

FARM POLICY COMMITTEE AND MARYLAND FOOD SYSTEM RESILIENCY COUNCIL JOINT MEETING

Friday, August 11, 2023
10 am to 12:15 pm

City Hall
7401 Baltimore Avenue
College Park, MD 20740

Zoom Connection Information:

<https://zoom.us/j/91633932736>

Or One tap mobile:

+13017158592,,91633932736# US (Washington DC)

+19292056099,,91633932736# US (New York)

Or Telephone:

Dial (for higher quality, dial a number based on your current location):

+1 301 715 8592 US (Washington DC)

+1 929 205 6099 US (New York)

* An RSVP for in-person attendance is requested [at this link](#) by no later than Tuesday, August 8th for catering and parking purposes.

Meeting Notes

9:30 A.M. 1. ARRIVAL AND OPEN NETWORKING

Coffee, tea, and morning refreshments were available.

WebEx began at 10:00 am.

10:00 A.M. 2. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Councilmember Maria Mackie, COG FARM Policy Committee Member
Councilmember Jon Stehle, FARM Vice Chair
Secretary Russell Strickland, Maryland Department of Emergency
Management Councilmember Jon Stehle, FARM Policy Committee Chair

Reasonable accommodation is provided upon request, including alternative formats of meeting materials.
Visit www.mwco.org/accommodations or call (202) 962-3300 or (202) 962-3213 (TDD).

Heather Bruskin, Director, Montgomery County Office of Food Systems Resilience Co-Chair, Maryland Food System Resilience Council, and FARM Member

City of College Park Councilmember and FARM Policy Committee Member, Maria Mackie, will provide a welcome to College Park.

College Park is home to Maryland's flagship university, The University of Maryland, College Park. It also encourages food production through legislation which enables front and backyard gardening. Food scrap curbside pick-up and drop off is available. "Black Gold" composted soil is something College Park is famous for and available to local farmers and landscapers. College is looking to advance its food resources while being an environmental leader.

Brittany Cook conveyed Secretary Russ Strickland's remarks, in his absence. The FSRC was created as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting economic crisis. The FSRC seeks to develop equitable and sustainable policy recommendations, increase the long-term resiliency of the food system, expand the impact of existing food councils and to develop a strategic plan to increase production and procurement of Maryland certified foods. The MDEM is tasked with co-chairing the Council and providing administrative support.

Since the first meeting in June 2021, the Council has prioritized developing an inclusive and collaborative environment to support creation of policy recommendations, information sharing, and posture critical connections and partnerships across the food system. The Council also identifies legislative considerations to engage in dialogue with interested parties in Maryland.

Secretary Strickland expressed gratitude for the collaboration and partnerships with MW COG and Lindsay Smith for her efforts. He wished to recognize FSRC Co-chair Heather Bruskin, and sub-committee Chairs Michael J. Wilson, Diana Taylor and Dr. Stephanie Lansing for their dedication and efforts. Additionally, state agency co-vice chairs, Michael Powell of MD Dept. of Agriculture, Mischelle Williams of Dept. of Human Services, and Dr. Stephanie in her role with Univ. Maryland College of Agriculture and Natural Resources. Finally, Secretary of Agriculture, Kevin Atticks and Secretary of Human Services, Rafael Lopez for their keen interest in building resiliency and collaboration in building a more resilient Maryland where communities can thrive.

FARM Chair Jon Stehle shared an overview of the FARM Policy Committee. He provided a slide illustrating the organizational structure of the COG's FARM Policy Committee

- Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments is the hub of regional collaboration in the area.
- FARM is one of several major policy committees reporting to the COG Board.
- Guided by COG's Annual legislative priorities, FARM takes (limited) policy positions.

Approval of the June FARM meeting summary by FARM members will take place by email.

MD FSRC Co-Chair and FARM Member Bruskin introduced speaker Zachari Curtis. She is an inspirational partner, and this is her last meeting as she has been selected as an NAACP's Legal Defense Fund Marshall Motley Scholarship

Award and will be entering Harvard Law School this fall.

**10:30 A.M. 3. PERSPECTIVES ON CRISIS AND OUR REGION'S FOOD SYSTEM
AND ITS CAPACITY TO RESPOND: REGIONAL PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION**

***Zachari Curtis, USDA Urban Agriculture Advisory Committee Member,
FARM Catalytic Opportunities Work Group Member, Washington, D.C.***

Ms. Curtis has an extensive background in the Mid-Atlantic region's food system. She has been an owner operator of a small farm and food business, staff at Bread for the City and Dreaming Out Loud, and more. Ms. Curtis has worked with a range of stakeholders, including Black farmers and food entrepreneurs, and residents of historically disadvantaged communities. She was also an Advisory Board member of the Mid-Atlantic Food Access and Resilience Coalition (MAFRAC), started during COVID-19 to connect our region's farmers with organizations and community groups providing emergency food assistance.

Ms. Curtis expressed her appreciation to the COG. She is a long-term DC resident with roots in the South. She is drawn to the food system due to and is committed to raising awareness of its gaps and history of inequality. During the pandemic she operated a small non-profit food distribution hub built by an optimistic young group of people.

Lindsay Smith invited her to engage in policy work with the COG Catalytic Opportunities Work Group. This exposed her to various members and broader operations of the regional food system. The frank reality of a successful food system operation came to light through this experience. Large scale government contracting is the backbone, rather than small scale food operators. She sees that millions and billions of dollars are spent by the government, years in advance of purchasing, based on metrics of competency that are important, but have excluded many communities. Thus arose the highest goal of the Catalytic Opportunities Working Group, to research the impact of these historically inequitable policies on particular groups, understand who has contracting power, who can experiment with them, who can provide proof of concept?

She recounted the challenging efforts to source food from farmers for the benefit of black/ underserved communities. She also strived to support a network of farmers, many of whom are black, to grow food due to the food shortage. Gaps have existed for centuries. Gaps such as lack of cold storage, and trucks should not be an issue as they are fundamentals in preparedness. The historic gaps are really a form of theft - theft of opportunity.

She feels that the historic gaps in food provision exceed her ability- due to lack of generational connections to farming, the labor system, financial constraints amounting to a lack of power. She recognizes her colleagues who work very hard to achieve small victories in such a complex problem. She seeks to add value and contributes as a thought-leader. She strongly encourages everyone on COG to continue the important work of equity.

She also acknowledged her membership of the USDA's Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Advisory Committee. Caveat, her comments today are solely her own, not representative of the opinions of any committee she participates in. Two key aspects that the Committee should continue to work on involve the production/ distribution chain of urban agriculture and innovative production. Recommendations pertain to composting and supporting municipalities with local zoning laws and making more room for urban agriculture. Further, communities will benefit from the modifying programs, and program eligibility.

Meeting notes for the USDA's Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Advisory Committee can be found on the website.

<https://www.usda.gov/partnerships/federal-advisory-committee-urban-ag#meetings>

***Michael Protas, One Acre Farm, Montgomery County, MD,
In conversation with Brittany Cook, Executive Associate to Secretary
Strickland, MDEM***

Mr. Protas has been operating One Acre Farm since 2008, purchasing his own 34-acre farm in Dickerson in 2017. Mr. Protas will discuss his experiences as a small farmer who has provided food assistance to catastrophic events in the region and in other parts of the country, namely, Hurricane Sandy in 2012 and Hurricane Harvey in 2017, as well as during the COVID-19 pandemic.

He described his operations as a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farmer with approximately 200 participating families. He collaborates with other farmers in his region and through the use of capacity building grants with MARBIDCO to work better and more effectively to grow vegetables and produce more food for the region.

Question: How were you able to mobilize and scale your operation to meet the need during your response in Hurricanes Harvey and Sandy and COVID-19?

Response: By reaching out to other farmer friends and collaborating with them, he was able to gather resources of food, water, batteries, clothes, and money and deliver them to the affected communities of Brooklyn in 24 hours. He realized the power of a strong community of farmers can make a meaningful impact. For Hurricane Harvey, he connected with parties who gathered supplies, and was able to provide the transportation of these resources to the impacted communities. For COVID-19, when the food crisis hit, he realized how important local farming is and how vital CSA farmers are in society and how it is important to showcase this for future generations.

CSA farmers are integral to food system resiliency. It is important to demonstrate this model for future generations so that they can see that it provides a valuable, sustainable, lucrative life and continues this vital industry. He noted that it is important to advocate for CSA farmers to be paid a living wage for their contributions.

Question: What challenges did you encounter and how did you overcome them? Response: He approached the Hurricane situations by collaborating and problem solving with his farmer network, which is a collaborative, supportive, resourceful community. During the Covid-19 crisis, the federal government unleashed economic relief grant funding which he received and utilized to increase capacity to grow additional food. Since the end of the pandemic emergency, sales have decreased. He sees a need to figure out why and how to return customers and demand for small farm grown produce.

Question: Why do you feel it is important for the public to support CSAs?

Response: The cost of growing food is more than people are willing to pay for it. There are 3 factors that farmers can use to compensate for this differential. They can take advantage of either the farm worker (pay less), the environment, or the farmer himself. None of these factors are beneficial to society. He thinks it is best for farmers to diversify their product offering rather than concentrating on only one or two products. Educate customers about the farm process to help them appreciate the product relative to pricing.

Question: What is the impact of the shift from local CSA buying from the peak Covid-19 peak

Response: Michael Protas replied that “convenience” is of utmost importance to customers and impossible to local farmers to do so. He has partnered with Adventist Health to deliver 200 bags of produce to their 3 locations, which creates the convenience needed by employees with an impact of an institutional purchasing opportunity for him as the farmer. Institutional purchasing is the most effective and necessary way for CSAs to survive and compete.

Zachari Curtis added the historical context of the disadvantage of small farmers- lack of contracting/funding which are barriers to entry and success. There is an enormous amount of work that farmers do to produce and distribute food, which is underappreciated by society. Further, the labor system is complex regarding farm labors with regulations prohibiting organizing unions, strides for improving working conditions and our externalizing farm workers. The perception is that “people don’t want to work,’ to which Ms. Curtis adds, “....for inadequate pay, for bad jobs that shorten their lives...” Labor oppression is widespread, and the US has maintained a food system that relies on the exploitation of workers and spins a narrative that we must have the lowest cost of food prices for customer satisfaction. There are several political, cultural, and economic issues entwined in the food industry that are oversimplified.

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11:10 A.M. 4. PLANNING FOR CRISIS AND OUR REGION'S FOOD AND WATER RESILIENCE

Mark Scott, Critical Infrastructure Specialist, District of Columbia Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DC HSEMA)

Philip J. Palin, Subject-Matter Expert and Consultant, Supply Chain Resilience

In 2019, FEMA awarded DC HSEMA a Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Grant to undertake planning for the National Capital Region’s (NCR) food and water resilience. They proceeded with the support and guidance of a technical advisory committee which was immensely valuable. See slides.

Goal: Improve regional capacity to meet food and water needs during and after a disaster.

Outcomes:

- Completed Food and Water Supply Chain Analysis
 - Where are bottlenecks?
 - What are system vulnerabilities?
- Situational analysis and information sharing
 - No consistent method historically.
 - NCR Geospatial data exchange (GDX) is the most promising platform.
- Food and water strategic frameworks.
 - What are the practices that have been deployed most successfully?
 - Lay that atop the existing EM plan and look for opportunities to strengthen.
- Regional stakeholder summit.
 - Feedback helped to formulate Objectives for Phase 2, implementation.

After several years of planning, HSEMA received subsequent implementation

funding in 2021 to implement the building of regional capacity which was done by DC HSEMA in collaboration with COG.

Mr. Scott presented an overview of outcomes to date, including as they relate to the major grocery supply chains which provide most of the region's food. He discussed project tasks and how the team is leveraging data and information to equip emergency managers in DC and the NCR with new tools to plan for, and respond to, catastrophic events impacting food access.

Project tasks for Phase 2, implementation:

- Establish formal public/private partnerships within the Region.
- Help NCR jurisdictions use Strategic Frameworks to strengthen their local capabilities.
- Develop and socialize tools for supply chain messaging and communication.
- Support improvements to regional data sharing.
- Initiate annual regional workshops.
- Identify and address training.
- Conduct regional and interregional exercises.

Keys to successful application

- Mapping existing supply chain.
- Building strategic partnerships.
- Using data to improve response.
 - Data from USDA and SNAP was helpful.

Mr. Palin provided an overview of the project's work to strengthen public private stakeholder relationships in the NCR and Mid-Atlantic, and the value of doing so. He posed the question, "How do we maintain substantial flows from preexisting capacity?"

He shared a slide illustrating the envisioned public/private partnership model of a Mid-Atlantic Food Flows Collaborative.

Vision: Demand and supply networks for food will continue to flow with the best possible volume and velocity even on the worst days.

This is a simplified, less bureaucratic, public/private collaboration to share information and achieve the vision.

They identified the top supermarket leaders in the region. Two or three providers have an 80% market share for grocery provision in a region, which is true across the nation.

A zoom call with major suppliers was held on July 12, 2023.

They expressed their priorities which include:

- Regional approach is appropriate.
- Food flows need more priority.
- Private sector sees that the public sector approaches (especially state and federal) are too complex.
- States & FEMA must eventually be involved when a disruption occurs.
- Transparency in decision making is necessary.
- Communication among operators during a disruption is needed.

Question: Comment/insight: If coordinated, the local urban farmers should be able to produce enough to keep the food supply flowing; purchasing power is important and keeping the local dollar local is important. Response: Scale is the issue, especially involving a large-scale disaster. Resilience is enhanced with more diversity of supply. Currently, there is a concentration and a lack of diversity. The more a local supplier can scale up, the better.

Question: Has COG compared the data findings of supply with other major cities (LA, Chicago, Boston, etc.)? How important is faith-based support?
Response: The team had conferred with other major cities LA, Chicago, Houston. There are similarities in the concentration of suppliers. They discovered that COG has more resilience than other regions due to such factors as transportation accessibility.

Question: In areas with a lack of food suppliers/retailers, the most vulnerable populations, what can be available to them in an emergency? Response: Mapping the food supply revealed blank areas where no retailers/suppliers were available. There needs to be more public/private partnerships to address this gap.

Lindsay Smith noted that Emergency Managers in Virginia inquired about a template to more efficiently contract with local organizations for disruption response.

11:45 A.M. 5. MARYLAND FOOD BANK EARLY WARNING SYSTEM PROJECT WITH MDEM

***Sania Shams, Director of Sourcing and Inventory, Maryland Food Bank
Daniel Sturm, VP for Learning, Measurement, and Evaluation, Maryland Food Bank (MFB)***

Ms. Shams and Mr. Sturm provided a high-level overview of MFB's new Early Warning System Reports (Cost of Goods) and how this information is being incorporated into the Maryland Department of Emergency Management's thresholds for awareness and mitigation.

Daniel Strums provided a metaphor that using a food bank is like a canary in a coal mine for those facing hunger and hardship. Food banks, as first responders, are themselves an early warning system of the strains on our food system. They are a data driven organization and are developing a system monitoring tool. There are 13 data points that are being studied as indicators.

Food Bank Early Warning System indicators/pressure points measured:

- Demand is increasing at food banks, internet searches, and 211 calls for food.
- Food Supply (movement of supplies, inventory turnover, sourcing outlook)
- Hardship (pricing, affordability, food insufficiency)

Ms. Shams discussed the use of food price analysis in the Early Warning System. The top 25 food item prices were compared from pre-Covid 2019 to FY 2023. They examined what the causes of the price changes - whether by inflation or supply chain, labor cost, seasonality.

The Food Bank deals with third party distributors who did not know the cause of price increases. Costs overall per pound, 2022 to 2023, were flat overall for the MFB. Individual items were reviewed and contributing factors such as a change in product/quality were also considered. Patterns were examined and contributing factors such as crop related, demand related, etc. Knowing these factors allowed them to make corrective actions.

12:00 P.M. 6. FARM AND FSRC MEMBER UPDATES

Heather Bruskin, Co-Chair, MD FSRC

FSRC Co-Chair and founding FARM Member, Ms. Bruskin, provided a brief,

summary observations from the meeting. She invited FARM and FSRC members to share updates and announcements of regional or statewide interest.

Question: How much information is being disseminated on the USDA Farmers Discrimination Suit (Eugene Pickett and Latino Farmers and Ranchers Trade Association) due to the Oct. 31, 2023, deadline for application of restitution?

Response: Redress is targeted at a group of “socially disadvantaged” farmers. It is not clear who is exactly being helped. We as a society have to be more proactive about how we read policy to see who is benefiting. USDA publishes the results of their public meeting, and they do that.

Comment: Maryland Hunger Solutions will distribute invitations to the Sept. 20 Maryland Food Access and Nutrition network (virtual) meeting in preparation for the legislative session in Maryland.

12:15 PM 6. ADJOURN TO LUNCH AND NETWORKING
Jon Stehle, FARM Policy Committee Vice Chair

Speaking Participants

Jon Stehle, Chair, FARM Committee & Councilmember, City of Fairfax

Brittany Cook, Executive Associate to Secretary Strickland, Maryland Department of Emergency Management

Heather Bruskin, Director, Montgomery County Office Food System Resilience & Co-Chair, MD FSRC

Mark Curtis

Zachari Curtis, USDA Urban Agriculture Advisory Committee Member, FARM Catalytic Opportunities Work Group Member

Michael Protas, One Acre Farm, Montgomery County, MD

Diane Todd, Agricultural Law Education Initiative, UMD Baltimore County

Mark Scott, Critical Infrastructure Specialist, District of Columbia Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DC HSEMA)

Philip J. Palin, Subject-Matter Expert and Consultant, Supply Chain Resilience

Ashley Sharp, Co-Owner, Market Fresh Gourmet

Charles Sharp, Chairman, Black Emergency Managers Association International

Hugo Mogollon, FRESHFARM

Daniel Sturm, VP for Learning, Measurement, Evaluation, Maryland Food Bank

Sania Shams, Director of Sourcing and Inventory, Maryland Food Bank

Michael J. Wilson, Executive Director, Maryland Hunger Solutions

Maria Mackie, City of College Park (alternate)

Virtual and In-person Participants

To be updated based upon member feedback.

