columbia Food Policy Council

Heather Bruskin, Montgomery County Food Council

Jeremy Criss, Montgomery County Office of Agriculture

Zachari Curtis, Dreaming Out Loud

Meredith Ledlie Johnson, Virginia Cooperative Extension

Selena Mendy Singleton, Montgomery County Council (alternate)

Sara Pollock Hoverter, Georgetown University

Nick Stavely, FRESHFARM (alternate)

Victoria Treski, Bainum Family Foundation

Chris VanVlack, Loudoun Water and Soil Conservation District

Michael J Wilson, Maryland Hunger Solutions

Ariel Ardura, Office of Councilmember Cheh

Kristin Trible, Office of Councilmember Rice

Arlee Harris, Office of Supervisor Kershner

Gretchen Greiner-Lott, Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation

Ramona Carroll, Fairfax County Department of Neighborhood and Community Services

Brittany Cook, Maryland Department of Emergency Management (MDEM)

Philip Sambol, Oasis Community Partners and Good Food Markets

Tazeen Ahmad, Up 2 Us Foundation

Daniela Ochoa González, Regenerative Solutions

Leila Bournes, Bourne2fly

Vanessa Calaban, MDEM

Mark Powell, Maryland Department of Agriculture

Eleni Rigsby, Capital Area Food Bank (CAFB)

Rebecca Gates, Northern Virginia Food Rescue

Max Broad, DC Voters for Animals

Sydney Daigle, Institute for Public Health Innovation (IPHI), Prince George’s Food Equity Council (PGCFEC)

Julia Groenfeldt, IPHI and PGCFEC

Heaven Jordan, IPHI and PGCFEC

Scarleth Castro, IPHI and PGCFEC

Kim Rush Lynch, Prince George’s Soil Conservation District

Elizabeth Borst, Virginia Community Food Connections and Virginia Fresh Match

Jennifer Freeman, Community FarmShare

Mark Scott, DC HSEMA

Cristina Berthelot, Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission

Sara Beckwith, DC Department of Health

Stacy Kubofcik, MARBIDCO

Harrison Palmer, NRCS-CD, Upper Marlboro, MD

Two call-in participants

Speakers

Eddie Oliver, Executive Director, Federation of Virginia Food Banks

Anna Sierra, Chief Development Officer, Maryland Department of Emergency Management, (MDEM)

Steve McHenry, Executive Director, MARBIDCO

Shelby Luce, Health Legislative Assistant, Office of Representative Jim McGovern

Alex Cordova, US Department of Agriculture

COG Staff

Steve Bieber

Tom Gates

Christine Howard

Brian LeCouteur

Adair Ravencraft

Lindsay Smith