



DRAFT

LOCAL AND REGIONAL FOOD DISTRIBUTION WORKING GROUP CONCEPT

BACKGROUND

The [Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments](#) (COG) is partnering with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and local philanthropic organizations to carry out a Regional Food Systems Value Chain Coordination (VCC) Program. The VCC program started on March 1, 2016 when COG began contracting with a local and regional food systems expert to serve as its Value Chain Coordinator in COG's Department of Environmental Programs. This pilot program is part of the larger USDA [Food LINC](#) initiative.

COG will build on its previous agricultural programming to help develop and enhance local food supply chains that connect rural and suburban farmers and ranchers to urban-based marketplaces in the region. This will include serving as a strategic convener of stakeholders in the supply chain to help improve the bottom line for farm businesses committed to sustainable production practices, and to increase access to healthy, sustainable, local food for consumers.

Since March 1, the Value Chain Coordinator, Lindsay Smith, has interviewed or met with a range of stakeholders including nonprofits, farmers, local government staff, institutions, distributors, grocers, and others to develop a recommended work plan. **One proposed focus area for the VCC Initiative is improving connections from local/regional producers to supply chain infrastructure and markets around major transportation corridors.**

OVERVIEW: LOCAL AND REGIONAL FOOD DISTRIBUTION WORKING GROUP

Local food producers, organizations and businesses working with producers of all sizes, have noted that the difficulty of travel in the Washington metro region equates to additional costs for travel time, labor, fuel, etc. A number of local food producers and businesses struggle to connect with scale-appropriate infrastructure for product aggregation and distribution, which can add to the inefficiencies currently inherent in the transport of local and regional food. As market demand for local food is stronger than ever, a range of organizations and businesses are testing solutions to address these issues. For example, COG recently co-hosted a meeting with real estate development teams interested in building regional food hubs to help address gaps in the supply chain for local farmers.

A Local and Regional Food Distribution (LRFD) Working Group could provide a unique, on-going forum for public, private, and nonprofit interests in the local food supply chain to:

- Identify existing infrastructure gaps and underutilized capacity for aggregation, cross docking, etc., of local produce, meat, seafood, and dairy products;
- Discuss logistics challenges and explore potential policy and programmatic solutions;
- Foster business connections among producers, distributors, and customers in the metropolitan Washington region;
- Communicate resource, research, policy, and programmatic support needs to [COG members](#); and
- Develop metrics and goals for increasing local and regional food-related distribution

efficiencies.

The VCC and COG do not have a proprietary interest in proposing the creation of a LRF Working Group, but would ask participants to help develop some basic values-based principles around sustainability for the type of local food system such a working group would ultimately seek to advance. These principles will help to guide the group's work and inquiry. In addition, periodic but brief surveys will be requested to measure the value of the group's work to stakeholders.

The [Driftless Region Food & Freight Project](#), based at the University of Wisconsin's Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems, is a potential reference for initial topics and issues the proposed Working Group could consider.

PROPOSED ADMINISTRATION, MEETING FREQUENCY, AND MEMBERS

Similar to the Driftless Region Food & Freight Project, COG could host a one day conference in late 2016 to identify technical issues and confirm interest in establishing an LRF Working Group. This kick-off conference could be held at COG. However, given the region's large geographic area, the VCC recommends that future meetings – perhaps held quarterly - be held in other locations within the region.

The VCC will lead stakeholder outreach, communications, and meeting planning. Department of Transportation Planning staff will provide subject matter expertise, help refine this concept, and advise on key transportation contacts and meeting issues.

In early September, COG would like to develop a planning committee comprised of diverse stakeholders to help to shape the content and structure of the conference.

Initial LRF Working Group members could be comprised of conference invitees who express an interest in continued meetings and collaboration. Potential conference invitees include:

- State, regional, and local transportation staff and transportation planners;
- COG's Regional Agricultural Work Group;
- Local and state agricultural economic development officers and organizations, including members of the VA and MD Agricultural Development Officers;
- Organizations, businesses, and cooperatives representing local farmers (i.e. Farm Bureau, Future Harvest CASA, Tuscarora Organic Growers, Shenandoah Produce Auction, FRESHFARM, etc.), ranchers, and watermen;
- Locally-owned and operated food hubs, processors, brokers, trucking businesses transporting food, and distributors (i.e. Washington's Green Grocer, 4P Foods, Relay Foods, Common Market Philadelphia, Local Food Hub, Blue Ridge Produce, T&E Meats, Coastal Sunbelt Produce, Keany Produce, The Produce Source, etc.);
- Nonprofits working on local and regional food issues, including logistics and local food sourcing (i.e. DC Central Kitchen, Arcadia, Capital Area Food Bank, Manna Food Center, etc.);
- The Chesapeake Foodshed Network and interested representatives from local food policy councils;
- Local and regional food system, agricultural economists, and other consultants working to improve the local and regional food supply chain; and
- Universities, including interested and available [EFSNE](#) researchers
- The philanthropic community and investors

NEXT STEPS

The VCC has met with COG staff and is sharing outlines of this concept with select food system stakeholders working in different areas of the supply chain. Your interest and comments on this preliminary concept are welcomed and appreciated.

CONTACT

Comments and queries can be directed to Lindsay Smith, AICP, Regional Food Systems Value Chain Coordinator at lsmith@mwkog.org or 202-962-3307.

-
- .