



MONTGOMERY COUNTY
FOOD COUNCIL

Building Collaborative Urban-Rural Markets: The Role and Impact of Food Councils

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Overview

- The role Food Councils can play in creating new market opportunities
- About the Montgomery County Food Council and our strategic priorities
- Specific examples on how market opportunities have been created through this work in Montgomery County, Maryland and the DMV region

Note: We do this work in partnership with many collaborators and will name some of these key partners throughout the presentation.





What are Food Councils?

One of many definitions: A local food council is a group convening around a defined geographic area to assess and recommend practices or policies that affect one or more aspects of the food system.

Varied Structures: Loose coalition, fiscal sponsor, independent non-profit, government

Varied Purposes: Advocacy, education, coordination, **problem-solving**

Varied Focus Areas: Food security, local agriculture, food waste, health/nutrition, etc



Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future Food Policy Networks Project

www.foodpolicynetworks.org



MCFC History and Structure

- **2010:** Community Discussions
- **2011:** Advisory Board
- **2012:** Founded
 - Part time coordinator
- **2018:** 501(c)3
- **2019:** Board of Directors
 - 4 full time staff
- **2021:** SNAP CBO
- **2022:** First Strategic Plan
- **2024:** 11 full time staff, 25 volunteer councilmembers, 9 BOD





Mission & Vision

MCFC builds an equitable, resilient and sustainable local food system through collaboration, transformation, and cultivation.

MCFC envisions a vibrant and equitable food system that is healthy for our community, economy, and environment.



MCFC Scope and Priorities

Strategic Priorities (2024-25)

- Increase food security
- Increase access to affordable land for food production
- Increase local food and beverage procurement
- Reduce food waste and support food recovery

Tools for Accomplishing

- Public convenings and field trips (i.e. education)
- Formal and informal advocacy
- Connecting across the food system
- Evaluation and equity
- Direct service to inform



Farm to Foodbank Program

Our Role

- Pandemic Food Security Taskforce
- Long history of convening local growers and food assistance providers
- Advocacy, evaluation, and program support

Key Partners

- Manna Food Center, MoCo Office of Ag, MoCo DHHS, Greater Washington Comm. Foundation
- 30 farmers, 45 food assistance providers (FAPs)

Result / Status: Program continues with local dollars. **Key Findings:** Sweet spot between wholesale and retail pricing to meet needs of both FAPs and growers. Contract growing to support culturally appropriate and highly -requested items. **Capacity building grants** increased growing capacity for variety of business needs.



Farm to School

Our Role

- Long history of convening local growers and partnering with MCPS
- Flexible non-profit partner

Key Partners

- Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), MoCo Office of Food Systems Resilience, MoCo Office of Ag

Result / Status: Secured USDA Farm to School Action Planning grant with commitment from MCPS. Strong collaboration with school system, farmers, county agencies to co-create actionable Farm to School Plan with robust community engagement with local / hyper-local growers. Anticipated 12/2024



Strategic Plan to End Childhood Hunger

Our Role

- Contracted by County Council to create plan, Convene implementation
- Community trust via long history of community engagement
- Advocated for creation of MoCo Office of Food System Resilience (OFSR)

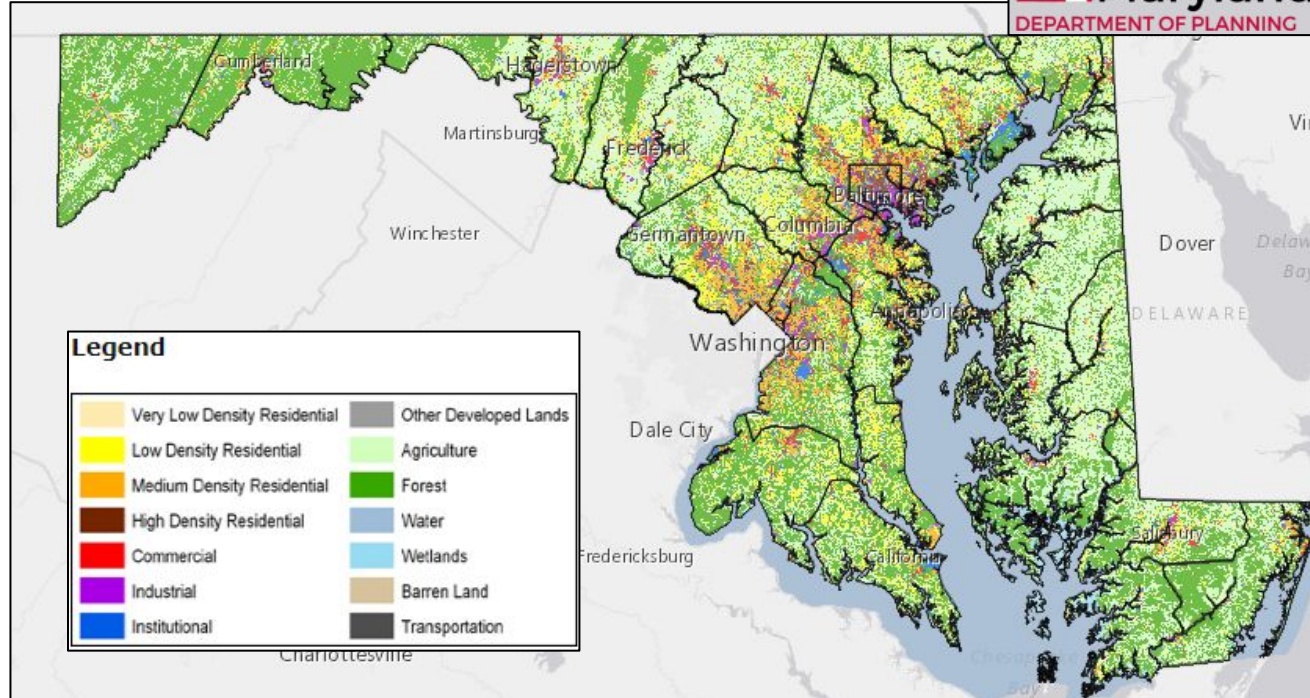
Key Partners

- 150 organizational partners
- Over 1,300 resident surveys, focus groups
- County agencies and school system

Result / Status: Recommendations in plan promoted local sourcing where possible. Recent Special Appropriation to OFSR creates grant programs that incentivize local sourcing for pilot programs, funding for cold storage. Investing in connection between food security and local agriculture producers to achieve County priorities.



Expanding Market Access: State





MD Food System Resiliency Council

Our Role

- Advocated for development, served as local model re: role of food councils
- Appointed member and hold leadership positions within council

Key Partners

- MD Dept of Emergency Management
- State agencies (MDA, MDE, MDH, MSDE, MDHS), Elected Officials
- Statewide local food councils

Result / Status: Services as statewide food council. Creates recommendations for MD General Assembly. Convenes state and local leadership around food system issues, promotes coordination.



Examples of FSRC Impact

MD Certified Local Farm and Fish Program

- State agencies mandated to source 25% from certified local farms / fisheries
- If not possible, submit report that identifies barriers - promotes future investment
- MCFC advocated heavily and testified in support of this legislation

MD Local Food Council Collaborative

- FSRC recommendation to fund local food councils in underrepresented areas
- MCFC awarded USDA Regional Food System Partnership Planning grant to seed-fund local food councils, establish new statewide collaborative
 - MD Dept of Emergency Management (FSRC administrator) key in-kind partner



Additional Connections

DMV Regional Food Council Collaborative

- Subcommittee within Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
- Connecting across three-state region, part of USDA-funded research agreement
- 2024 focus on connecting urban/rural markets: cold storage, aggregation, distribution

USDA AMS Local Food Purchasing Assistance Cooperative Agreements

- MD food banks sourcing from local farmers, informed by and connected to Farm to Foodbank producers
- Farm to School direct purchasing - assisted school system with planning



Future Opportunities

- Increase supply to meet demand for local table crop farms via investments in cold storage, facilities for aggregation, processing, distribution
 - Informed MD's approach to USDA's Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program
- Land affordability, farm incubator programs, tax incentives for table crop farms, investment in value chain coordination





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Thank you!

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