



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE REGIONAL MEMBER (FARM) POLICY COMMITTEE
MEETING SUMMARY
December 10, 2021

LINK TO ALL AVAILABLE MEETING MATERIALS:

<https://www.mwcog.org/events/2021/12/10/food-and-agriculture-member-farm-policy-committee/>

DECISIONS AND ACTIONS:

- Short Term
 - Chair Cheh asked FARM members to reach out to her, the Vice Chairs, or COG staff with feedback they have on longer term work, priorities, and organizational development now that the FARM Committee is permanent.
 - Chair Cheh requested a list of proposed legislation for FARM which was discussed during this meeting.
 - Vice Chair Stehle will meet with Delegate Roem in Richmond on VML's and VACO's legislative day in early February.
 - Radha Muthiah suggested bringing together stakeholders who are working with BIPOC farmers to find opportunities to scale production.
 - Michael J Wilson suggested the formation of subcommittees to work on issues and priorities (i.e. school meals, Food as Medicine) in greater depth and to learn from one another.
 - Several FARM members requested minor changes to proposed food and agriculture priorities. *Update:* Adopted 2022 COG Legislative Priorities can be found [at this link](#).
 - Mark Scott at the DC Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management will provide a project update at the next FARM meeting.
 - The Healthy Policy Compendium is still being completed and another review will be requested from members.

WELCOME, CALL TO ORDER, AND ROLL CALL

Councilmember Mary Cheh, FARM's Chair, called the meeting to order just after 1:00 pm.

Chair Cheh confirmed that the FARM Committee is now permanent, and a regional fund has been established to support it. She will be meeting with the Vice Chairs later in the month and welcomes any feedback from FARM members on longer term work, priorities, and organizational development.

Chair Cheh congratulated several FARM members on recent leadership recognitions from regional media and COG. She also congratulated FRESHFARM and partners on the receipt of a USDA grant to support matching dollars for nutrition incentives at farmers markets and regional collaboration. Chair Cheh [shared a summary](#)

[of FY21 USDA grants](#) to support local and regional food systems development in DC, MD, and VA.

COG staff took a roll call.

Chair Cheh provided a recap of [October's FARM meeting](#) and called for meeting summary approval. **FARM members approved the October meeting summary.**

FARM MEMBER REFLECTIONS ON THE BIPOC FARMERS MEETING

Chair Cheh provided several updates since the November 29th special meeting on Land Access for Farmers Identifying as Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC). This included [a link to follow-up materials](#) shared by one of the meeting speakers, Ms. Ebonie Alexander (Black Family Land Trust), on a USDA study calling for the creation of an Office of Small Farms. The meeting recording is available to FARM members by request.

Chair Cheh discussed the District's introduction of *The Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act* to better preserve intergenerational family assets and wealth. She also shared DC's passage of legislation to provide free fishing licenses to members of the Piscataway Conoy Tribe.

She offered to share the legislation with interested colleagues in MD and VA. She echoed sentiments shared by several FARM members about the need to preserve farming and also to develop specific policies to address past harms, discrimination, and displacement.

Kate Lee and Sara Horverter thanked the Chair for centering this topic as an important one in the FARM's work. Ms. Horverter suggested focusing more on what can be done in 2022 to move this issue forward, including working on procurement.

Radha Muthiah shared that Capital Area Food Bank (CAFB) spends millions of dollars in food procurement is interested in sourcing from BIPOC farmers. CAFB can do multi-year contracting which represents an opportunity to help farmers scale up production. More capacity is needed. She suggested that a next step would be to bring together stakeholders who are working with BIPOC farmers to find opportunities to scale production.

FOOD SECURITY IN THE MARYLAND AND VIRGINIA LEGISLATIVE SESSIONS AND UPDATE ON DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA NO SENIOR HUNGRY BILL

Virginia State Delegate Danica Roem provided a preview of her plans for the 2022 Legislative session which will include bills to build on the previous eight bills she's introduced to address school meals, debt, and shaming. Delegate Roem plans to introduce three bills:

- A Virginia version of the Campus Free Hunger Act which Maryland has passed. Delegate Roem addressed some of components (i.e. transfer of meal swipes, campus pantries, SNAP outreach to students) of the bill and the misperceptions about food insecurity on college campuses.
- Building on earlier work, a bill to close a gap which allows schools to prevent students with debt from walking at graduation, going on field trips, to prom, etc. It's critical to avoid stigmatizing students.
- Addressing some delays they've seen at several schools in taking in and processing free and reduced meals applications. If schools take an excessive amount of time, they would be required to reimburse families for the meals paid at full price.
- Delegate Roem shared background on earlier bills passed (e.g. banning alternative meals, requiring participation in CEP and After School Meals among eligible schools, allowing distribution of excess meals) and encouraged other jurisdictions to consider them. She provided a link to [a social media post](#) with her school meals legislation signed into law.

Nichole Wescott-Hayes, Government Relations Director, American Heart Association – Virginia provided

remarks on Virginia Food Access Coalition priorities for the upcoming session. Three priorities include:

- Grocery Incentive Act (The [Virginia Food Access Investment Fund](#)): First grant round was last year, second round is now open.
- Produce Incentives: Supporting [Virginia Fresh Match](#) with state funding. VFM provides matching support in urban and rural communities to SNAP participants shopping at farmers markets and some retailers.
- Produce Rx: Request to start a small pilot in the Department of Social Services.
- Governor's budget will come out next week which will help VFAC shape its strategy for the upcoming session.
- Ms. Wescott-Hayes offered an invitation to weekly calls she will host on legislative updates.

Radha Muthiah talked about CAFB's partnerships with colleges to support food security, including four community colleges in Northern Virginia. She also echoed Chair Cheh's interest in working together on Produce Rx programs and talked about CAFB's participation in the DC Food as Medicine Coalition with DC Greens and Food and Friends. There is a new Food Pharmacy in Children's National Hospital Center where food insecure children use a practitioner's prescription to get food. Their zip codes are collected so that follow-up can be done to ensure that children don't have to return to Children's for additional healthy food. Could there be another Food as Medicine Coalition in Virginia?

Michael J Wilson suggested that subcommittees could help drill down on some of these issues more deeply and learn from one another.

- There are many different versions of food as medicine programs in MD. Children's National reaches out to MD Hunger Solutions for SNAP support.
- There's also an opportunity to talk more about colleges – MD legislation focuses on campuses and not just students.
- Federal legislation provides an opportunity to focus more on direct certification which then avoids having to collect individual free and reduced school meal applications.

Chair Cheh suggested this could provide an opportunity to work with funders to shape actionable projects and referenced a recent meeting with Washington Regional Food Funders.

Vice Chair Stehle committed to bring some thoughts to Delegate Roem on proposed legislation during VML's legislative day.

Several speakers acknowledged Maryland Delegate Lorig Charkoudian's legislative leadership. She could not speak today due to participation in special session. The Delegate participated in a recent policy briefing. Her remarks [can be found here](#) beginning at 1:04:55.

Anna Sierra, Chief Development Officer in the Executive Office of the Maryland Department of Emergency Management shared [a draft of the Maryland Food Resiliency Council's first report to the MD General Assembly](#). FSRC made 16 recommendations, only three require legislation. These include:

- Delegate Charkoudian's proposed FARM program to support direct purchase of Maryland products for food banks, at farmers markets, etc.
- Full funding for the MD Food Resiliency Council and Office.
- Incentives to school systems and funds for the purchase of Maryland food.
- The Food Resiliency Council will monitor legislation this session through the Communications Subcommittee that Michael J Wilson chairs.

Chair Cheh shared information on the *No Senior Hungry Omnibus Act of 2021* that she introduced at the Council of the District of Columbia in October. This legislation would establish an interagency task force led by DC's Department of Agency and Community Living. The task force would be charged with multiple

responsibilities including the development of a plan to coordinate and communicate with seniors on available programs. The bill emerged from a series of meeting with senior advocacy groups. Chair Cheh wants the bill to be heard and pass to allow for planning in the next budget.

FARM members discussed some of the reasons why DC's food insecurity rate is so high. Ona Balkus thanked the Chair for her leadership in convening the work group and believes the bill is well informed by lived experience.

CAFB will be executing a large-scale survey of senior hunger. Ms. Muthiah believes results will be available in February or March.

Recommended Action: Chair Cheh requested a list of proposed legislation for FARM which was discussed during this meeting for members.

2022 COG FOOD AND AGRICULTURE RECOMMENDED LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

FARM Members provided feedback on several draft 2022 priorities to Chair Cheh ahead of her meeting with Legislative Committee of the COG Board.

Staff reached out to several FARM members who gave feedback at last year's meeting on this topic to see if they had recommendations for the group this year. Many were included it in the draft under consideration.

Staff recommended expanding priorities from two to four and explained COG's process for eventual consideration by the COG Board. The priorities guide limited outreach on federal and state legislation once approved.

The draft priorities represent a combination of issues that will be addressed in upcoming legislation which align with FARM goals, clear priorities from the committee (i.e. free school meals), or other priorities FARM may wish to express based on issues discussed to date (i.e. Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act). They seek to address food and farm issues in COG region and do not represent every issue.

Supervisor Gross requested a minor change to a recommendation so that local land use authority was clear. Councilwoman Jackson requested language be added on the need for more healthy kids' meals.

Action Item: FARM member requested changes will be made to the draft food and agriculture legislative priorities.

FARM MEMBER, COG, AND REGIONAL UPDATES

SNAP Emergency Allotments – Michael J Wilson, MD Hunger Solutions

There is not a lot of information at this time about what will happen in January. USDA waivers, and states' use of these, allows SNAP participants to receive the maximum benefit allowable and more funds in a lot of cases. When these waivers go away, benefit levels for hundreds of thousands of participants across the region will drop. It could be as significant as going from receiving \$250/month to \$20/month. He is hopeful that this benefit cliff will not be here soon.

Arlington County Food and Agriculture Updates – Libby Garvey, Arlington County Board of Supervisors

Board Member Garvey shared updates from Arlington County. Her presentation [is available at this link](#). She conveyed:

- The numerous organizations working together to support food security.
- The county hired a Food Security Coordinator last year.
- Highlights from the work of Arlington Friends of Urban Agriculture and their work to support people growing food and coordination of garden donations.

- The group has helped to coordinate 8,000 pounds (October data) to 16 organizations.
- They also do gleaning and support school gardens and started a small, demonstration garden on unused park space (Highlands Urban Gardens).
- Farmers markets in Arlington.
 - There are now ten and its oldest is on track to have its strongest year of sales.
- Highlights on Virginia Cooperative Extension's programming on a range of important food issues.
 - They have had impressive participation in some of their online educational programs.
- The expansion of Fresh Impact Farms, Arlington County's first commercial indoor farm. Fresh Impact Farms received an AFID grant for their expansion, creation of six new jobs, work to serve as an educational hub.
 - Arlington County also partnered with George Mason University's School of Business to do a study on these models. Anticipate a new urban farm business in the county.
- Importance of urban agriculture to contributing more to feeding the region in the future.

FRESHFARM Regional Grant Award – Hugo Mogollon, FRESHFARM

USDA has awarded FRESHFARM a four-year, \$1.4 million-dollar GUSNip grant. This is a close collaboration with Maryland Market Money (housed [at SMADC](#)) and [Virginia Fresh Match](#) (based at LEAP).

- FRESHFARM brought this opportunity to establish a one-of-a-kind, multistate farmers market incentives coalition to FARM.
- Support from FARM, state departments of human and social services, and the DC Food Policy Council were important to securing the grant.
- Local government investments in DC and MD (e.g. Produce Plus and contributions to MD Market Money) helped to secure more federal dollars.
- There has been an unprecedented increase of use of SNAP at farmers markets.
- 110 farmers markets and some CSAs will be part of the coalition to support participating families to purchase more fruits and vegetables.
- The project can be used as example for regional collaboration.

Ona Balkus asked about any data available on SNAP usage at farmers markets. Mr. Mogollon shared that FRESHFARM has seen 100% increase this year (\$650,000 in SNAP sales) over last year at its markets. Families are spending P-EBT and SNAP emergency allotments at farmers markets.

Michael J Wilson underscored the importance of P-EBT. When people have more resources they have the opportunity to make greater food choices.

Juliet Glass shared USDA data that shoppers spent \$33 million across the country in SNAP at farmers markets 2020. That was an increase of 33% at farmers markets and 69% to direct market farmers when compared to the same point in 2019.

Food and Water Resilience Project Update – Mark Scott, DC Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management

Mark Scott [briefed the group in August](#) and offered to come back in February. The project team is working to understand major food and water flows into the region, including how major food flows may be changing during the pandemic. They are working to develop an understanding of how different disasters would impact food and water needs. They have also been interviewing emergency managers and food assistance providers about information needed for decision making. This will lead to the outline of a plan to take to emergency managers in the region to enhance existing plans to respond to emergencies.

Based on all this work, the team will develop a “punch list” of what’s needed to implement this work. DC HSEMA has received FEMA funding to continue this project work. T

his will help with response and understanding where to build in more resiliency to the food system. Mr. Scott is paying attention to the work of the food policy councils, FRESHFARM, and others. We are all working toward the same purpose to build more resiliency into the food system.

Councilmember Cheh asked Mr. Scott to participate in an upcoming hearing on climate resiliency in the District. Mr. Scott indicated that the Director of HSEMA will be there but would be happy to speak with her staff further.

COG FARM: FARM Committee 2022 and Healthy Food Policy Compendium updates – Lindsay Smith, COG

Lindsay Smith briefly showed the Healthy Food Policy Compendium. Additional research is being conducted and it is being put into publication format. She hopes to have an updated draft for review by the end of the year. Additional review and expertise will be required but the document will be an important resource for FARM going forward.

REVIEW ACTION ITEMS AND ADJOURN

The next FARM Committee meeting is Friday, February 11, 2022, at 11 am.

Chair Cheh adjourned the meeting at 3 pm.

ATTENDANCE:

Mary Cheh, Chair, District of Columbia
Jon Stehle, Vice Chair, City of Fairfax
Reuben Collins, Charles County (alternate)
Libby Garvey, Arlington County
Penny Gross, Fairfax County
Ann Wheeler, Prince William County
Tom Ross, City of Fairfax (alternate)
Ona Balkus, District of Columbia Food Policy Council
Heather Bruskin, Montgomery County Food Council
Jeremy Criss, Montgomery County Office of Agriculture
Sara Hoverter, Georgetown University
Meredith Ledlie Johnson, Virginia Cooperative Extension
Radha Muthiah, Capital Area Food Bank
Julie Oberg, Maryland Department of Agriculture
Michael J Wilson, Maryland Hunger Solutions
Hugo Mogollon, FRESHFARM
Nick Stavely, FRESHFARM (alternate)
Victoria Treski, Bainum Family Foundation

Ariel Ardura, Office of Councilmember Cheh
Kristin Tribble, Office of Councilmember Rice
Stephanie Hopkins, Arlington County Department of Human Services
Kim Haun, Arlington County Department of Parks and Recreation
Max Broad, DC Voters for Animals
Aaron Tolson, Northern Virginia Food Rescue
Rebecca Gates, Northern Virginia Food Rescue
Elizabeth Teuwen, Montgomery County Food Council

Mark Scott, DC HSEMA
R. Kekoa Koehler, CNA Corporation
Connie Dalton, Prince William County Planning Department
Alex Cordova, U.S. Department of Agriculture
Kirsten Kelley, Virginia Cooperative Extension
John Shockley, ALIVE!
Juliet Glass, FRESHFARM
Gretchen Greiner-Lott, Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation
Cynthia Singiser, Capital Area Food Bank
Ethan Gardner, Office of State Delegate Danica Roem

Speakers

Virginia State Delegate Danica Roem
Nichole Wescott-Hayes, American Heart Association - Virginia
Anna Sierra, Maryland Department of Emergency Management

COG Staff

Christine Howard
Lindsay Smith
Steve Bieber
Brian LeCouteur
Tom Gates