

MARYLAND FOOD SYSTEM
RESILIENCY COUNCIL

INTERIM REPORT TO THE
MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

NOVEMBER 1, 2021

The Honorable Larry Hogan
Governor
State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

The Honorable William C. Ferguson, IV
President
Senate of Maryland
State House, H-107
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Adrienne A. Jones
Speaker
Maryland House of Delegates
State House, H-101
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Report required by Public Safety Article §14-1103(c) (MSAR # 13046)

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent response highlighted and exacerbated systemic challenges in the food system on local, state, and national levels. Food insecurity and the need for assistance skyrocketed as response measures resulted in the temporary closure of businesses and reduced access to normal support services. The impacts to communities across Maryland were stark; the Maryland Food Bank alone reported an 88% increase in food distribution since March of 2020 when compared with the same 16-month period prior to the pandemic.

As we look to the future, we must also consider the lessons learned regarding our local food supply chain. The pandemic demonstrated that we need innovative ideas and investment into our state's food production capabilities, focusing on mitigating and preparing for climate change impacts we know will impact our food system. Overall reduction of food waste and improved employment of best practices for local composting and food waste processing methods will build our resilience in the face of changing environments.

The Maryland Food Resiliency Council (FSRC) was established pursuant to Chapter 725 of 2021 in order to work toward a more resilient food system in the State. The law cites four goals for the Council:

1. To address the food insecurity crisis in the State resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis;
2. To develop, on or before November 1, 2021, equity and sustainability policy recommendations to increase the long-term resiliency of the food system;
3. To expand the impact of existing food council organizations; and
4. To develop, on or before November 1, 2021, a strategic plan to increase the production and procurement of Maryland certified food.

The Co-Chairs of the Maryland FSRC respectfully submit this report on behalf of the 33 appointed Council members. The Maryland Department of Emergency Management was identified by legislation to both Co-Chair and provide staffing for the Food System Resiliency Council. While MDEM staff assisted in drafting the

content of this document as part of that requirement, this report reflects the wisdom, knowledge, and experience of the expert members of the Food System Resiliency Council. This document is not a Maryland Department of Emergency Management product, but a product of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council. The report submitted to you today is the result of just five months of intense work by the Council members and stakeholders across the State, working together to develop recommendations and policies which will improve production, distribution, and access to culturally-appropriate, nutritious food for the nearly 1 in 3 Marylanders who are food insecure.

This interim report focuses on “shovel ready” policy and program recommendations and highlights best practices that have already been demonstrated locally or nationally. While we are confident the recommendations in this interim report can be acted upon now to increase food system resiliency in Maryland, we also acknowledge that much more time and consideration is required to fully develop the equity and sustainability policy recommendations and the robust strategic plan to increase production and procurement of Maryland certified food required by the legislation. Years of racial inequity, climate change, and shifting policy priorities have resulted in the food system we have today; it will take time and thoughtful dialogue with stakeholders to identify concrete, sustainable steps to improve the systems that impact the food security of Marylanders.

The Council will continue to meet regularly and develop policy recommendations around all four goals laid out by the Chapter 725 over the next year. We look forward to the submission of our next report in November of 2022. Based on the work we have already done, we have full confidence forthcoming recommendations will continue to build resilience into the entirety of the Maryland food system for the benefit of all Marylanders.

Sincerely,

Russell J. Strickland
Acting Secretary, Maryland Department
of Emergency Management
Co-Chair, Maryland Food System
Resiliency Council

Heather Bruskin
Executive Director, Montgomery County
Food Council
Co-Chair, Maryland Food System
Resiliency Council

Cc: Sarah Albert, Department of Legislative Services (5 copies)

Council Membership Roster

Organization	Name
Maryland Department of Emergency Management (FSRC Co-Chair)	Russell Strickland
Food Council Member (FSRC Co-Chair)	Heather Bruskin <i>Montgomery County Food Council</i>
Maryland State Senate	Katie Fry Hester
Maryland House of Delegates	Lorig Charkoudian
Maryland Department of Human Services (FSRC Co-Vice Chair)	Mischelle A. Williams
Maryland Department of Agriculture (FSRC Co-Vice Chair)	Mark Powell
University of Maryland College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (FSRC Co-Vice Chair)	Stephanie Lansing
Maryland Department of Commerce	Wade A. Haerle
Maryland Farm Bureau	Jeremy V. Criss <i>Montgomery County Department of Agriculture</i>
Maryland Agricultural & Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation	Stephen McHenry
Food Council Member	Sydney Daigle <i>Prince George's County Food Equity Council</i>
Food Council Member	Janice Wiles <i>Frederick County Food Council</i>
Food Council Member	Theresa Stahl <i>Western Maryland Food Council</i>
Food Council Member	Brenda DiCarlo <i>Southern Maryland Food Council</i>
University of Maryland Extension	Lisa Lachenmayr
University of Maryland Eastern Shore Small Farm Program	Berran Rogers
Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology	Nancy Nunn
Public School System	Beth Brewster <i>Caroline County Public Schools</i>
Statewide food insecurity advocacy organization	Michael J. Wilson <i>Maryland Hunger Solutions</i>
Farmer	Les Richardson <i>Richardson Farms (Baltimore County)</i>
Food business owner	Heather Buritsch <i>Headwaters Grille (Talbot County)</i>

Food business owner	Jon Class <i>Class Produce</i>
Food system policy expert	Dena Leibman <i>Future Harvest Casa</i>
Racial equity in food system policy expert	Diana Taylor <i>Anne Arundel County Partnership for Children and Families</i>
Food system policy expert	Anne Palmer <i>Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future</i>
Food system policy expert	Holly Freishtat <i>Baltimore City Food Policy and Planning</i>
Food system impacts on climate change and environment expert	Chloë Waterman <i>Friends of the Earth</i>
Food nutrition and public health expert	Daphene Altema-Johnson <i>Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future</i>
University of Maryland Eastern Shore Extension	Moses T. Kairo
Maryland State Department of Education	Robin Ziegler
Maryland Department of General Services	Mike Myers
Maryland Food Bank	Meg Kimmel
Capital Area Food Bank	Adam LaRose

Executive Summary

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and subsequent response highlighted and exacerbated systemic and structural challenges in the food system on local, state, and national levels. Food insecurity and the need for assistance skyrocketed as response measures resulted in the temporary closure of businesses and reduced access to normal support services. The impacts to communities across Maryland were stark; the Maryland Food Bank alone reported an 88% increase in food distribution since March of 2020 when compared with the same 16-month period prior to the pandemic. Simultaneously, some farmers and food businesses were faced with a sudden drop in demand for their supply or an inability to distribute goods. They were left with limited places to turn to and few systems in place to connect supply with demand.

Throughout the response, it became clear that the food system, both nationally and in Maryland, was not built to respond to such an acute increase in need for such a sustained period of time. While governments, nonprofits, private sector, and academic institutions quickly took critical steps to address the food crisis in Maryland, systemic barriers to food insecurity pre-dating the pandemic challenged response efforts to the drastic increase in need for food, the challenges in the food supply chain, and the drastic increase in economic dislocation.

Food insecurity is not a new issue in Maryland. While COVID-19 increased the number of individuals and families who experienced food insecurity, it is important to note that existing pre-COVID conditions of racial inequities that perpetuates generational poverty, and policy decisions that impact community food insecurity will require a long-term strategy to dismantle and rectify.

The average cost of a meal in Maryland is \$3.24 according to the Feeding America Map the Meal Gap study. Prior to COVID-19's impact on Maryland, an estimated 640,180, or just over 10 percent of Marylanders face hunger, and 30 percent of them are children.¹ Feeding America estimates only account for individuals below the Federal Poverty Level. These numbers grow when considering ALICE households; the Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed households where individuals and families live above the Federal Poverty Level but do not make enough to afford basic household necessities based on the local cost of living. In 2018, prior to the pandemic, the ALICE Project estimated that 30 percent of Maryland households are ALICE households, with an additional 9 percent at or below the Federal Poverty Level.²

¹ "Hunger in Maryland," Feeding America, last accessed September 28, 2021.
<https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/maryland>

² "Maryland State Overview," United for ALICE, last accessed September 27, 2021.
<https://www.unitedforalice.org/state-overview/maryland>

The impacts of climate change will further threaten the food security of Marylanders. According to the United Nations Foundations in an article published in 2020, “Yield growth for wheat, maize, and other crops has been declining in many countries due to extreme heat, severe weather, and droughts. By some estimates, in the absence of effective adoption, global yields could decline by up to 30 percent by 2050.”³ At the same time, Columbia University cites population growth estimates in the same time period as an additional 3.4 billion people across the globe, increasing demand for food between 59 and 98 percent.⁴ Climate change without adaptive solutions won’t simply make food less available; the health impacts resulting from a reduction in vegetables and legumes in particular will pose a significant public health threat. Low vegetable consumption could increase risk of several noncommunicable diseases, such as coronary heart disease and stroke, and the risk of different types of cancers globally.⁵

The Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (FSRC) was established pursuant to Chapter 725 of 2021, sponsored by Senator Katie Fry Hester (Senate Bill 723) and Delegate Lorig Charkoudian (House Bill 831) in order to work toward a more resilient food system in the State and to address those systemic impediments which influence food insecurity in Maryland. The law cites four goals for the Council:

1. To address the food insecurity crisis in the State resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis;
2. To develop, on or before November 1, 2021, equity and sustainability policy recommendations to increase the long-term resiliency of the food system;
3. To expand the impact of existing food council organizations; and
4. To develop, on or before November 1, 2021, a strategic plan to increase the production and procurement of Maryland certified food.

The legislation charged the Maryland Department of Emergency Management (MDEM) and the University of Maryland College of Agriculture and Natural Resources with staffing the Council and authorized the Acting Secretary of MDEM to appoint Council members in accordance with the membership described in the legislation.⁶

In addition to the Council members, additional stakeholders were engaged through subcommittee meetings and other forums in order to ensure a transparent, accessible process for individuals and organizations active in the Maryland food system. Monthly meetings typically included at least one presentation from an organization or government agency responsible for a portion of the food system.

³ “Climate Change and the Future of Food,” Hobert and Negra, 2021
<https://unfoundation.org/blog/post/climate-change-and-the-future-of-food/>

⁴ “How Climate Change Will Alter Our Food,” Cho, 2018,
<https://news.climate.columbia.edu/2018/07/25/climate-change-food-agriculture/>

⁵ “Effect of Environmental Changes on Vegetable and Legume Yields and Nutritional Quality,” Scheelbeek et al. (2018). <https://www.pnas.org/content/115/26/6804>

⁶ The original legislation refers to “Maryland Emergency Management Agency” and the “Executive Director” of MEMA. On October 1, 2021 MEMA was elevated to a standalone state department, renamed the Maryland Department of Emergency Management with an Acting Secretary, rather than Executive Director.

Subcommittees focused on developing draft recommendations for their assigned goals and objectives based on the subject matter expertise and experiences of the subcommittee members. Subcommittees also occasionally invited guest speakers to discuss a specific initiative or topic to better inform recommendation development.

The Council and subcommittees met over the course of five months to develop this interim report in accordance with the legislative requirements. Early in the process, the Council determined that subcommittees would focus on “shovel-ready” recommendations that would take advantage of federal funding opportunities associated with the pandemic relief packages that included opportunities for strengthening food system resilience. The Council identified the need to use this stepping-stone approach, understanding that the short amount of time between convening the group and the interim report due date would limit the ability to devise and discuss long-term strategies related to complex food resiliency issues.

The Maryland Department of Emergency Management was identified by legislation to both Co-Chair and provide staffing for the Food System Resiliency Council. While MDEM staff assisted in drafting the content of this document as part of that requirement, this report reflects the wisdom, knowledge, and experience of the expert members of the Food System Resiliency Council. This document and the recommendations below are not a Maryland Department of Emergency Management product, but a product of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council.

Those interim recommendations are as follows:

Goal 1: Address the food insecurity crisis in the State resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis

Recommendation 1.1: Establish and maintain a statewide food system map incorporating data elements from existing maps to provide a holistic view of existing need, services, and gaps.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

Establishing a food system map will not require legislation to implement. However, legislation or Executive Order requiring state agencies to share key data elements (Medicaid, SNAP, etc.) may be necessary. An Executive Order may provide more flexibility as data elements change regularly, new programs are added, etc. Additional federal permissions may be necessary for federal data sets.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

Updating existing data sets and maintaining additional layers will require additional funding for staff to conduct data collection and management, respond to requests for data or analysis, and address emergency response needs. If the map is created using OSPREY, this will also require additional funding for services provided by the

Department of Innovation and Technology (DoIT) in supporting/maintaining the OSPREY platform.

Recommendation 1.2: Local and state emergency management agencies should review and update emergency response plans to include non-congregate feeding capabilities.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

No. Updates to emergency operations plans are eligible costs under existing emergency management grant funding streams.

Recommendation 1.3: The state should coordinate statewide emergency contracts for widespread non-congregate feeding needs.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

No funding is required to establish the contract. Funding would be required if the contract was engaged due to an emergency response need.

Recommendation 1.4: Establish a Maryland Food and Agriculture Resilience Mechanism (FARM) program at the Maryland Department of Agriculture that is multifaceted and flexible in order to ensure maximum benefit to food insecure Marylanders, food business owners, and farmers. The FARM program will provide funding for direct purchase of food by food assistance organizations from local farmers and provide technical assistance to farmers and food business owners.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

Several states have established similar programs, some through legislation and others through state departments of agriculture. Specific program parameters and funding needs must be delineated to determine whether legislation would be required.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

Yes, both start up and sustainment funding will be required to establish and implement a Maryland FARM program. In order to build and sustain a successful program, the Council estimates the cost of this program to be \$10M.

Recommendation 1.5: Fully fund the Office of Resilience and the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No; however, either an Executive Order or legislation would provide the most legitimacy and clear direction for the State Office of Resilience and the Chief Resilience Officer.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

Yes. The Council estimates approximately \$276,000 for the Chief Resilience Officer based on 2021's Senate Bill 62 fiscal note; \$550,000 for the Food Policy Director and three support personnel (State Food Council program manager; local Food Council liaison; grants specialist) and an additional \$650,000 to fund research and assessment initiatives.

Recommendation 1.6: Encourage State government to integrate social safety net programs to enable better access for Marylanders.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

The cost of this recommendation is currently being investigated by Council staff.

Recommendation 1.7: Conduct an assessment of existing Federal and State food system grants, programs, and resources and analyze gaps in Maryland's participation in the available opportunities.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

If the FSRC is fully funded with staff and consultation support, this could be undertaken by the Council staff. Otherwise, contractual support will be needed to support this project.

Recommendation 1.8: Evaluate food system metric best practices and collaborate with State government to better understand existing performance metrics for food system-related spending.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

If the FSRC is fully funded, this could be undertaken by the Council staff. Otherwise, contractual support will likely be needed to support this project.

Goal 2: Develop equity and sustainability policy recommendations to increase the long-term resiliency of the food system

Recommendation 2.1: Allocate funding to increase the cold storage capacity across the state to meet immediate needs. Complete an assessment of existing cold storage resources in the state to better understand current resources to address gaps in the future.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

The FSRC recommends allocating \$3 million to increase cold storage capacity statewide. If the FSRC is not provided a research/assessment budget, funding will be required to conduct this assessment.

Recommendation 2.2: Expand and modernize use of food benefits, including Maryland Market Money and EBT.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

Expanding the Maryland Market Money (MMM) program will require increasing the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) line item for the Farms and Families Grant Fund. Modernizing WIC/SNAP primarily relies on federal advocacy.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

The FSRC requests a minimum of \$200,000/year to fund the MMM program. Additional staff and consulting funding would be required to conduct the research and focus groups as described in earlier recommendations.

Goal 3: Expand the impact of existing food council organizations

Recommendation 3.1: Established a state-grant funded program for food council start-up, sustainment, and expansion costs.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

Yes. The FSRC recommends allocating \$250,000 for the grant fund.

Goal 4: Develop a strategic plan to increase the production and procurement of Maryland certified food

Recommendation 4.1: Provide incentives to encourage Maryland school systems to purchase Maryland food.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

Modeling procurement policy after what other states have done will likely require legislation. For example, following Michigan's program will require legislation, while other models may use other mechanisms for implementation.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

A reimbursement program modeled after an example like Michigan's "10 Cents a Meal" program requires funding approval from the state legislature and Governor. Other potential models, such as direct grant programs to school districts, will require an identified funding source as well.

Recommendation 4.2: Increase access to and use of technology to create and modify platforms to connect producers directly with consumers.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?
No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

MDA currently has funding to update the Maryland's Best platform to include potential e-commerce options. Other technology expansions, including the integration of EBT, may require additional funding.

Recommendation 4.3: Diversify opportunities for small- and mid-scale producers.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?
No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

The Livestock Processing Equipment Grants Program funds have already been committed for FY2021. The FSRC recommends \$750,000 per year for at least two additional years. If this program is successful, the Council would like to see it funded as a continuous and fully sustainable program.

The Local Food Aggregation Grant Fund pilot is currently funded through FY2025 and should be reevaluated before these funds expire.

Recommendation 4.4: Support statewide, regional, and local incentives or one-time grant programs to increase the number of food waste sites. Provide complementary technical assistance to local or regional entities to establish private sector or local government food waste programs.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

Yes. The council recommends seeding this grant program with \$500,000. The program will also require management costs, which are estimated at approximately \$150,000. Additional resources for technical assistance may be needed, depending on demand.

Recommendation 4.5: Increase education on source separation of food waste and possibilities for on-farm composting/digestion.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

Yes. Based on comparable programs at the state level, \$200,000 of startup and first year funding with \$150,000 of sustainment funding would be sufficient.

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Introduction

The term “resilience” has gradually made its way into the American lexicons. The ability to prepare for, withstand, and recover from an emergency or disaster is, at its core, what makes a community, organization, or individual *resilient*.

The COVID-19 pandemic tested the entire world’s resilience. The pandemic touched every facet of daily life and exposed a multitude of critical systems to stress levels not seen in a generation or more: healthcare, logistics and transportation, manufacturing, and food systems all demonstrated gaps in resilience that had global impacts.

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent response did not create the gaps in food system resilience in Maryland, but rather it exposed areas for improvement to be undertaken before the next disaster. Thousands of Marylanders experience food insecurity on a daily basis outside of emergencies like COVID-19, and many more experienced food insecurity for the first time as a result of the pandemic. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), “food insecurity is defined as the disruption of food intake or eating patterns because of lack of money and other resources.”⁷ Often individuals and families must choose between food and other necessities like rent, transportation, or healthcare even when they are fully employed. When communities experience critical impacts such as the pandemic-related job loss or changing access to existing resources and social safety net systems, even more individuals and families are pushed into food insecurity. Individuals experiencing food insecurity for the first time were not familiar with existing social safety net systems, and governments and community organizations were challenged with meeting demand for services and providing information through culturally appropriate communication tools. This underscores the importance of building food system resilience during steady-state operations to ensure preparedness for the storms to come.

Traditionally, feeding efforts and food assistance programs outside of emergency response conditions have fallen to state and local governments as well as nonprofit organizations. Community nonprofit organizations understand the daily need in the communities they serve and work with government agencies and philanthropists to fund and provide assistance to community members. The pandemic’s acute, nearly overnight increase in demand for food assistance combined with the challenges experienced by the food system supply chain placed considerable stress on both the national and the Maryland food systems.

⁷“Food Insecurity,” HealthyPeople.Gov, last accessed September 25, 2021.
<https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-health/interventions-resources/food-insecurity#1>

This Council recognizes the importance of clarity of language and intention in this report. As such, the Council has opted to define the following terms, which are used with frequency throughout this report.

Racial Inequity

The term “racial inequity” is referenced numerous times in the legislative statute that formed the FSRC. There are a variety of institutions and organizations who have defined racial inequity and related terms (such as structural racism and institutional racism). In this report when we refer to racial inequity, we include the following for context:

- Institutional racism
 - Annie E. Casey Foundation: racial inequity within institutions and systems of power, such as places of employment, government agencies and social services. It can take the form of unfair policies and practices, discriminatory treatment and inequitable opportunities and outcomes. The City of Seattle: policies, practice, and procedures that work to the benefit of white people to the detriment of people of color, usually unintentionally or inadvertently.
- Structural racism
 - Annie E. Casey: the racial bias across institutions and society. It describes the cumulative and compounding effects of an array of factors that systematically privilege white people and disadvantage people of color.
 - The City of Seattle: the interplay of policies, practices, and programs of differing institutions which leads to adverse outcomes and conditions for communities of color compared to white communities and occurs within the context of racialized historical and cultural conditions.⁸

The FSRC is charged by the Maryland General Assembly with working toward racial equity in the food system, which includes “consciously designed systems” that “create, support and sustain social justice. It is a dynamic process that reinforces and replicates equitable ideas, power, resources, strategies, conditions, habits and outcomes.”⁹

Resilience

The dictionary definition of “resilient” is the ability to withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions. As discussed earlier in this introduction, resilience in the context of communities and systems is the ability to prepare for, withstand, and recover from an emergency or disaster. In the context of this report, resilience is the ability specifically for the food system, from farm to fork, to withstand changes in conditions with limited interruptions or impacts on daily living for anyone within the system.

⁸ “Types of Racial Inequity,” Race & Social Justice Initiative, City of Seattle, accessed October 18, 2021. <https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/RSJI/Defining-racism.pdf>

⁹ “Equity vs. Equality and other racial justice definitions,” Annie E. Casey Foundation (April 14, 2021). <https://www.aecf.org/blog/racial-justice-definitions>

Food System

Maryland's food system is a complex network of production, distribution, consumption, and disposal nodes layered with policy, services, community engagement and advocacy, economic interests, a changing climate, and human behavior. Strengths in each area create a resilient food system capable of withstanding and adapting to changing environments; gaps or vulnerabilities in any of the areas can cause cascading impacts throughout the system resulting in a less resilient Maryland and food insecure Marylanders.

Interim Recommendations

The Food System Resiliency Council met over the course of five months to develop interim recommendations which focused on shovel-ready projects due to the time constraints of the first report. While many more ideas were discussed by Council members, these are the recommendations that were endorsed by the Council for movement forward. Ideas discussed but not included in the interim recommendations can be found in the "Next Steps" section of this report.

Goal 1

To address the food insecurity crisis in the State resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis by:

- *Coordinating state and local level food insecurity services to support residents of the state*
- *Tracking and analyzing data to create a comprehensive map of food insecurity across the state and identify gaps in service*
- *Leveraging federal and private sector grants and other resources in order to address food insecurity needs*
- *Advising the state on how best to allocate resources and increase efficiency*
- *Exploring the role of and potential use for the federal community eligibility provision to ensure all students in the state are fed*
- *Making recommendations to the Maryland State Department of Education and the Maryland General Assembly to implement relevant findings*

Recommendation 1.1: Establish and maintain a statewide food system map incorporating data elements from existing maps to provide a holistic view of existing need, services, and gaps.

Various maps currently exist in Maryland and are run by government and non-governmental entities:

- Johns Hopkins University Center for a Livable Future (CLF) maintains the Maryland Food System Map
- Both Maryland Food Bank and Capital Area Food Bank have maps that reflect their service areas

- Department of Human Services (DHS) provided access to a map for emergency response entities during COVID-19 response
- Future Harvest, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, and the Maryland Farmers Market Association developed a Find-a-Farmer or Market Map
- Counties such as Montgomery and Anne Arundel have created their own maps

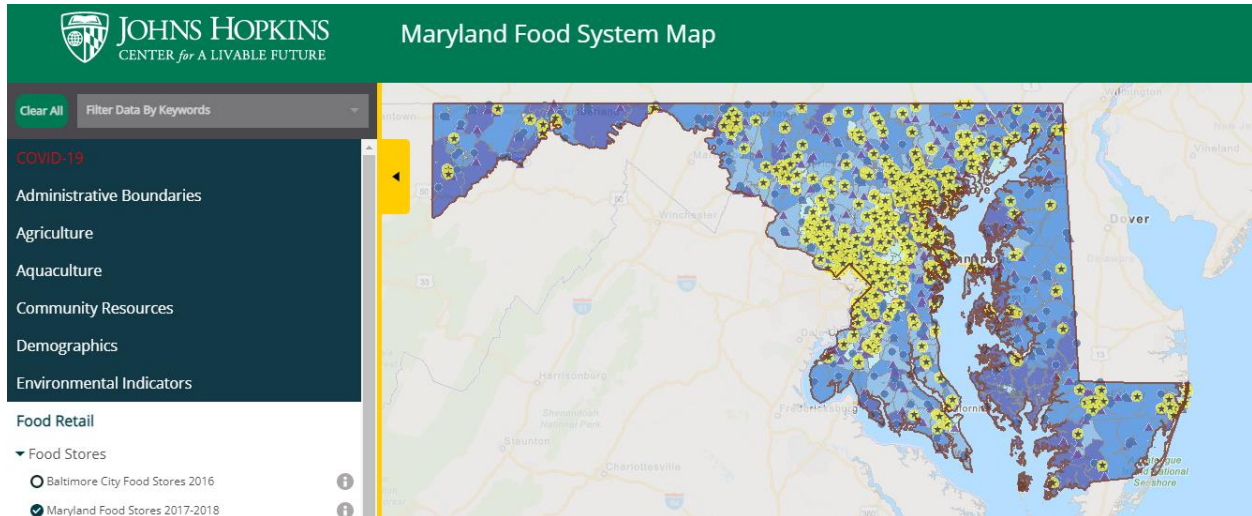


Figure 1: Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, Maryland Food System Map

Each map has a specific audience and thus focuses on different areas. There is no single, holistic map that incorporates agricultural information, population/demographics information, program (e.g. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP] enrollment or utilization) information, and services information. Furthermore, the resources required to maintain each of these maps creates duplication of effort and lack of cohesive, systematic understanding of the Maryland food system during normal operations and emergency response. This gap results in duplication of effort or lack of services.

Creating a comprehensive public-facing data set for mapping will enable and support data-driven decision making to help understand where the food system needs improvement. One potential application of such a data set is to create a visual dashboard to assist stakeholders in understanding the overall food system health in terms of environmental factors, food waste, human health impact, infrastructure, and more. This will enable policy makers to see and understand a more complete picture of Maryland's food system resilience.

Because the food system map is important in both normal operating circumstances and in emergency response operations, the Council recommends the MDEM coordinate with both government and non-governmental organizations to coordinate a Maryland food system map. This may be achieved by working with an organization to update and expand an existing map or through additions to the Operational Situational Picture for Response to an Emergency (OSPREY), which is a

public-facing Geographic Information System (GIS) application providing key Maryland-specific data and hazard-related information managed by MDEM today. The addition of layers that reflect current food insecurity and food system resources will be beneficial to food advocacy and policy experts during normal operations and to emergency managers during response and recovery operations.

The comprehensive food system map should include at minimum the following layers:

- Census tract, zip code, or county-level data
 - Federal census data (income, demographics, unemployment rates, etc.)
 - Federal poverty level from the American Community Survey analysis
 - Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) data
 - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) enrollment and utilization rates
 - The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) utilization
 - Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) enrollment
 - School-based nutrition programs like the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program, and Community Eligibility Provision enrollment
 - Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) enrollment and utilization rates
 - Food Assistance organizations and retailers (including “pop up” pantries, faith-based, and community pantries that may not be affiliated with the Maryland or Capital Area Food Banks)
- State agency data applicable to health disparities
 - Medicaid
 - Health outcomes
- Identified food desert areas
 - USDA Food Desert Map
- Agricultural data (including regional if available - DE, VA, WV, DC, PA, NY, NJ)
 - Farms
 - Maryland Certified Local Growers
 - Production facilities
 - Distribution centers
 - Farmers markets
 - Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) and Maryland Market Money (MMM) locations
 - Livestock processing facilities (could also be considered CI)
 - Composting and anaerobic digestion facilities
 - Food waste reduction programs
- Critical infrastructure
 - Cold storage facilities

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

Establishing a food system map will not require legislation to implement. However, legislation or Executive Order requiring state agencies to share key data elements (Medicaid, SNAP, etc.) may be necessary. An Executive Order may provide more

flexibility as data elements change regularly, new programs are added, etc. Additional federal permissions may be necessary for federal data sets.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

Updating existing data sets and maintaining additional layers will require additional funding for staff to conduct data collection and management, respond to requests for data or analysis, and address emergency response needs. If the map is created using OSPREY, this will also require additional funding for services provided by the Department of Innovation and Technology (DoIT) in supporting/maintaining the OSPREY platform.

Recommendation 1.2: Local and state emergency management agencies should review and update emergency response plans to include non-congregate feeding capabilities.

Emergency feeding has traditionally been planned for at both the state and local level in the context of congregate housing and shelter operations. Each jurisdiction in Maryland, as well as the State government through the Department of Human Services, have plans for implementing a congregate feeding capability when shelters are opened in response to an emergency. However, the COVID-19 response left several jurisdictions scrambling to meet an acute increase in need for food support among diverse communities in Maryland unassociated with shelter operations. While food insecurity is a daily problem for many Marylanders, the COVID-19 pandemic response conditions, including the closure of businesses and gatherings, increased risk to health posed by visiting stores for seniors and vulnerable populations, and supply chain breakdowns leaving local grocery store and market shelves bare, increased the number of Marylanders who needed support in accessing nutritious, culturally appropriate food¹⁰.

Many local governments responded quickly and effectively, standing up task forces, coordinating with Community Organizations Active in Disasters (COADs), and in local food councils in some cases, organizing efforts across their jurisdictions. Through this effort, millions of pounds of food, both packaged and fresh, were distributed to meet the need.

The FSRC recommends that these efforts be documented and established as lasting partnerships and capabilities ready for implementation should the need arise in the future. Local governments should be given the flexibility to update or establish new plans, partnerships, and capabilities that both meet the projected emergency needs of residents and are reflective of the existing resources within the county. The FSRC

¹⁰ For the purposes of this report, culturally appropriate food is food that meets people's dietary patterns based on of racial, ethnic, and religious groups.

recommends MDEM and DHS provide technical assistance and support to local jurisdictions seeking to establish or update non-congregate feeding plans and capabilities.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

No. Updates to emergency operations plans are eligible costs under existing emergency management grant funding streams.

Recommendation 1.3: The state should coordinate statewide emergency contracts for widespread non-congregate feeding needs.

Local governments were largely responsible for procurement of food and supplemental supplies (e.g. silverware, paper products, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during the COVID-19 response. While the influx of Coronavirus Aid, Relief, & Economic Security Act (CARES Act) funding enabled local governments to work with community organizations and nonprofits like the Maryland Food Bank, jurisdictions were left to compete for scarce resources against each other, making purchasing challenging particularly for smaller jurisdictions that lacked the significant demand of larger counties, and larger counties also lacked the purchasing power to compete with state contracts.

The FSRC recommends establishing both statewide and regional emergency contracts to support non-congregate feeding efforts. These contracts will enable coordination of purchases to increase buying power and competitive advantage. These contracts should not only be for food itself, but should also include cold storage access, supplemental supplies, and logistics support (including regional and/or direct point of distribution delivery).

Contracts should preference local businesses where possible and should incentivize the purchase of local goods and use of local labor.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

No funding is required to establish the contract. Funding would be required if the contract was engaged due to an emergency response need.

Recommendation 1.4: Establish a Maryland Food and Agriculture Resilience Mechanism (FARM) program at the Maryland Department of Agriculture that is multifaceted and flexible in order to ensure maximum benefit to food insecure

Marylanders, food business owners, and farmers. The FARM program will provide funding for direct purchase of food by food assistance organizations from local farmers and provide technical assistance to farmers and food business owners.

Access to culturally appropriate, locally grown, nutritious food is a systemic problem which was exacerbated during the COVID-19 response. Programs at the federal, state, and local levels were developed or expanded to meet the needs of communities in a multitude of ways: assembling and creating food boxes, arranging mutually beneficial contract growing, purchasing surplus product, and covering the costs of distribution and processing to account for gaps in service, infrastructure, or efficiency.

The USDA established the Farm-to-Families program in the wake of COVID-19 as a way to stabilize agricultural markets while meeting the need of a significant increase in food insecurity across the United States. Several FSRC Council members were directly engaged with the program. The Maryland Department of Agriculture reports that more than \$87.1 million worth of food was distributed to Marylanders in 2020-21 through USDA food box contracts. The program successfully supported the state's produce farmers and dairy farmers by maintaining a market for them during COVID. For example, cheese prices collapsed during the beginning of COVID. The USDA food box program began including cheese and pushed up the price of cheese, thereby supporting the dairy sector. Maryland produce distributors, whose sales were devastated by the closure of restaurants, were able to survive COVID due to the box program.

While there were benefits to the program, a number of Council members reported significant challenges with how the program was administered. Some of those challenges included shifting priorities, lack of focus on culturally appropriate and dietary needs of the community, and unpredictable deliveries with minimal communication and transparency.

Several states, including regional neighbors like Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New York, have established statewide agriculture and resilience programs to ensure locally grown products, services, infrastructure, and processing activities are leveraged to support those in need. Virginia recently passed the Virginia Agriculture Food Assistance Program legislation which provides funding to the food bank system to cover the costs associated with harvesting, processing, packaging, and transporting surplus products including fruits, vegetables, eggs, dairy, poultry, pork, beef, and grains. Each Virginia locality is assigned an allocation based on a formula that controls for unemployment, SNAP eligibility, and Medicaid eligibility. Program legislation which limits the program to donation of food to charitable food assistance organizations.¹¹

New York's Nourish New York initiative was designed to, "allow New York's emergency food providers to continue purchase surplus products from New York

¹¹ Virginia Agriculture Food Assistance Program, Code of Virginia Ch. 47.1, §3.2-4783 (2021)
<https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?212+ful+HB2203ER>

farmers and dairy manufacturers and deliver it to New York families in need” through the end of 2021. New York has invested \$85 million in the program so far.¹² The Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System (PASS) was established as a pilot program in 2008 with a goal of securing surplus, Pennsylvania-grown products and distributing them to food banks and charitable organizations. The state used funding to cover farmers’ costs to harvest, sort and package products. PASS was shifted from a pilot to a formal program in 2010 and has been funded between \$1 and \$1.5 million each year since. Feeding Pennsylvania contracts with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture to administer the program. Feeding PA then subcontracts out to 13 local, charitable food distributors to procure food from PA agricultural producers, packers, and processors (nine of these organizations are Feeding America food banks, and the remaining four are charitable organizations).

The Michigan Agricultural Surplus System (MASS) was established in 1990 and provides funds through the Food Bank Council of Michigan to ensure food banks can purchase or process Michigan-grown produce, dairy, and eggs. Each year, the Council administers funding of up to \$2.5 million for the purchase or processing of products, and an additional \$500,000 for transit related distributional activities.

Maryland should develop a Food and Agricultural Resilience Mechanism (FARM) program that is multifaceted and flexible in order to ensure maximum benefit to food insecure Marylanders, food business owners, and farmers. Learning from both the successes and the challenges of the USDA farm-to-families program, as well as other local and regional efforts, the program should:

- Utilize and expand existing infrastructure, storage, warehouse capacity, long standing local relationships and distribution networks locally and regionally.
 - For example, the two statewide food banks operating in Maryland, the Maryland Food Bank and the Capital Area Food Banks, work daily to continue to build out and develop contracts and MOUs with local farms, producers, and processors to enhance the reach and impact of local Maryland agriculture on food insecurity. The Maryland Food Bank, serving 21 Counties and Baltimore City, and the Capital Area Food Bank, serving the two largest counties in the state, Prince George’s and Montgomery, partner with a combined 71 farms across the state to supply fresh, nutritious produce to food-insecure communities. MD FARM would allow the two food banks of the state to increase, enhance, and identify local agriculture opportunities to diversify produce offerings, contract growing, and process/distribute surplus products. The infrastructure of these organizations to purchase at scale is comparable to the role that other food banks have played in the state systems aforementioned. For example, the Maryland Food Bank and the Capital Area Food Bank distributed 9.5 million and 7.08 million pounds respectively of nutritious food statewide, including produce,

¹² “Nourish New York,” New York Department of Agriculture, last accessed September 29, 2021. <https://agriculture.ny.gov/NourishNY>

milk, dairy, and meat, through the federal Farmers to Families Food Box program over the past 16 months.¹³

- Incentivize farmers to participate in the program by offering opportunities for guaranteed purchase at above wholesale prices by food banks or other charitable organizations. For example:
 - Montgomery County: The Montgomery County Food Security Task Force, Montgomery County Food Council, Manna Food Center, and the Montgomery County Office of Agriculture established the Montgomery County Farm to Food Bank Program in the wake of COVID-19. The program established a grant for Montgomery County table crop farms with a maximum award of \$20,000 per farm. The grant was able to cover infrastructure and equipment or to contract growing specific crops. Preference was given to culturally appropriate crops, sustainable farming practices, and supporting diversity and equity in the local agricultural community. To date, over 100,000 pounds of product from 33 County farms have been purchased and the food has been distributed to residents through a network of over 28 local food assistance providers.
 - Howard County: The Howard County Grow It Forward Campaign was established in 2020 to help meet the needs of food-insecure communities while simultaneously supporting the economic recovery of small, local farmers. The partnership includes the Howard County Farm Bureau, Howard County Food Bank, Maryland Food Bank, and Howard County 4-H Extension and the Howard County Government. The program included gleaning local fields of participating farmers, purchasing food directly from local farmers as well as contracting with local farmers to grow specific crops for the Food Bank.
 - Future Harvest's Feed the Need program gave small grants to 22 area farmers, 14 of whom were farmers of color, who then provided an equivalent portion of their harvest at retail value to families in need. The farmers in total delivered more than 66,000 pounds of produce to food access outlets of their choice. This flexibility allowed for small farmers to participate in farm-to-stomach initiatives.
- Leverage, when necessary, opportunities to purchase food directly from farmers for boxes that meet the needs of local communities, inclusive of culturally appropriate and dietary needs of the communities. For example:
 - Baltimore City relied on FEMA reimbursement funding to purchase produce and mixed product boxes throughout the pandemic and particularly in the wake of USDA's shifting of Farm to Families vendors

¹³ Analyzing survey data from a representative sample in Vermont, the authors find that food-insecure residents who visited a pantry during the pandemic were consuming more fruits and vegetables than before COVID-19. Conversely, food-insecure respondents who did not use a food pantry were significantly more likely to report both a reduction in fruit consumption and a reduction in vegetable consumption. Source: Farryl Bertmann et al. "The Food Bank and Food Pantries Help Food Insecure Participants Maintain Fruit and Vegetable Intake During COVID-19." In: *Frontiers in Nutrition*. Vol. 8. August 6, 2021. <https://www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fnut.2021.673158>

and priorities. According to the City's Strategy to improve Nutritional Security and Minimize Hunger: City of Baltimore COVID-19 Emergency Food Response report (May 2021), "The City contracted with multiple vendors with slightly different product mixes. This ensured that if one vendor had supply chain or COVID-19 safety issues there would still be food flowing from other vendors." Transportation was included in the contracts with the vendors which reduced the logistics burden on the City and expanded the network of participating sites. Using larger organizations as hubs, smaller organizations were able to pick up the desired amounts and relay them to their service areas. Sites received between 100 and 400 produce boxes per week, which allowed residents to access fresh food without the need to travel significant distance or risk going to the grocery store. For mixed product boxes, sites received between 50 and 900 boxes per week.

- Create a position within the Maryland Department of Agriculture to support organizations utilizing MD FARM funding with the technical assistance needed to develop relationships, contracts, and arrangements with Maryland farmers, distributors, processors, and producers. This position is necessary as a key distinction is that Maryland (as juxtaposed to Michigan, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and New York) does not have an umbrella organization to serve as an intermediary between the Department of Agriculture and the food banks or emergency food charitable organizations such as the Food bank Council of Michigan, Feeding Pennsylvania, the Federation of Virginia Food Banks, or Feeding New York. Thus, to ensure MD FARM is fully supporting and building out agricultural resilience for Maryland producers, emergency organizations, and food insecure populations, a full-time position is necessary.
- Ensure an emphasis is placed on investing in Black, Indigenous, and People of Color owned food businesses, farms, and organizations.
- Expand the capacity capabilities of farms, businesses, and organizations to be able to maximize their food assistance measures and respond in emergency situations.
- Ensure that the program includes support for necessary process logistics, such as, for example, the production capacity to clean, bag, and quickly freeze vegetables all year round. This should also include cold storage and distribution support, all of which are critical to allowing organizations to expand beyond current capacity. In addition, permanent capacity-building infrastructure, especially if regional or centralized, would allow more and possibly varied participation.
- Embed provisions for statewide, regional, or local emergency procurement of large quantities of food in response to a state of emergency or disaster declaration through the most efficient, established emergency food organizations.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

Several states have established similar programs, some through legislation and others through state departments of agriculture. Specific program parameters and

funding needs must be delineated to determine whether legislation would be required.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

Yes, both start up and sustainment funding will be required to establish and implement a Maryland FARM program. In order to build and sustain a successful program, the Council estimates the cost of this program to be \$10M.

Recommendation 1.5: Fully fund the Office of Resilience and the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council.

Organizational structure and support are critical to the success of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council and its initiatives. The Council and its mission as defined by the legislation also dovetails with the larger effort to include resilience planning across local and State government sectors and initiatives.

The FSRC recommends establishing a Maryland Office of Resilience within the Department of Emergency Management, led by a Chief Resilience Officer. Under the Chief Resilience Officer, the FSRC recommends establishing a Director of Food Policy, supported by two program management staff and an accompanying budget to conduct the recommended research and assessments included in this report and anticipated in future reports. The Council must be fully funded to effectively coordinate and facilitate meetings, conduct research, assist with program development and implementation, and conduct additional outreach with stakeholders to ensure Council operations are informed by a broad range of perspectives.

Program management staff is also necessary to support Maryland's local and regional food councils. Food councils are critical to the success of communication and coordination about food security in their areas. Food councils also connect resident and organizational insight and expertise to inform policy and program development locally and at the State. However, several Maryland food councils noted that they did not have a primary point of contact at the State for advocacy, coordination, or communication of issues during the pandemic, or prior to the response. The ability to have a central point of contact at the state responsible for coordinating food system information for community organizations like food councils is critical in both daily operations and during emergencies.

Council members were quick to recognize the important work done by the Office of Emergency Response at the Department of Human Services, particularly on the coordination of weekly feeding calls during the pandemic response. However, DHS is just one State agency responsible for one area of the food system. Community

organizations lack the bandwidth to seek out each State agency program independently for information and collaboration on such a variety of systems. Furthermore, organizations like the Maryland Food Bank serve multiple local governments as well as coordinate with the State, demonstrating that the lack of single point of coordination is even more challenging for regional and statewide entities.

The Council recommends that the State dedicate one of the program manager positions to supporting communication and coordination between the local food councils and other food-related community organizations, state and local government, private sector (supply chain, food businesses, etc.), and other entities to fill existing gaps.

In addition to functioning as a liaison between the food councils and state government, the program manager should also:

- Provide educational and networking sessions for councils on state operations and how to navigate the expertise available.
- Facilitate data agreements with state government agencies for councils, non-profits, and other organizations that rely on real-time data for decision-making.
- Identify a backbone organization(s) that could co-facilitate a network of Maryland county-level councils for capacity-building activities, including advocacy, networking, training, and aligning efforts across the state where possible.
- Collaborate as appropriate on policy efforts across the state.
- Work with Maryland higher education, non-profit, and government institutions to develop a research agenda that addresses gaps in our collective understanding of the issues and partner with educational institutions to fill those gaps.
- Serve as a liaison and advocate to integrate food across statewide resilience programs (such as the Resilience Hub program administered by the Maryland Energy Administration)
- Advise and assist coordinating emergency response efforts related to the food system.

Lastly, the Council recommends that the State establish a staff position responsible for providing technical assistance to food councils seeking private sector or Federal grants for food council operations or initiatives. The staff position should also work to identify and share federal funding opportunities to support programs and advocacy efforts related to food systems outside of ARPA and other pandemic-related sources (e.g., USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) Community food projects, USDA Agricultural Marketing Services (AMS's) Regional Food System Partnerships).

The Council emphasizes that state resources can be leveraged to support cost-sharing requirements for federal grants, which would be a significant benefit to communities across the State. The Council also notes that several Maryland higher education institutions like the University of Maryland Extension, Johns Hopkins

Center for a Livable Future, and Morgan State's newly launched Center of Health Equity have knowledge and expertise in federal programs and grant dollars; partnerships with these institutions will improve access to experts for food councils across the State.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No; however, either an Executive Order or legislation would provide the most legitimacy and clear direction for the State Office of Resilience and the Chief Resilience Officer.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

Yes. The Council estimates approximately \$276,000 for the Chief Resilience Officer based on 2021's Senate Bill 62 fiscal note; \$550,000 for the Food Policy Director and three support personnel (State Food Council program manager; local Food Council liaison; grants specialist) and an additional \$650,000 to fund research and assessment initiatives.

Recommendation 1.6: Encourage State government to integrate social safety net programs to enable better access for Marylanders.

Food insecurity in Maryland is a complex issue where transportation, healthcare, housing, employment, education, historic injustices, on-going racial inequity, and a variety of other factors intersect to influence Marylanders' ability to be food secure. Recognizing the overlapping factors influencing food security, the Council recommends that the State integrate food security into a variety of agency/department initiatives. These include:

- Adding the following modules in the next iteration of the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS): The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) optional module on SNAP; USDA's U.S. Household Food Security Survey Model. The BRFSS is a federally designed survey intended to capture data on the conditions and behaviors of Marylanders and to understand disparities within groups and communities. Each year, the state is allotted space for over 100 modules (i.e. sets of questions related to a specific subject), to pose to a sample size of more than 10,000 residents. In the recently concluded 2019 survey, only two questions were included pertaining to food insecurity. The Council believes the addition of the recommended modules would illuminate the issue of hunger within the target population.
- Adding food security metrics to the Maryland Community Health Resources Commission Annual Report, Maryland State Plan on Aging, and the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs Annual Report.
- Adding the provision of nutrition services into the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services existing education, health, and training programs.

The Council would like to highlight the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) for exemplifying state government integration through its application to the USDA's NSLP and School Breakfast Program Demonstration Project to Evaluate Direct Certification with Medicaid (DCM) for the 2022-2023 School Year. MSDE recognized that the application requirements for enrollment into the free and reduced price meal program is a barrier to access much needed food for children across the country. As such, they have taken the opportunity to apply for the Direct Certification with Medicaid demonstration project to automatically certify children in the free and reduced-price meal program without completing an application.

According to the USDA's website, "direct certification using Medicaid data is limited to children who are members of households with income that does not exceed the following [National School Lunch Program] income standards:

- Free school meal eligibility, 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level for the family size used by Medicaid; and
- Reduced price school meal eligibility, 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Level for the family size used by Medicaid."¹⁴

The USDA reports that 19 states are already participating in the direct certification demonstration program: Illinois, Kentucky, New York, Pennsylvania, California, Florida, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia, Connecticut, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Nevada, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. The first pilot project began in the 2012-2013 school year. A demonstration project phase began in the 2016-2017 school year. Additional States were added to the demonstration project in the 2017-2018 school year.

According to the latest report submitted to the Food and Nutrition Service on the first year of the demonstration round (SY2016-2017), in the four states which joined the third round of demonstration, more than 100,000 students were certified for free meals, an increase of between 2.5 and 8 percent in each state, and an additional 22,000 were identified for reduced price meals across five states, an increase between 0.2 and 4.1 percent in each state.¹⁵

This method does not supersede or reduce eligibility through other programs, including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, foster care, Head

¹⁴ USDA, "National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Demonstration Projects to Evaluate Direct Certification with Medicaid," 2021.
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/direct-certification-medicaid-demonstration-project>

¹⁵ Lara Hulsey, Andrew Grotho, Joshua Leftin, Brian Estes, Claire Smither Wulsin, Liana Washburn, Josephine Thomason, Daniela Golinelli. "Direct Certification with Medicaid for Free and Reduced-Priced Meals (DCM-F/RP) Demonstration, Year 1," Mathematica Policy Research, 2019.

Start, or through being migrant or homeless. Direct Certification with Medicaid simply added an additional tool in the box for communities to ensure all students eligible for free and reduced meals have access to the program.¹⁶

According to the School Nutrition Association, “the process:

- Eliminates barriers to healthy school meals for at-risk students;
- Spares low-income parents a cumbersome, unnecessary application process;
- Reduces paperwork, processing and administrative costs for schools, allowing them to focus resources on serving students and improving menus; and
- Substantially reduces school meal certification errors.”¹⁷

The burden on families is highlighted by a 2015 USDA report which reported that 75 percent of the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program underpayments were a result of reporting errors, “when households report their income or report their size incorrectly in ways that reduce their benefits...” The same report identified the majority of overpayments were from a combination of reporting (household) and administrative (school district) errors. Direct certification has been identified by the USDA Food Nutrition Service as a way to substantially reduce errors in the administration of both NSLP and Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP).¹⁸

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

The cost of this recommendation is currently being investigated by Council staff.

Recommendation 1.7: Conduct an assessment of existing Federal and State food system grants, programs, and resources and analyze gaps in Maryland’s participation in the available opportunities.

The Council recognizes that the Federal complex of food system-related grants is extensive and, at times, confounding and inaccessible to both government and

¹⁶ Food Research & Action Center, “Direct Certification Improves Low-Income Student Access to School Meals: An Updated Guide to Direct Certification,” 2018. <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/direct-cert-improves-low-income-school-meal-access.pdf>

¹⁷ School Nutrition Association, “Expand Direct Certification with Medicaid for Free and Reduced-Price Meals (DCM-F/RP) to all states,” 2020. http://schoolnutrition.org/uploadedFiles/Legislation_and_Policy/SNA_Policy_Resources/2020-Direct-Cert-Fact.pdf

¹⁸ USDA Food Nutrition Service, “Measuring and Reducing Errors in the School Meal Programs: The APEC II Study and FNS Actions (summary),” May 2015. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/ops/APECII-Summary.pdf>

community organizations attempting to take advantage of Federal dollars to the benefit of Maryland. Education and awareness around programs can be limited, particularly for small offices, organizations, and entrepreneurs.

Therefore, the Council recommends the State undertake a full assessment of existing Federal programs related to the food system and analyze which opportunities Maryland is not currently maximizing. The results of the assessment should be shared across State and local governments, with community organizations, and the private sector.

The Council would like to collaborate closely with State government to understand the existing funding and resource allocations for all food-related programming and resources within State government. The Council acknowledges that understanding the existing state of food system funding is a necessary first step in making thoughtful recommendations in the future on the allocation of resources and increases in efficiency, a legislative requirement of this Council.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

If the FSRC is fully funded with staff and consultation support, this could be undertaken by the Council staff. Otherwise, contractual support will be needed to support this project.

Recommendation 1.8: Evaluate food system metric best practices and collaborate with State government to better understand existing performance metrics for food system-related spending.

Performance metrics are critical to understanding whether any program implementation and administration is succeeding. The FSRC recommends working closely with existing State programs administering food system-related programs to understand the performance metrics and evaluative criteria being used for those programs.

The Council also recommends undertaking an evaluation of best practices of food system performance metrics from other systems around the country.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

If the FSRC is fully funded, this could be undertaken by the Council staff. Otherwise, contractual support will likely be needed to support this project.

Goal 2

To develop, on or before November 1, 2021, equity and sustainability policy recommendations to increase the long-term resiliency of the food system including:

- *Addressing and eliminating racial inequalities in the food system*
- *Addressing and eliminating diet-related public health disparities*
- *Addressing and eliminating food deserts*
- *Reducing food waste, increasing recycling, and encouraging other relevant environmental impacts*

Recommendation 2.1: Allocate funding to increase the cold storage capacity across the state to meet immediate needs. Complete an assessment of existing cold storage resources in the state to better understand current resources to address gaps in the future.

Storing fresh and fresh-frozen food in large quantities became a major problem during COVID-19 as cold storage facilities (refrigerated trucks, freezers, etc.) were in high demand and short supply. The FSRC identified increasing cold storage capacity at the local level (through food pantries, schools, etc.) as a significant area for improvement which helps fresh food keep longer and expands the availability of nutritious, fresh-frozen food beyond the standard growing season. Cold storage has been identified as an immediate need across the state.

Increasing day-to-day cold storage capacity improves the ability of local institutions to store fresh produce and proteins. As an emergency measure, the purchase of temporary cold storage (such as refrigerated trailers and other mobile equipment) should be prioritized to increase short-term capacity.

While shortages and gaps were anecdotally noted throughout the COVID-19 response across the State, there is no data set which clearly identifies current infrastructure gaps either locally or regionally. The FSRC recommends conducting an assessment using critical infrastructure data compiled for internal mapping and analyses of local and regional food distribution and storage capacity to assist in identifying food deserts and areas that lack sufficient access to refrigeration. Once identified, these areas and the facilities or organizations that serve them should be prioritized for permanent cold storage equipment receipt. The FSRC recommends establishing a grant program for one-time purchase of cold storage, either mobile or stationary, to fill gaps identified by the assessment. The FSRC recommends building in a requirement to verify future funding availability for maintenance of the infrastructure.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

The FSRC recommends allocating \$3 million to increase the cold storage capacity statewide. If the FSRC is not provided a research/assessment budget, funding will be required to conduct this assessment.

Recommendation 2.2: Expand and modernize use of food benefits, including Maryland Market Money and EBT.

Empowering Marylanders to make their own choices about the foods they purchase and consume is paramount to personal autonomy and treating shoppers with dignity and respect. Several aspects of social safety net program administration, both at the state and federal levels, are antiquated and reflect distrust in those individuals and households these programs intend to lift up and out of food insecurity.

The FSRC supports the modernization of WIC to allow online redemption of benefits. Due to federal restrictions on points-of-sale verification, WIC benefits cannot currently be redeemed online. The Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act, currently pending in Congress, includes provisions to modernize the use of WIC to include allowing use of online platforms to redeem benefits. The FSRC recommends Maryland's congressional delegation continue to advocate for expansion of these and other necessary federal programs that help Marylanders.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) is also in need of modernization. The program is generally a source of good-quality food and has enjoyed a significant funding expansion during the pandemic. However, inflexibilities in program compliance requirements prevent food from being distributed strategically, but rather based on set formulas that prevent the redistribution of food to areas of high or unmet need. Program requirements also exclude organizations that cannot offer dedicated TEFAP staff from participating, which similarly hampers targeted geographic program expansion efforts. Finally, restrictions in the types of food offered, limit variety and the inclusion of culturally appropriate food.

TEFAP, SNAP, WIC, and other food benefits programs need to be simplified or streamlined to facilitate the usage, application, redemption, and vendor payment processes (including electronic methods). For example, these programs rely on the individual vendor to choose to accept benefits, resulting in an overly burdensome process for both users and vendors, especially small farmers, and is frequently

prohibitive to participation. State agencies that administer food benefits programs should work directly with farmers market management, rather than individual vendors, to increase use of food assistance benefits at farmers markets. This will also reduce the administrative burden on small farmers.

However, efforts to modernize food benefits should not come at the cost of alienating consumers. While the FSRC does support the increased use of technology to broaden access and improve end-user experience (as discussed in Recommendation 4.2 of this report), the FSRC emphasizes that those efforts should not move beyond the capabilities of the people served or exclude Marylanders, such as a transition to online-only purchase or redemption options that further marginalize Marylanders without Internet access. The Council recommends placing more emphasis and investment on wraparound social services including engagement with nongovernmental partners. Individuals dealing with food insecurity are often identified in nontraditional settings, like doctors' offices or in barber shops¹⁹. These organizations can serve as a crucial link between Marylanders and the support they need.

The Council acknowledges that broadband access is not available consistently across the state due to both affordability and infrastructure-related barriers. The Food Council supports the investment into broadband access across the state as a method to improve food systems for food assistance recipients and vendors participating in local programs.

The Council supports expanding the Maryland Market Money (MMM) program by doubling its funding for the next fiscal year. This program allows individuals to make their own choices at farmers markets by doubling their purchasing power. Additionally, expanding local pools of customers incentivizes farmers to grow a variety of crops that are culturally appropriate to the communities and cultures served²⁰.

To complement the success of an increased program allocation, the FSRC recommends conducting focus groups to target, supply and demand for, and access to, goods. These focus groups should be designed to answer questions on supply and access to food items (including farmers markets in the MMM program) versus

¹⁹Hilary Powell, "Charlotte barbers collect food to cut hunger," Spectrum Local News, August 22, 2018. <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nc/charlotte/news/2018/08/22/charlotte-barbers-care-food-drive>

²⁰ The University of Maryland Eastern Shore has been funded by the USDA to "expand and strengthen food science research, teaching and extension related to ethnic crops." <https://www.umes.edu/SANS/Content/SANS-News-Releases/UMES-study-addresses-increasing-demand-for-ethnic-crops-on-Delmarva/>

need, demand, and feasibility of production. The focus groups should include questions regarding supply, demand, and access to culturally appropriate and ethnic crops. This proposed research can likely be combined with other similar focus groups or surveys identified elsewhere in this report.

Another way to reach wider audiences of potentially food-insecure individuals and families is through increased marketing and education. Offering workshops or seminars (in person or virtual) at community centers, farmers markets, food pantries, schools, etc. on preparing the types of local food available in Maryland can help increase awareness of programs like MMM while working to educate Marylanders about new and potentially unfamiliar food items. Such events should offer free child care options and meals provided on-site in order to reduce participation barriers. To recruit presenter participation, incentives could be given to farmers and producers in the community.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

Expanding the MMM program will require increasing the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) line item for the Farms and Families Grant Fund. Modernizing WIC/SNAP primarily relies on federal advocacy.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

The FSRC requests a minimum of \$200,000/year to fund the MMM program. Additional staff and consulting funding would be required to conduct the research and focus groups as described in earlier recommendations.

Goal 3

To expand the impact of existing food council organizations by:

- *Providing coordination and facilitation of knowledge exchange at the state level*
- *Supporting identification and application of grants to operating funds to support existing and new food council organizations as needed*

Recommendation 3.1: Established a state-grant funded program for food council start-up, sustainment, and expansion costs.

Not surprisingly, funding has been cited as a perennial problem since councils began forming in the 1980s. Advocacy and civic engagement are challenging to evaluate, and many private funders simply do not support advocacy efforts. Outside of in-kind contributions, councils most commonly received funding from private foundations (42% of councils); individuals (34%); and local, state, or government grants (27%) and budgets (27%).²¹ Federal grants accounted for less than 20% of council funding in 2018.

Funding for council work remains scarce, even with their stepped-up roles during the pandemic. A national survey of food councils in 2018 by the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future found that 29% report having no funding; 34% between \$1-\$10,000; 11% between \$10,001-25,000; 15% between \$25,001-100,000; and 11% over \$100,000. Thirty-six percent have paid staff. In Maryland, four of the five councils are currently funded in some capacity but not necessarily funded at an appropriate level of effort. Furthermore, lack of diverse and consistent funding streams makes this critical network of food councils unstable, particularly during emergencies like COVID when costs increase and revenue to cover response-related expenses are uncertain.

The Council recommends the state initiate a grant program to assist new councils to form and existing councils to expand, in areas with interest and support for greater collaboration throughout the food system. The minimum grant amount should be \$20,000. Applicants could be county governments, non-profits, or community-based organizations with a fiscal sponsor. Collaboration among local governments should be encouraged, such as the Western Maryland Food Council (WMFC). Applicants must demonstrate that the funding will support a collaborative, cross-sector body representing a diverse group of stakeholders that address food-related issues and needs within a city, county, state, tribal, or multi-jurisdictional region.

The Council also recommends establishing innovation grant funds to encourage local problem solving for food system resiliency at the community level that could be

²¹ Karen Bassarab, Raychel Santo, Anne Palmer (2019). Food Policy Council Report 2018. Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future.
https://assets.jhsph.edu/clf/mod_clfResource/doc/FPC%20Report%202018-FINAL-4-1-19.pdf

available to food councils, non-profits, or community-based organizations with a fiscal sponsor.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

Yes. The FSRC recommends allocating \$250,000 for the grant fund.

Goal 4

To develop, on or before November 1, 2021, a strategic plan to increase the production and procurement of Maryland certified food, including:

- *Increasing the quality and quantity of production as well as aggregation, marketing, and distribution of local food in urban, suburban, and rural settings*
- *Increasing procurement of local food through schools, universities and other institutions*
- *Creating additional market opportunities for Maryland food businesses*
- *Expanding access to small scale manufacturing and food production infrastructure*

Recommendation 4.1: Establish incentives to encourage Maryland school systems to purchase Maryland food.

As a state that values both its agricultural activity and its proximity to the great Chesapeake Bay, Maryland takes great pride in its watershed stewardship initiatives. For example, agricultural enterprises in Maryland that generate more than the set threshold of live animal weight or gross income per year are required to follow a nutrient management plan. The cost of implementing and monitoring soil and nutrient health is a cost that farmers must internalize; as a result, local (Maryland-grown) products are sometimes more expensive than their out-of-state equivalents.

The Maryland Certified Local Farm Enterprise Program provides a good starting framework for shifting state procurement practices to support local food production and agriculture. The FSRC supports the intentions behind this program and the legislation which created it. As this program is rolled out, the Council will monitor the implementation of this program to identify any changes or adjustments that may need to be made in the coming years. The FSRC looks forward to seeing this program expanded to continually raise the bar for state procurement by incorporating shared values like fair labor practices, environmental sustainability, and eliminating racial inequity.

Supporting publicly-funded institutions like school districts with financial incentives to purchase local food makes participating in optional local food purchasing initiatives more financially feasible. As a result, sales of local food increase and partnerships between schools and local farmers are formed and strengthened. In particular, providing school-age children with access to more fresh, local food plays a huge role in reducing food insecurity and promoting educational achievement. For students that rely on school meal programs, the opportunity to educate children and families about different types of local food can be attained through innovative

programming that incentivizes schools to provide access to these partnerships

The FSRC recommends adopting legislation that incentivizes school districts purchasing locally grown or produced food. In conjunction with hands-on school programs such as gardening education or cafeteria food tastings to teach school-age children about healthy, local food choices, Maryland schools could serve as Mid-Atlantic models for sustainable, healthy food choice. The impact of a meal reimbursement program could be multiplied if programs like Backpack Buddies were eligible for funding as well.²²

Indeed, there are many state procurement initiatives that aim to help K-12 school districts acquire local foods. Michigan has a very successful program where school districts can receive a \$.10 per-meal reimbursement if the meal contains a certain quota of locally grown produce²³. The program was recently expanded beyond its pilot phase and is now available to around 445,000 students in 146 school districts (an increase from 48,000 students in 16 districts in its pilot year 2016-17). Other states have their own versions of this initiative using different financial models; in New Mexico, for example, schools are given grants at the beginning of the school year to purchase produce from local farms.²⁴ Closer to home, the District of Columbia (DC) offers schools \$.05 per meal when at least one component of either breakfast or lunch consists of a locally-grown, unprocessed food as part of DC's Healthy Schools Act²⁵.

State-funded support of food distribution programs need not be limited to public school districts. Institutions responsible for feeding Marylanders, such as prisons, adult care facilities, and hospitals, have an opportunity to reach a wide range of individuals and families with the foods they serve, and the FSRC recognizes the importance of ensuring healthy food access to these populations. The FSRC will continue to discuss incentive program opportunities to make publicly-funded facilities eligible for grants or reimbursements to help more Marylanders gain access to fresh, local food.

²² Anne Arundel County Food Bank, "Backpack Buddies," Last accessed October 19, 2021, <https://aafoodbank.org/backpack-buddies>

²³ "10 Cents a Meal for Michigan's Kids & Farms", Last accessed September 30, 2021, <https://www.tencentsmichigan.org/>

²⁴ New Mexico Public Education Department, "Farm to School," September 10, 2021, <https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/student-success-wellness/nutrition/farm-to-school/>

²⁵ DC Code §38-821.02. Retrieved from: https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/Healthy%20Schools%20Act%20Informational%20Guide%2012.13.19.pdf

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

Modeling procurement policy after what other states have done will likely require legislation. For example, following Michigan's program will require legislation, while other models may use other mechanisms for implementation.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

A reimbursement program modeled after an example like Michigan's "10 Cents a Meal" program requires funding approval from the state legislature and Governor. Other potential models, such as direct grant programs to school districts, will require an identified funding source as well.

Recommendation 4.2: Increase access to and use of technology to create and modify platforms to connect producers directly with consumers.

Increased physical distancing requirements, facility closures, and other public health-related restrictions which were implemented to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 highlighted the need for a virtual solution to traditionally in-person events and transactions. Even in jurisdictions without stay-at-home orders during the height of the pandemic, restrictions on the sizes of events and outdoor gatherings made holding farmers markets impossible. This had a detrimental effect on farmers, many of whom rely on farmers market sales as their main income source.²⁶

In Frederick County, the local food council created an online platform as a solution to in-person farmers market restrictions. Their platform, Frederick Fresh Online, connects farmers with shoppers through weekly online farmers markets. It allows users to sort available products by item type or by producer and select products to purchase. Once an order has been completed, it is consolidated by volunteers and made available for pickup at one of four pre-designated locations in Frederick County. The system provides an opportunity for farmers to sell their products without the added burden of creating and maintaining their own online stores. This helps producers by expanding their markets beyond the traditional in-person weekly farmers market, and it reaches a younger audience who are more accustomed to online purchasing.

The Council recommends exploring a regional and/or statewide virtual platform to connect producers and individual consumers. While the MDA has a dedicated website that provides information about local agriculture, it does not currently offer

²⁶ Mary Carole McCauley, "'People need to eat': Making sense of why some Maryland farmers markets are open during the coronavirus pandemic," *Baltimore Sun*, April 4, 2021, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/coronavirus/bs-fe-farmers-markets-covid-19-20200404-s6khw2pzvjbmrozdx7pnfvrku-story.html>)

an e-commerce feature.²⁷ MDA is surveying farmers to see if there is interest in a state-run or supported e-commerce platform. Once this survey is completed, the Council will have a better understanding of how best to connect consumers and producers in a productive manner. The FSRC maintains that any efforts to expand technology use should not limit participation in services for those without reliable access to the internet

Regardless of the final solution employed to help connect producers and consumers, FSRC recommends continued marketing and outreach to make sure the general public knows about the great products available for purchase directly from Maryland farmers. In a continued effort to increase access to local goods to all Marylanders, the platform must have the capability to accept EBT payments for food benefits redemption and should seek out ways to highlight availability of culturally diverse product choices. This could be facilitated by allowing small farms to connect with each other to aggregate their products in order to reach new markets which require larger supply volume, institutions connecting directly with farmers, or other innovative methods of using technology to increase access to local food sources.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

MDA currently has funding to update the Maryland's Best platform to include potential e-commerce options. Other technology expansions, including the integration of EBT, may require additional funding.

Recommendation 4.3: Diversify opportunities for small- and mid-scale producers.

Maryland livestock farmers were inundated by demand for their products when the COVID-19 pandemic began, and this strong demand for locally-produced meat continues to this day. Many Maryland livestock producers report wait times of year or more to schedule their animals for processing at area USDA-inspected and custom-exempt facilities. With help from federal economic recovery funds, Maryland Agricultural & Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) offered a pilot program in spring 2021 to help Maryland livestock processors scale up their production and processing capability. Through the Maryland Livestock Processing Equipment Relief Grants Program, MARBIDCO awarded grants to 22 small livestock processing businesses totaling nearly \$580,946.²⁸

²⁷ marylandsbest.maryland.gov

²⁸ https://www.marbidco.org/_pages/relief_act/program_relief_act.html

In addition to setting local food procurement goals for State institutions, the Certified Local Farm Enterprise Program also established the Local Farm Enterprise Food Aggregation Grant Fund Pilot Program. This program intends to support the expansion of farm food aggregation by awarding grants to groups of small- and medium-sized farms to expand local processing or distribution of farm products.²⁹ Its main objective is to help facilitate the aggregation of foods produced by smaller farm operations so that they are able to be sold to State institutions and wholesale distribution companies.

The Council supports these programs as ways to provide more opportunities for more livestock farmers. These programs allow funds to be used for a variety of new projects, including expanding existing meat processing capabilities, purchasing cold storage to better consolidate meat products for wholesale production, and potentially covering the cost of new employee training courses.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

The Livestock Processing Equipment Grants Program funds have already been committed for FY2021. The FSRC recommends \$750,000 per year for at least two additional years. If this program is successful, the Council would like to see it funded as a continuous and fully sustainable program.

The Local Food Aggregation Grant Fund pilot is currently funded through FY2025 and should be reevaluated before these funds expire.

Recommendation 4.4: Support statewide, regional, and local incentives or one-time grant programs to increase the number of food waste sites. Provide complementary technical assistance to local or regional entities to establish private sector or local government food waste programs.

The Council recognizes the work of the Maryland Department of the Environment and the Maryland General Assembly on increasing the number of food waste sites around the State. Notably, the 2021 passage of HB 264 (Organics Recycling and Waste Diversion - Food Residuals) requires many establishments that generate food waste to separate food residuals from other solid waste, as well as ensure those residuals are diverted to more sustainable uses (composting sites, animal feed, etc.);

²⁹https://www.marbidco.org/_pages/programs_grants/grant_programs_lfag.htm

however, the requirement only applies to large-volume sites and those generators who have a processor capable of taking the waste within 30 miles.³⁰

State, regional, and local incentive programs to establish processing facilities and other sites capable of taking this food waste or implementing other types of diversion programs (such as animal feed, composting, or anaerobic digestion) would increase the existing law's impact and efficacy. Alternatively, the State or local government could establish one-time capital grant programs or no-interest loans to assist in deferring the start-up costs, particularly for smaller systems that could be more sustainable long-term but have higher initial costs due to economies of scale.

The State should provide technical assistance to communities and private sector entities on establishing food waste sites and programs. For food waste site start up, the State should support local government, community organizations and companies in understanding and navigating the process of setting up sites, permits (environmental and power purchase agreements), community input mechanisms, and other steps for establishing anaerobic digestion or composting facilities. The State should also provide technical assistance to businesses on how to divert organics from the waste stream.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

Yes. The council recommends seeding this grant program with \$500,000. The program will also require management costs, which are estimated at approximately \$150,000. Additional resources for technical assistance may be needed, depending on demand.

Recommendation 4.5: Increase education on source separation of food waste and possibilities for on-farm composting/digestion.

The Council identified education as a key step in reducing food waste and increasing composting and anaerobic digestion across the state. It recommends a multi-pronged approach for education, from schools to consumers to business owners:

- The State should work with educational institutions to bring food waste programming to schools, including information about pre-consumer and post-consumer waste. The programming should include tool kits that provide supplies for composting at schools.
- Provide education for farmers on how to navigate taking food waste for composting or energy production (digestion). Expand education on manure to energy programs and options for farmers.

³⁰Solid Waste Management - Organics Recycling and Waste Diversion - Food Residuals, Chapter 441 of 2021, Retrieved from <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2021RS/bills/hb/hb0264E.pdf>

- Create a “one stop shop” for regulations, best practices, and education surrounding food waste, soil health, and water quality.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

Yes. Based on comparable programs at the state level, \$200,000 of startup and first year funding with \$150,000 of sustainment funding would be sufficient.

Next Steps

The Maryland Food Resiliency Council is excited to continue its work towards a more resilient food system. Due to the compressed timeline of this interim report and the complexity of the food system, the Council focused on shovel ready improvements that could take immediate advantage of federal funding related to the COVID-19 response.

The Council acknowledges that many critical areas of the food system and identified by the legislation like racial inequity, diet-related public health disparities, food deserts, climate change, and increasing the quality and quantity of Maryland food production, were not able to be addressed in detail in this interim report. The FSRC will be continuing to meet regularly over the course of the next year to tackle these areas as well as expand on ideas included in this report.

While the FSRC was not able to fully discuss all of the ideas from members and stakeholders, staff did capture many of the key conversations that will be placed on next year's agenda. Several ideas discussed by the subcommittees were recognized by the Council as important for future considerations; the following areas have been identified as areas for future research, investigation, and discussion:

- Establish guidelines and best practices for feeding programs, including:
 - establishing additional requirements and incentives for improved nutrition standards across state-funded and state-managed food programs;
 - increasing and incentivizing client choice programs; conducting focus groups to understand availability of food items versus need, demand, and feasibility; and
 - workshops or seminars (in person or virtual) at community centers, farmers markets, food pantries, schools, etc. on preparing the types of local food available in Maryland
- Fully fund the Maryland Healthy Soils Initiative. Chapter 373 of 2017 established the Maryland Healthy Soils Program to (1) improve the health, yield, and profitability of the soils of the State; (2) increase biological activity and carbon sequestration in the soils of the State by promoting practices based on emerging soil science, including planting mixed cover crops, adopting no-till or low-till farming practices, and rotation grazing; and (3) promote widespread use of healthy soils practices among farmers in the State. To carry out the purposes of the program, Chapter 373 requires MDA to (1) provide incentives, including research, education, technical assistance, and, subject to available funding, financial assistance, to farmers to implement farm management practices that contribute to healthy soils and (2) determine whether the program may be implemented in a manner to enhance other State and federal programs that provide financial assistance to farmers.
- Improve state carceral food systems, including engaging formerly incarcerated individuals to provide lived experience input.

- Better define the terms “local” and “regional” for the purposes of state food policy.
- Mitigate the carbon footprint of Maryland’s food system and address climate change impacts on farmers, regional and local food systems, and how to plan for adaptation.
- Restart the Maryland Farmers Market Association.
- Investigate opportunities to collaborate regionally, particularly with neighboring states, to better understand external influences on Maryland’s food system resiliency.
- Explore opportunities for connecting affordable housing efforts with food access efforts by evaluating national best practices. Affordable housing and food security are inextricably linked issues, with thousands of Maryland households choosing between nutritious food and rent. While ensuring that wraparound services are being provided to those in need of housing assistance, there are other innovative methods of providing food insecure individuals agency over food choices. Some specific examples of some national best practices include:
 - The Combined Application Projects
 - The Elderly Simplified Application Project (already in place in Maryland)
 - Standard Medical Deduction
 - Elderly and Disabled Recertification Interview Waiver
 - Continued expansions /waiver requests regarding Broad Based Categorical Eligibility.
- Establish a pilot program with a handful of Area Aging Agencies in Maryland, facilitated by the Department of Aging, to increase procurement of fresh, local produce through grants and technical assistance.
- Replicate the Baltimore urban agriculture program throughout the state.
- Evaluate the regional and local markets prospects and evaluate who are the buyers in the state, and then create a targeted brand to Maryland primarily and also the regional or national market demand.
- Support the development of Resilience Hubs to include food assistance mechanisms.
- Replicate the Baltimore City Urban Grocery Fund to retain our most “critical grocery store” locations i.e. those locations that if closed would create a healthy food priority area, previously known as food desert).
- Replicate the Baltimore City Urban Grocery Improvement Fund, which provides 50% matching funds (up to \$25,000 per location) to complete capital improvements to “critical grocery stores” that may include exterior and interior improvements.
- Support a statewide food waste reduction campaign.
- Ensure that Maryland’s food and farmworkers have safe and fair working conditions, and explore the labor needs, challenges, and opportunities related to the food system in Maryland.

Conclusion

COVID-19 will not be the last disaster to impact our food system. Emergency managers use an “all-hazards” approach to mitigate, prepare for, plan for, respond to, and recover from every likely hazard and threat impact to our communities. These threats and hazards can be acute (e.g. cyber security disruptions) or longer-term (e.g. climate change). Regardless of the threat or hazard, Maryland’s food system must be built to withstand impacts and increase capacity and coordination when portions of the system, and the community that relies on it, are faced with disruption.

The Maryland Food System Resiliency Council has identified 16 recommendations to improve food system resilience. Some of these recommendations will take meaningful investment, while others will take action by local and state governments, businesses, and community organizations. Every positive action taken will have an impact on Maryland’s ability to mitigate food insecurity for our family, neighbors, and friends. Every positive change will help us prepare for, respond to, and recover from food system interruptions large and small, ensuring Maryland is ready for whatever comes our way next. The FSRC looks forward to continuing its work in the coming year.

Appendix A: Maryland Food System Resiliency Council Statute

Public Safety Article
§14-1101-1103

§14-1101.

- (a) In this subtitle the following words have the meanings indicated.
- (b) “Council” means the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council.
- (c) “Director” means the Director of the Maryland Emergency Management Agency.
- (d) “Food council organization” means a local food council organization that is established in the State.

§14-1102.

- (a) There is a Maryland Food System Resiliency Council.
- (b) The Council consists of the following members:
 - (1) one member of the Senate of Maryland, appointed by the President of the Senate;
 - (2) one member of the House of Delegates, appointed by the Speaker of the House;
 - (3) the Director, or the Director’s designee;
 - (4) the Secretary of Human Services, or the Secretary’s designee;
 - (5) the Secretary of Agriculture, or the Secretary’s designee;
 - (6) the Secretary of Commerce, or the Secretary’s designee;
 - (7) the Executive Director of the Maryland Farm Bureau, or the Executive Director’s designee;
 - (8) the Executive Director of the Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation, or the Executive Director’s designee;

(9) the Dean of the University of Maryland College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, or the Dean's designee; and

(10) the following members appointed by the Director:

(i) five representatives of five different food council organizations who are recommended by members of food council organizations;

(ii) one representative of the University of Maryland Extension;

(iii) one representative of the University of Maryland Eastern Shore Small Farm Program;

(iv) one representative of the Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology;

(v) one representative of a public school system in the State who has experience in food security and local food procurement;

(vi) one representative of a statewide food security advocacy organization;

(vii) one farmer in the State;

(viii) one owner of a food business in the State;

(ix) one expert in food system policy;

(x) one expert on racial equity in the food system;

(xi) one expert on food system impacts on climate and the environment;

(xii) one expert on food nutrition and public health; and

(xiii) any other individual that the Director deems appropriate.

(c) The Director shall:

(1) ensure that all five geographic areas of the State are represented by the appointed members of the Council; and

(2) appoint a successor in the event of a vacancy on the Council.

(d) (1) (i) The term of a member of the Council appointed by the Director is 3 years.

(ii) An appointed member may not serve for more than two consecutive 3-year terms.

(2) At the end of a term, a member continues to serve until a successor is appointed and qualifies.

(3) A member who is appointed after a term has begun shall serve for the rest of the term or until a successor is appointed and qualifies.

(e) A member of the Council:

(1) may not receive compensation as a member of the Council; but

(2) is entitled to reimbursement for expenses under the Standard State Travel Regulations, as provided in the State Budget.

(f) A majority of the members then serving on the Council is a quorum.

(g) (1) (i) The Director, or the Director's designee, and one member representing a food council organization who is elected in accordance with subparagraph (ii) of this paragraph shall cochair the Council.

(ii) At the first meeting of each year, the Council shall elect a cochair from among the five Council members representing food council organizations for a term of 1 year.

(2) The Secretary of Agriculture, or the Secretary's designee, the Secretary of Human Services, or the Secretary's designee, and the Dean of the University of Maryland College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, or the Dean's designee shall co-vice chair the Council.

(h) (1) The Council may establish subcommittees to provide technical assistance to the Council.

(2) The Council may establish subcommittee topics and membership as the Council deems appropriate.

(i) The Maryland Emergency Management Agency and the University of Maryland College of Agriculture and Natural Resources shall provide staff for the Council, as deemed necessary by the cochairs.

§14-1103.

(a) The Council shall:

(1) meet regularly for a period of at least 2 years to address food insecurity in the State; and

(2) work toward the following goals:

(i) to address the food insecurity crisis in the State resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis by:

1. coordinating State and local level food insecurity services to support residents of the State;
2. tracking and analyzing data to create a comprehensive map of food insecurity across the State and identify the gaps in service;
3. leveraging federal and private sector grants and other resources in order to address food insecurity needs;
4. advising the State on how best to allocate resources and increase efficiency; and
5. A. exploring the role of and potential for the federal Community Eligibility Provision to ensure all students in the State are fed; and
B. making recommendations to the Maryland State Department of Education and the Maryland General Assembly to implement relevant findings under item A. of this item;

(ii) to develop, on or before November 1, 2021, equity and sustainability policy recommendations to increase the long-term resiliency of the food system, including:

1. addressing and eliminating racial inequities in the food system;
2. addressing and eliminating diet-related public health disparities;
3. addressing and eliminating food deserts; and
4. reducing food waste, increasing recycling, and encouraging other relevant environmental impacts;

(iii) to expand the impact of existing food council organizations by:

1. providing coordination and facilitation of knowledge exchange at the State level; and
2. supporting identification and application of grants to operating funds to support existing and new food council organizations as needed; and

(iv) to develop, on or before November 1, 2021, a strategic plan to increase the production and procurement of Maryland certified food, including:

1. increasing the quality and quantity of production, as well as aggregation, marketing, and distribution of local food in urban, suburban, and rural settings;

2. increasing procurement of local food through schools, universities, and other institutions;

3. creating additional market opportunities for Maryland food businesses; and

4. expanding access to small scale manufacturing and food production infrastructure.

(b) To advance the goals of the Council, the Council shall engage and collaborate with interested stakeholders, including:

(1) residents of the State with lived experience of food insecurity; and

(2) food council organizations and similar local level food system convening organizations.

(c) (1) On or before November 1, 2021, the Council shall submit an interim report to the General Assembly, in accordance with § 2-1257 of the State Government Article, on key findings and activities undertaken by the Council.

(2) On or before November 1, 2022, the Council shall submit a report to the General Assembly, in accordance with § 2-1257 of the State Government Article, on the Council's recommendations for a long term structure for a statewide food policy council including providing recommendations on:

(i) appropriate policy and legislative changes;

(ii) potential ways to restructure the Council such as:

1. placing the Council within a different agency or organization; and

2. enacting a sunset provision for the Council; and

(iii) any other recommendations of the Council.

(3) On or before November 1, 2023, and each year thereafter, the Council shall submit a report to the General Assembly, in accordance with § 2-1257 of the State Government Article, on key findings and activities undertaken by the Council.

Appendix B: Goals, Objectives, and Recommendations Crosswalk

Goal 1: Address the food insecurity crisis in the State resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis	
Objectives	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Coordinating state and local level food insecurity services to support residents of the state ● Tracking and analyzing data to create a comprehensive map of food insecurity across the state and identify gaps in service ● Leveraging federal and private sector grants and other resources in order to address food insecurity needs ● Advising the state on how best to allocate resources and increase efficiency ● Exploring the role of and potential use for the federal community eligibility provision to ensure all students in the state are fed ● Making recommendations to the Maryland State Department of Education and the Maryland General Assembly to implement relevant findings 	<p><u>Recommendation 1.1:</u> Establish and maintain a statewide food system map incorporating data elements from existing maps to provide a holistic view of existing need, services, and gaps.</p> <p><i>Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?</i> Establishing a food system map will not require legislation to implement. However, legislation or Executive Order requiring state agencies to share key data elements (Medicaid, SNAP, etc.) may be necessary. An Executive Order may provide more flexibility as data elements change regularly, new programs are added, etc. Additional federal permissions may be necessary for federal data sets.</p> <p><i>Is funding required to implement this recommendation?</i> Updating existing data sets and maintaining additional layers will require additional funding for staff to conduct data collection and management, respond to requests for data or analysis, and address emergency response needs. If the map is created using OSPREY, this will also require additional funding for services provided by the Department of Innovation and Technology (DoIT) in supporting/maintaining the OSPREY platform.</p>
	<p><u>Recommendation 1.2:</u> Local and state emergency management agencies should review and update emergency response plans to include non-congregate feeding capabilities.</p>

	<p><i>Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?</i> No.</p> <p><i>Is funding required to implement this recommendation?</i> No. Updates to emergency operations plans are eligible costs under existing emergency management grant funding streams.</p> <hr/> <p><u>Recommendation 1.3:</u> The state should coordinate statewide emergency contracts for widespread non-congregate feeding needs.</p> <p><i>Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?</i> No.</p> <p><i>Is funding required to implement this recommendation?</i> No funding is required to establish the contract. Funding would be required if the contract was engaged due to an emergency response need.</p> <hr/> <p><u>Recommendation 1.4:</u> Establish a Maryland Food and Agriculture Resilience Mechanism (FARM) program at the Maryland Department of Agriculture that is multifaceted and flexible in order to ensure maximum benefit to food insecure Marylanders, food business owners, and farmers. The FARM program will provide funding for direct purchase of food by food assistance organizations from local farmers and provide technical assistance to farmers and food business owners.</p> <p><i>Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?</i> Several states have established similar programs, some through legislation and others through state departments of agriculture.</p>
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	<p>Specific program parameters and funding needs must be delineated to determine whether legislation would be required.</p> <p><i>Is funding required to implement this recommendation?</i> Yes, both start up and sustainment funding will be required to establish and implement a Maryland FARM program. In order to build and sustain a successful program, the Council estimates the cost of this program to be \$10M.</p> <hr/> <p>Recommendation 1.5: Fully fund the Office of Resilience and the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council.</p> <p><i>Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?</i> No; however, either an Executive Order or legislation would provide the most legitimacy and clear direction for the State Office of Resilience and the Chief Resilience Officer.</p> <p><i>Is funding required to implement this recommendation?</i> Yes. The Council estimates approximately \$276,000 for the Chief Resilience Officer based on 2021's Senate Bill 62 fiscal note; \$550,000 for the Food Policy Director and three support personnel (State Food Council program manager; local Food Council liaison; grants specialist) and an additional \$650,000 to fund research and assessment initiatives.</p> <hr/> <p>Recommendation 1.6: Encourage State government to integrate social safety net programs to enable better access for Marylanders.</p> <p><i>Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?</i> No.</p> <p><i>Is funding required to implement this recommendation?</i> The cost of this recommendation is currently being investigated by Council staff.</p>
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	<p>Recommendation 1.7: Conduct an assessment of existing Federal and State food system grants, programs, and resources and analyze gaps in Maryland’s participation in the available opportunities.</p> <p><i>Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?</i> No.</p> <p><i>Is funding required to implement this recommendation?</i> If the FSRC is fully funded with staff and consultation support, this could be undertaken by the Council staff. Otherwise, contractual support will be needed to support this project.</p> <hr/> <p>Recommendation 1.8: Evaluate food system metric best practices and collaborate with State government to better understand existing performance metrics for food system-related spending.</p> <p><i>Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?</i> No.</p> <p><i>Is funding required to implement this recommendation?</i> If the FSRC is fully funded, this could be undertaken by the Council staff. Otherwise, contractual support will likely be needed to support this project.</p>
<p>GOAL 2: Develop equity and sustainability policy recommendations to increase the long-term resiliency of the food system</p>	
<p>Objectives</p>	<p>Recommendations</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing and eliminating racial inequities in the food system • Addressing and eliminating diet-related public health disparities 	<p>Recommendation 2.1: Allocate funding to increase the cold storage capacity across the state to meet immediate needs. Complete an assessment of existing cold storage resources in the state to better understand current resources to address gaps in the future.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing and eliminating food deserts • Reducing food waste, increasing recycling, and encouraging other relevant environmental impacts 	<p><i>Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?</i> No.</p> <p><i>Is funding required to implement this recommendation?</i> The FSRC recommends allocating \$3 million to increase cold storage capacity statewide. If the FSRC is not provided a research/assessment budget, funding will be required to conduct this assessment.</p> <hr/> <p>Recommendation 2.2: Expand and modernize use of food benefits, including Maryland Market Money and EBT.</p> <p><i>Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?</i> Expanding the Maryland Market Money (MMM) program will require increasing the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) line item for the Farms and Families Grant Fund. Modernizing WIC/SNAP primarily relies on federal advocacy.</p> <p><i>Is funding required to implement this recommendation?</i> The FSRC requests a minimum of \$200,000/year to fund the MMM program. Additional staff and consulting funding would be required to conduct the research and focus groups as described in earlier recommendations.</p>
<p>GOAL 3: Expand the impact of existing food council organizations</p>	
<p>Objectives</p>	<p>Recommendations</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing coordination and facilitation of knowledge exchange at the state level • Supporting identification and application of grants to operating funds to support existing and new 	<p>Recommendation 3.1: Established a state-grant funded program for food council start-up, sustainment, and expansion costs.</p> <p><i>Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?</i> No.</p>

<p>food council organizations as needed</p>	<p><i>Is funding required to implement this recommendation?</i> Yes. The FSRC recommends allocating \$250,000 for the grant fund.</p>
<p>GOAL 4: Develop a strategic plan to increase the production and procurement of Maryland certified food</p>	
<p>Objectives</p>	<p>Recommendations</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increasing the quality and quantity of production as well as aggregation, marketing, and distribution of local food in urban, suburban, and rural settings ● Increasing procurement of local food through schools, universities and other institutions ● Creating additional market opportunities for Maryland food businesses ● Expanding access to small scale manufacturing and food production infrastructure 	<p><u>Recommendation 4.1:</u> Provide incentives to encourage Maryland school systems to purchase Maryland food.</p> <p><i>Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?</i> Modeling procurement policy after what other states have done will likely require legislation. For example, following Michigan’s program will require legislation, while other models may use other mechanisms for implementation.</p> <p><i>Is funding required to implement this recommendation?</i> A reimbursement program modeled after an example like Michigan’s “10 Cents a Meal” program requires funding approval from the state legislature and Governor. Other potential models, such as direct grant programs to school districts, will require an identified funding source as well.</p> <p><u>Recommendation 4.2:</u> Increase access to and use of technology to create and modify platforms to connect producers directly with consumers.</p> <p><i>Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?</i> No.</p> <p><i>Is funding required to implement this recommendation?</i> MDA currently has funding to update the Maryland’s Best platform to include potential e-commerce options. Other technology expansions, including the integration of EBT, may require additional funding.</p>

	<p><u>Recommendation 4.3:</u> Diversify opportunities for small- and mid-scale producers.</p> <p><i>Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?</i> No.</p> <p><i>Is funding required to implement this recommendation?</i> The Livestock Processing Equipment Grants Program funds have already been committed for FY2021. The FSRC recommends \$750,000 per year for at least two additional years. If this program is successful, the Council would like to see it funded as a continuous and fully sustainable program.</p> <p>The Local Food Aggregation Grant Fund pilot is currently funded through FY2025 and should be reevaluated before these funds expire.</p> <hr/> <p><u>Recommendation 4.4:</u> Support statewide, regional, and local incentives or one-time grant programs to increase the number of food waste sites. Provide complementary technical assistance to local or regional entities to establish private sector or local government food waste programs.</p> <p><i>Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?</i> No.</p> <p><i>Is funding required to implement this recommendation?</i> Yes. The council recommends seeding this grant program with \$500,000. The program will also require management costs, which are estimated at approximately \$150,000. Additional resources for technical assistance may be needed, depending on demand.</p> <hr/> <p><u>Recommendation 4.5:</u> Increase education on source separation of food waste and possibilities for on-farm composting/digestion.</p>
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	<p><i>Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?</i> No.</p> <p><i>Is funding required to implement this recommendation?</i> Yes. Based on comparable programs at the state level, \$200,000 of startup and first year funding with \$150,000 of sustainment funding would be sufficient.</p>
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Appendix C: Establishing the Food System Resiliency Council

The Maryland Food System Resiliency Council was established to address the following goals and objectives as defined by Chapter 725 of 2021. The purpose of the Maryland FSRC is to address both immediate and long-term needs of Maryland’s food system. The Council is charged with making recommendations to decrease the structural and systemic racial inequities in the food system, diet-related public health disparities, and food deserts.

The FSRC is responsible for considering a holistic approach to food security and resiliency in Maryland, and its scope ranges across the food system in the context of need, vulnerability, and equity.

Goals and Objectives

The legislation outlines several goals and objectives for the FSRC:

GOAL 1: Address the food insecurity crisis in the State resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis by:

Objective 1A	Coordinating state and local level food insecurity services to support residents of the state
Objective 1B	Tracking and analyzing data to create a comprehensive map of food insecurity across the state and identify gaps in service
Objective 1C	Leveraging federal and private sector grants and other resources in order to address food insecurity needs
Objective 1D	Advising the state on how best to allocate resources and increase efficiency
Objective 1E	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Exploring the role of and potential use for the federal community eligibility provision to ensure all students in the state are fed 2. Making recommendations to the Maryland State Department of Education and the Maryland General Assembly to implement relevant findings

GOAL 2: Develop equity and sustainability policy recommendations to increase the long-term resiliency of the food system including:

Objective 2A	Addressing and eliminating racial inequities in the food system
Objective 2B	Addressing and eliminating diet-related public health disparities
Objective 2C	Addressing and eliminating food deserts
Objective 2D	Reducing food waste, increasing recycling, and encouraging other relevant environmental impacts

GOAL 3: Expand the impact of existing food council organizations by:

Objective 3A	Providing coordination and facilitation of knowledge exchange at the state level
Objective 3B	Supporting identification and application of grants to operating funds to support existing and new food council organizations as needed

GOAL 4: Develop a strategic plan to increase the production and procurement of Maryland certified food, including:

Objective 4A	Increasing the quality and quantity of production as well as aggregation, marketing, and distribution of local food in urban, suburban, and rural settings
Objective 4B	Increasing procurement of local food through schools, universities and other institutions
Objective 4C	Creating additional market opportunities for Maryland food businesses
Objective 4D	Expanding access to small scale manufacturing and food production infrastructure

Deliverables

The statute requires the FSRC to submit two reports. The first report, due November 1, 2021, is the interim FSRC report. The interim report must include key activities and findings of the Council and address the two areas specified in the goals for submission by November 1, 2021.

The second report is due November 1, 2022. The 2022 report must include the FSRC's recommendations for the future structure of the Council, including whether or not the FSRC should enact a sunset provision and, if it should continue, under which agency or organization it should operate.

From November 2023 onward, the Council will be responsible for annual reports on key activities and findings. Should the Council decide to enact a sunset provision, reports will only be required until the Council ceases to operate.

Council Membership

The FSRC membership was defined by the legislation, with flexibility provided to the Maryland Emergency Management Co-Chair to add additional individuals and organizations as appropriate.

The legislatively-defined Council members are as follows:

- Maryland Department of Emergency Management (FSRC Co-Chair)
- Maryland State Senate
- Maryland House of Delegates
- Maryland Department of Human Services (FSRC Co-Vice Chair)
- Maryland Department of Agriculture (FSRC Co-Vice Chair)
- University of Maryland College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (FSRC Co-Vice Chair)
- Maryland Department of Commerce
- Maryland Farm Bureau
- Maryland Agricultural & Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation
- Food Council Member (FSRC Co-Chair)
- Food Council Member
- Food Council Member
- Food Council Member
- University of Maryland Extension
- University of Maryland Eastern Shore Small Farm Program
- Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology
- Public School System
- Statewide food security advocacy organization
- Farmer
- Food business owner
- Food business owner
- Food system policy expert
- Racial equity in food system policy expert
- Food system policy expert
- Food system policy expert
- Food system impacts on climate change and environment expert
- Food nutrition and public health expert

Acting Secretary Strickland added several positions to the FSRC after consulting with key stakeholders. The organizations added include:

- University of Maryland Eastern Shore Extension
- Maryland State Department of Education
- Maryland Department of General Services
- Maryland Food Bank
- Capital Area Food Bank

Operating Procedures

In recognition of the time constraints between the creation of the FSRC and the first report's due date, the FSRC established operating procedures and adopted a work plan at the first meeting of the Council. They are as follows:

- All Council meetings are conducted within the parameters of the Open Meetings Act.
- In recognition of the on-going pandemic, all Council meetings are conducted either in virtual or hybrid format.
- Maryland Department of Emergency Management prepared all agendas, minutes, reports, and other supporting documents as necessary to the Council.
- Subcommittees identified a chair who presented updates, findings, and recommendations to the Council
- Co-Chairs used best efforts to facilitate decisions by consensus, confirmed by a formal vote of the Council.
- Subcommittees developed recommendations and content for each objective.
- Council members present registered a vote of approval, disapproval or abstention which was included in the record of the meetings
- Routine orders of business were passed if no voting member objected when asked by the Co-chairs if there was opposition to taking the proposed action. This included approving the agenda or minutes of the meeting.

The Maryland Department of Emergency Management was identified by legislation to both Co-Chair and provide staffing for the Food System Resiliency Council. While MDEM staff assisted in drafting the content of the interim report as part of that requirement, the report reflects the wisdom, knowledge, and experience of the expert members of the Food System Resiliency Council. This document is not a Maryland Department of Emergency Management product, but a product of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council.

Subcommittees

The breadth and scope of the legislative requirements, combined with the size of the FSRC, necessitated the creation of subcommittees in order to divide the work and

develop recommendations. Each Council member participated in at least one subcommittee, and subcommittee chairs were empowered to invite additional non-Council members to join the subcommittees to provide any subject matter expertise or stakeholder engagement deemed appropriate.

Subcommittees met either weekly or bi-weekly for at least one hour between July and October. The subcommittees worked to establish and refine recommendations for consideration by the Council and provided regular updates during the FSRC monthly meetings.

Subcommittee Membership List

Name	Organization
Communications and Coordination	
CHAIR: Michael J. Wilson	Maryland Hunger Solutions
Anne Palmer	Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
Daphene Altema-Johnson	Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future
Meg Kimmel	Maryland Food Bank
Sydney Daigle	Prince George’s County Food Equity Council
Lee Babcock	Frederick County Food Council
Distribution and Access	
CHAIR: Diana Taylor	Anne Arundel County Partnership for Children and Families
Brenda DiCarlo	Southern Maryland Food Council
Chloë Waterman	Friends of the Earth
Heather Buritsch	Headwaters Grille (Talbot County)
Lisa Lachenmayr	University of Maryland Extension
Lorig Charkoudian	Maryland House of Delegates
Mischelle A. Williams	Maryland Department of Human Services
Nancy Nunn	Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology
Theresa Stahl	Western Maryland Food Council
Temitope (Tope) Fajingbesi*	Dodo Farms
Vanessa Pierre*	Montgomery County Food Security Community Advisory Board
Courtney Carney*	University of Maryland: Baltimore
Ayesha Holmes*	Maryland No Kid Hungry
Annmarie Hart-Bookbinder*	Montgomery County Food Council
Lee Babcock*	Frederick County Food Council
Environment and Production	
CHAIR: Stephanie Lansing	University of Maryland College of Agriculture and Natural Resources
Berran Rogers	University of Maryland Eastern Shore Small Farm Program

Beth Brewster	Caroline County Public Schools
Dena Leibman	Future Harvest Casa
Janice Wiles	Frederick County Food Council
Jeremy V. Criss	Maryland Farm Bureau
Les Richardson	Richardson Farms
Mike Myers	Maryland Department of General Services
Moses T. Kairo	University of Maryland Eastern Shore Extension
Stephen McHenry	Maryland Agricultural & Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation
Wade A. Haerle	Maryland Department of Commerce
Chloë Waterman	Friends of the Earth
Nancy Nunn	Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology
Jonny Class	Class Produce
Lee Babcock*	Frederick County Food Council
Funding	
CHAIR: Katie Fry Hester	Maryland Senate
Adam LaRose	Capital Area Food Bank
Heather Bruskin	Montgomery County Food Council
Holly Freishtat	Baltimore City Food Policy
Robin Ziegler	Maryland State Department of Education
Evelyn Kelly*	Institute for Public Health Innovation
Anne Wallerstedt*	Maryland Food Bank
Lindsay Smith*	Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
Netta Squires*	Montgomery County Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security
Lee Babcock*	Frederick County Food Council

*Denotes non-Council members invited to join the subcommittee based on their subject matter expertise related to one of the assigned subcommittee objectives.

Communication and Coordination

The Communication and Coordination Subcommittee met bi-weekly under the leadership of Michael J. Wilson. The subcommittee's assigned areas of focus were:

- Coordinating state and local level food insecurity services to support residents of the state
- Tracking and analyzing data to create a comprehensive map of food insecurity across the state and identify gaps in service
- Reducing food waste, increasing recycling, and encouraging other relevant environmental impacts
- Providing coordination and facilitation of knowledge exchange at the state level
- Supporting identification and application of grants to operating funds to support existing and new food council organizations as needed

The subcommittee worked through a number of ideas and recommendations related to the assigned focus areas. In particular, the subcommittee spent time

discussing opportunities for improved mapping, including which data and layers were key to successful policy formation and emergency response decision making. The subcommittee also discussed at length the USDA Farm to Families program, both successes and failures, and what elements were important to adopt for a Maryland program. Lastly, the subcommittee discussed the communications challenges with both local and state government, particularly during COVID-19 response, and solutions for how to better streamline information pathways between community organizations and government entities.

Distribution and Access

The Distribution and Access Subcommittee met bi-weekly under the leadership of Diana Taylor. The subcommittee's assigned areas of focus were:

- Addressing and eliminating racial inequities in the food system
- Addressing and eliminating diet-related public health disparities
- Addressing and eliminating food deserts
- Creating additional market opportunities for Maryland food businesses

The subcommittee extensively discussed the legislative objectives related to eliminating racial inequities, diet-related public health disparities, and food deserts. After many weeks of deliberation, they determined that the roots of these systemic problems are so intertwined and deeply embedded in our society that they cannot be meaningfully separated and treated in isolation. Therefore, this set of recommendations is presented to address all three focus areas in tandem.

The inequities present in our food systems affect distribution and access from the production of food all the way to consumption and waste. Structural racism impacts how Marylanders who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color access food, and it determines the degree of difficulty in obtaining healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate foods.

A four-month timeline from inception to interim report was not nearly enough time to address the problems that our society has perpetuated for centuries. Racial inequities cannot be eliminated by the work of one group in one time period. These are ongoing issues that will continuously need to be confronted and, if necessary, dismantled. The ideas presented in this report are merely seeds for the Council to sow.

Environment and Production

The Environment and Production Subcommittee met bi-weekly under the leadership of Dr. Stephanie Lansing. The subcommittee's assigned areas of focus were:

- Increasing the quality and quantity of production as well as aggregation, marketing, and distribution of local food in urban, suburban, and rural settings
- Increasing procurement of local food through schools, universities, and other institutions
- Creating additional market opportunities for Maryland food businesses
- Expanding access to small scale manufacturing and food production infrastructure
- Reducing food waste, increasing recycling, and encouraging other relevant environmental impacts

The subcommittee learned that food production in Maryland looks very different on opposite ends of the state: the Eastern shore is home to robust poultry, livestock, soy, and grain production, whereas the Western, Central, and Southern regions produce more table crops and retail food. Maryland has vastly different economies of scale between wholesale and retail producers. This diversity in production can help develop a multifaceted and resilient system with different food production models and prices for common staples as well as more culturally appropriate foods.

The subcommittee also discussed how its assigned focus areas tended to overlap with discussions had by other subcommittees or within the subcommittee's own discussions. This allowed for wider overall discussion and better collaboration with other subcommittees that had different interests and backgrounds but were tasked with similar focus areas. Ultimately, the subcommittee chose to focus on tangible solutions to the problems posed to the Council, such as expanding existing programs that aim to increase production and procurement of local food.

Funding

The Funding Subcommittee met bi-weekly under the leadership of Senator Katie Fry Hester. The subcommittee's assigned areas of focus were:

- Leveraging federal and private sector grants and other resources in order to address food insecurity needs
- Advising the state on how best to allocate resources and increase efficiency
- Exploring the role of and potential use for the federal community eligibility provision to ensure all students in the state are fed
- Making recommendations to the Maryland State Department of Education and the Maryland General Assembly to implement relevant findings
- Supporting identification and application of grants to operating funds to support existing and new food council organizations as needed

In recognition of the pandemic and the temporary availability of ARPA funding, the subcommittee prioritized discussing the immediate need related to the COVID-19 recovery operations. The subcommittee considered lessons learned and best practices from existing programs and also considered opportunities for innovation using one-time investments. The subcommittee also arranged for a presentation by the Department of Budget and Management on the State's current ARPA funding plan for the entire Council.

Appendix D: Maryland's Food System

The International Food Policy Research Institute defines food systems as, “the sum of actors and interactions along the food value chain - from input supply and production of crops, livestock, fish, and other agricultural commodities to transportation, processing, retailing, wholesaling, and preparation of foods to consumption and disposal.”³¹ The Institute goes on to define ideal food systems as “nutrition-, health-, and safety-driven, sustainable and climate-smart, and inclusive.”



Figure 2: “The Food System”, Johns Hopkins Food System Primer

Maryland’s food system is a complex network of production, distribution, consumption, and disposal nodes layered with policy, services, community engagement and advocacy, economic interests, a changing climate, and human behavior.³² Strengths in each area create a resilient food system capable of withstanding and adapting to changing environments; gaps or vulnerabilities in any of the areas can cause cascading impacts throughout the system resulting in a less resilient Maryland and food insecure Marylanders. “Food systems must be able to withstand and rebound from acute disruptions such as civil unrest, cyber-attacks, or

³¹ “Food Systems,” International Food Policy Research Institute, accessed September 29, 2021. <https://www.ifpri.org/topic/food-systems>

³² “The Food System,” Johns Hopkins Food System Primer, Last accessed October 19, 2021. <https://www.foodsystemprimer.org/the-food-system/>

hurricanes, as well as those with more gradual impact, such as drought, sea-level rise, or funding cuts.”³³

Food Insecurity

At the 1996 World Food Summit, the UN, United Nations, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defined food security as, “when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.” The FAO further defines the dimensions of food security as:

Table 1: Four main dimensions of food security³⁴

Dimension	Definition or Condition
Physical Availability of Food	Food availability addresses the “supply side” of food security and is determined by the level of food production, stock levels and net trade.
Economic and physical ACCESS to food	An adequate supply of food at the national level does not in itself guarantee household level food security. Concerns about insufficient food access have resulted in a greater policy focus on incomes, expenditure, markets and prices in achieving food security objectives.
Food UTILIZATION	Utilization is commonly understood as the way the body makes the most of various nutrients in the food. Sufficient energy and nutrient intake by individuals is the result of good care and feeding practices, food preparation, diversity of diet and intra-household distribution of food. Combined with good biological utilization of food consumed, this determines the <i>nutritional status</i> of individuals.
STABILITY of the other three dimensions over time	Even if your food intake is adequate today, you are still considered to be food insecure if you have inadequate access to food on a periodic basis, risking a deterioration of your nutritional status. Adverse weather conditions, political instability, or economic factors (unemployment, rising food prices) may have an impact on your food security.

³³ Amelie A. Hecht, Erin Biehl, Daniel J. Barnett, Roni A. Neff, “Urban Food Supply Chain Resilience for Crises Threatening Food Security: A Qualitative Study,” *Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 119, no. 2 (2019): 2212-2672. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2018.09.001>

³⁴ “An Introduction to the Basic Concepts of Food Security,” UN Food and Agriculture Organization, accessed September 28, 2021. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/a1936e/a1936e00.pdf>

The USDA defines four ranges of food security, noting that food insecurity experiences are not static for individuals and families. Life events (e.g. changes in family status, loss or gain of employment, change in medical status) as well as external events (e.g. emergencies/disasters, changes in neighborhood markets, opening or closures of businesses, etc.) can shift food security status. Furthermore, measuring food insecurity typically involves analyzing data gathered from very broad sources, like the US Census, and it is therefore difficult to scientifically measure.

High food security: no reported indications of food-access problems or limitations
Marginal food security: one or two reported indications - typically of anxiety over food sufficiency or shortage of food in the house. Little or no indication of changes in diets or food intake.
Low food security: reports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet. Little or no indication of reduced food intake.
Very low food security: reports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake

Figure 3: USDA Definitions of Food Security

The USDA further clarifies that food insecurity and hunger are not the same condition; food insecurity refers to, “a household economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food,” while hunger is defined as, “an individual-level physiological condition that may result from food insecurity.”³⁵

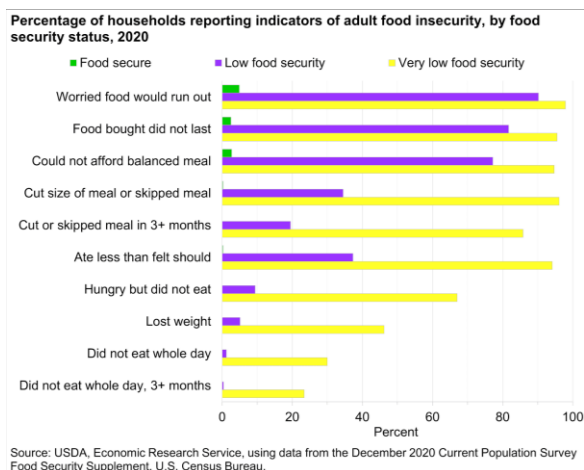


Figure 4: USDA Economic Research Service Percentage of Households Reporting Indicators for Adult Food Insecurity, by food security status

The average cost of a meal in Maryland is \$3.24 according to the Feeding America Map the Meal Gap study. An estimated 640,180, or just over 10 percent of Marylanders are food insecure, and 30 percent of them are children.^{36,37} Food insecurity is a statewide challenge with Marylanders in every county and town struggling to afford and access nutritious, culturally appropriate food.

These numbers grow when taking into account ALICE households where individuals and families live above the Federal Poverty Level but do not make enough to afford basic household necessities based on the local cost of living. In 2018, prior

to the pandemic, the ALICE Project estimated that 30 percent of Maryland households are ALICE households, with an additional 9 percent at or below the

³⁵ “Definitions of Food Security,” USDA, last updated September 8, 2021. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security.aspx>

³⁶ “Hunger in Maryland,” Feeding America, last accessed September 28, 2021. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/maryland>

³⁷ Data from Feeding America’s “Map the Gap” study was last collected in 2019. The numbers presented here likely do not reflect the current state of food insecurity in Maryland.

Federal Poverty Level.³⁸ According to ALICE pre-pandemic measures, a single Maryland adult making \$33,636 per year would be on a “survival” budget where only the most basic necessities are covered and there are no funds left over for savings or to absorb emergency needs. A single Maryland adult would need to make \$58,632 to be considered a stable household budget to include the ability to save and respond to small emergency needs.

Additional data sets like the Supplemental Nutrition Education Program (SNAP-Ed) surveys show an even bleaker picture in Maryland. According to a representative sample survey (n=537) conducted by the University of Maryland Extension, which included a two question food insecurity screening tool, over 55% of respondents indicated they were food insecure. The surveys were conducted in June and July of 2020.³⁹

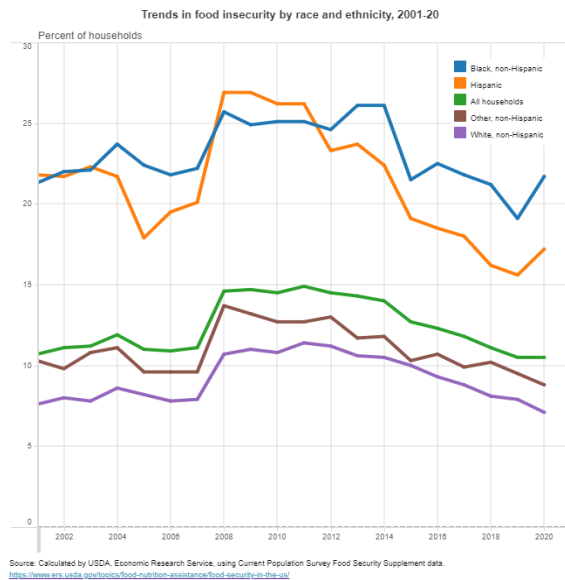


Figure 5: USDA Economic Research Service Trends in food insecurity by race and ethnicity, 2001 - 2020

The dimensions of food insecurity directly relate to the different elements of the food system. Vulnerabilities in food production, transportation and distribution, access, and affordability of nutritious, culturally appropriate food can impact Marylanders’ food security. Black and Latinx Marylanders experience persistently higher rates of food insecurity due to the racial inequity across the food system; these problems are multiplied by tremendous racial disparities in wealth accumulation and the disproportionate percentage living in poverty. A few examples of the long-term impacts of policies on food insecurity for Black and Latinx Marylanders include:⁴⁰

- Land access and zoning laws have prevented many Black and Latinx Marylanders from both food production opportunities and access to housing in areas where food is more readily available.
- Economic policies, such as redlining and credit rationing, have restricted the ability of Black and Latinx Marylanders to build generational wealth and perpetuated cycles of disinvestment in their communities.⁴¹

³⁸ “Maryland State Overview,” United for ALICE, last accessed September 27, 2021. <https://www.unitedforalice.org/state-overview/maryland>

³⁹ “Maryland SNAP-Ed FY20 Annual Report,” University of Maryland

⁴⁰ “Household Food Insecurity in the United States in 2020,” USDA Economic Research Service, last updated September 8, 2021

⁴¹ Federal Reserve Bank of New York, “Credit, Income, and Inequality” (2020). https://www.newyorkfed.org/medialibrary/media/research/staff_reports/sr929.pdf

- Lack of access to public transportation in Black and Latinx neighborhoods results in these Marylanders spending more time traveling to the grocery store than their white counterparts.
- Black and Latinx Marylanders spend more on food, as local corner or convenience stores, particularly in food deserts, have higher prices than supermarkets and large grocery stores.⁴²

Food security, and even the food system, cannot be considered in a vacuum. Access to transportation, healthcare and health literacy, housing, employment with living wages, education, and a variety of other factors directly impact Marylanders' ability to be food secure. To begin to understand and untangle these deep and systemic problems, our food system issues must be examined in the context of each as well as the total aggregate of all possible factors.

Maryland Food Production

Maryland agriculture is a point of pride for our State. In a blog published in July of 2021 reviewing the 2017 Census of Agriculture, the USDA says, "Maryland shows its diversity, with poultry, an array of crops, vegetables, and floriculture ranking high for a small state."

While the 2017 Census does not reflect the changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, it provides beneficial information regarding the overall state of Maryland agriculture. Notably, the number of farms between 1 and 9 acres saw a substantial increase between 2012 and 2017, from 1,481 to 2,244 farms.

Based on market value of agricultural products sold, Maryland's top products are poultry and eggs, followed by dairy milk. Land in farms dedicated to cropland includes:

- 512,697 acres of soybeans for beans
- 439,538 acres of corn for grain
- 164,831 acres of wheat for grain
- 29,339 acres for vegetables
 - 8,000 acres for sweet corn
 - 3,700 acres for watermelon
 - 3,100 acres for snap beans
- 4,200 acres for fruits
 - 1,800 acres for apples
 - 1,200 for grapes

About 10 percent of Maryland farms reported engaging in direct to consumer selling, which increased slightly from 2012.

⁴² "Store Formats and Patterns in Household Grocery Purchases," USDA Report to Congress, 2017. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security.aspx>

A number of localities in Maryland are exploring or implementing innovative methods of encouraging local farm developments. For example, Homegrown Baltimore, a partnership between the Baltimore City Department of Planning, Baltimore Office of Sustainability, and Baltimore Department of Housing and Community Development, established a program to turn vacant city-owned land into urban farms. The urban agriculture strategy includes a land leasing initiative, urban agriculture tax credit, flower farming resources, and rainwater harvesting resources.⁴³

In 2020 the Maryland General Assembly established the Certified Local Farm Enterprise Program as an initiative to increase procurement of Maryland-grown food by state government agencies. The program identifies and recognizes any farms that have met Maryland's nutrient management requirements and encourages State institutions to set a goal of at least 20% of their procurement contract's total dollar value from these certified local farm enterprises⁴⁴. Because Maryland's strict agricultural standards can sometimes increase the cost of Maryland-grown products, agencies can use Maryland's 5% price preference policy to allow flexibility within state procurement procedures⁴⁵. This initiative not only shows an investment in Maryland's agricultural producers, but a commitment to increasing access to fresher and more sustainable food choices.

Despite innovative programs to increase Marylanders' abilities to grow local, buy local, and eat local, agriculture continues to face many obstacles. Building more resilient systems at home and within the region to confront and withstand these challenges will require cooperation among individuals, neighbors, regional partners, state and local governments, the private sector, universities, nonprofits, and countless others. Resilience will not be achieved overnight, but a cooperative strategy that honors persistence and inclusion will build a better food system in Maryland and beyond.

Impacts of Climate Change

Climate change is a clear and present danger to the food system locally, regionally, nationally, and globally. According to the United States Department of Homeland Security (USDHS) 2015 Food and Agriculture Sector-Specific Plan, "Climate change poses a major challenge to U.S. agriculture because of the critical dependence of the agricultural system on climate and the complex role that agriculture plays in rural and national social and economic systems." While timelines and impact estimates

⁴³ "Urban Agriculture," Baltimore Office of Sustainability, last accessed September 30, 2021, <https://www.baltimoresustainability.org/projects/baltimore-food-policy-initiative/homegrown-baltimore/urban-agriculture-2/>

⁴⁴ Certified Local Farm Enterprise Program and Certified Local Farm Enterprise Food Aggregation Grant Fund - Establishment, 31 of 2021, <http://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgaweb/Legislation/Details/HB1488/?ys=2020rs>

⁴⁵ Maryland Code, State Finance and Procurement § 14-407, <https://law.justia.com/codes/maryland/2010/state-finance-and-procurement/title-14/subtitle-4/14-407/>

vary, the scientific community's overwhelming consensus is that changing climate patterns, including prolonged drought, wildfires, sea level rise, and increasing frequency and severity of storms will directly impact the entire food system from farms to plates. USDHS indicated in 2015 that U.S. water resources, agriculture, land resources, and biodiversity were already being impacted by climate change.⁴⁶

Mitigating climate change and preparing for its impacts to communities requires thoughtful, strategic investment and innovative practices. Maryland, home to world class academic and scientific research institutions, hard-working farmers, entrepreneurs, and dedicated nonprofit and public service institutions, has an opportunity to be a leader in food system resilience in the face of climate change. Because agriculture is and will be so acutely affected by the impacts of our changing environment, it behooves Marylanders to fully engage in seeking ways to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and focus production on climate-friendly crops, such as those that support plant-based diets.⁴⁷

Maryland's most recent climate vulnerability assessment, published in January 2011, explored six major categories of recommended improvements for building statewide resilience. While agriculture is addressed in the 2011 report, it was later identified as an area that requires more dedicated research due to the impacts of climate change on the agricultural economy and communities of Maryland.⁴⁸

In order for Maryland's agriculture sector to explore and develop necessary strategies for climate adaptation, the Hughes Center at the University of Maryland will lead a two-part climate vulnerability assessment with support from the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Maryland-College Park, the Maryland Department of Agriculture and the Maryland Department of the Environment. Phase I, to be completed by December 2021, will involve gathering and summarizing information on available knowledge, data and expertise; determining current and projected climate-related threats to local agriculture; identifying impacted parties and likely stakeholders; and an assessment of similar studies and actions taken by other states. Phase II will be conducted in 2022 and will include a stakeholder-informed strategy to complete the assessment.

⁴⁶ Department of Homeland Security, "Food and Agriculture Sector-Specific Plan," (2015), 6.

⁴⁷ Project Drawdown. <https://drawdown.org/>

⁴⁸ Josh Bollinger (September 7, 2021), "Input Needed on Climate Vulnerability Assessment for Maryland Agriculture," University of Maryland Extension. <https://extension.umd.edu/news-events/news/input-needed-climate-vulnerability-assessment-maryland-agriculture>

COVID-19 Response

No disaster in recent memory has triggered such catastrophic, cascading effects to the lives of all Marylanders like the COVID-19 pandemic. The impacts to the food system were as widespread as they were numerous, and most Marylanders experienced some level of interruption in normal food access. While the list below is in no way comprehensive of the impacts of COVID-19 to our communities, it does demonstrate the breadth of the repercussions to the food system.

- Physical production and processing of crops became difficult as case rates rose and physical distancing became a necessity, slowing down normal operating procedures and tempos.
- Decrease in demand from large public and private institutions and markets (e.g. hotels and restaurants) left many farmers and food processors with surplus products and falling commodity prices.⁴⁹
- Transportation and distribution systems were greatly interrupted, causing supply surpluses and significant perishable food waste even in the face of bare grocery shelves.
- Schools closed, leaving school systems to scramble to provide meals to thousands of children who rely on schools for nutritious meals.
- Large scale unemployment, particularly from low-wage jobs, deepened the food security crisis for many and resulted in hundreds of thousands of newly-food insecure households. This impact was especially pronounced among Black, Indigenous, and People of Color households, who experienced higher rates of severe illness and death from COVID-19 on top of greater job losses.
- Even for those with economic means, the grocery store or market became a high-risk environment for our seniors and those with health vulnerabilities.
- Closure of churches, senior centers, community centers, and other gathering places isolated community members, limiting spaces where vulnerable members of society can often learn about and access support networks. In areas without broadband internet access, either physical or economic, were hit especially hard.

The historical response to COVID-19 was nearly as consequential as the pandemic itself. In Maryland, efforts by nonprofit and community organizations, the faith-based community, state and local governments, and the private sector to respond rapidly and aggressively to the food crisis were severely tested... These actions were supported by funding and emergency program alterations at the Federal level. The CARES Act allowed the State to provide a significant amount of funding to the Maryland and Capital Area Food Banks, which in turn purchased food and worked with their local networks to distribute much-needed fresh produce, protein, and pantry-stable food across the state. The American Rescue Plan Act will continue to provide funding support to food banks as households continue to recover from the life changes brought about by the pandemic and subsequent response measures.

⁴⁹ Robert Johansson, "America's Farmers: Resilient Throughout the COVID Pandemic," USDA, (2021).

In some local governments, the emergency operations centers coordinated feeding efforts among partners, establishing memorandums of understanding with community groups and providing funding and logistics support through government resources and partnerships with the private sector. At the State government, the Department of Human Services held weekly calls to communicate updates in feeding efforts and provide a forum for emergency management officials to share information. The Department of Emergency Management supported locals as requests for resources came in, from assistance in finding refrigerated truck resources to connecting with businesses looking to partner for response efforts.

In other areas of the state, local food councils stepped into the void to coordinate and communicate with service organizations, sharing critical information about changes and expansions to benefits programs, and advocating for food insecure households to local, State, and Federal government agencies and leaders. Initial studies suggest that these actions indeed led to positive change; one survey in Vermont indicated that food-insecure residents who visited a pantry during the pandemic were consuming more fruits and vegetables than before. Conversely, respondents who did not use a food pantry were more likely to report reductions in both fruit and vegetable consumption.⁵⁰

This report would be remiss to neglect the connections between nutrition and public health. Diet-related diseases remain one of the strongest predictors of hospitalization and death due to COVID-19 (apart from vaccination status), and having access to the foods that comprise a healthy diet is a crucial component of nutrition security. Healthy diets support strong immune systems, and nutrition security creates more resilient individuals and households, building the social infrastructure to fight not only the next pandemic, but any future disasters.^{51,52} Healthy diets are in part also reflected by poverty which makes health more challenging to low-income consumers.

⁵⁰ Farryl Bertmann et al. "The Food Bank and Food Pantries Help Food Insecure Participants Maintain Fruit and Vegetable Intake During COVID-19." *Frontiers in Nutrition*. Vol. 8. August 6, 2021. <https://www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fnut.2021.673158>

⁵¹ Harvard School of Public Health, "Nutrition and Immunity", last accessed October 19, 2021. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/nutrition-and-immunity/>

⁵² Harvard School of Public Health, "Food safety, nutrition, and wellness during COVID-19", updated May 9, 2020. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/2020/03/25/food-safety-nutrition-and-wellness-during-covid-19/>

Food Councils

The Johns Hopkins University CLF defines food policy councils, “as networks that represent multiple stakeholders that are either sanctioned by a government body or exist independently of government, and address food-related issues and needs within a city, county, state, tribal, multi-county or other designated region through policy.”⁵³ Generally, Councils advocate, communicate, educate, and organize across disciplines for the purposes of creating an equitable, resilient food system.

While food councils have been around for more than 30 years, they have experienced significant growth in numbers in the last decade, from 170 in 2010 to 300 in 2021. One striking feature of this growth is the geographic diversity of FPCs, working in both urban (metro) and rural (non-metro) areas, and in all but three states in the U.S. This growth mirrors an increase of locally grown and raised food in the agricultural sector, accompanied by a robust infrastructure of programs and funding, which has led to greater public engagement with and comprehension of food systems. As public engagement with local and regional food systems has grown, so has the realization that complex problems cannot be solved by single organizations or interests. More collaborative approaches involving multiple sectors that prioritize civic engagement are required to ensure that the food system functions fairly, equitably, and sustainably for all.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of networking and collaboration among various food system sectors and their communities. A nationwide survey of food policy councils' contributions during the pandemic found that 72 percent of councils held regular meetings between food systems sector representatives, 63 percent met with government staff or elected officials to discuss food systems issues, and 50 percent of councils worked with government staff or elected officials to provide funding for needed food systems services in response to COVID-19.⁵⁴ In comparison, 59 percent worked with community partners to raise funds for needed food systems services in response to COVID-19. Thirty percent led advocacy efforts for local, state, tribal, or federal policies related to community food and farm systems concerns due to COVID-19, and another 37 percent supported the advocacy efforts of partner organizations.⁵⁵

⁵³ Food Policy Networks, “About Us”, last accessed September 30, 2021.
<https://www.foodpolicynetworks.org/about/>

⁵⁴ Raychel Santo, Caitlin Misiaszek, Karen Bassarab, Darriel Harris, Anne Palmer, “Pivoting Policy, Programs and Partnerships: Food Policy Councils' Responses to the Crises of 2020,” (2021). <https://www.foodpolicynetworks.org/food-policy-resources/index.html?resource=1394>

⁵⁵ Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, “Actions taken by Maryland food councils in response to COVID-19 (2020). Retrieved September 29, 2021.

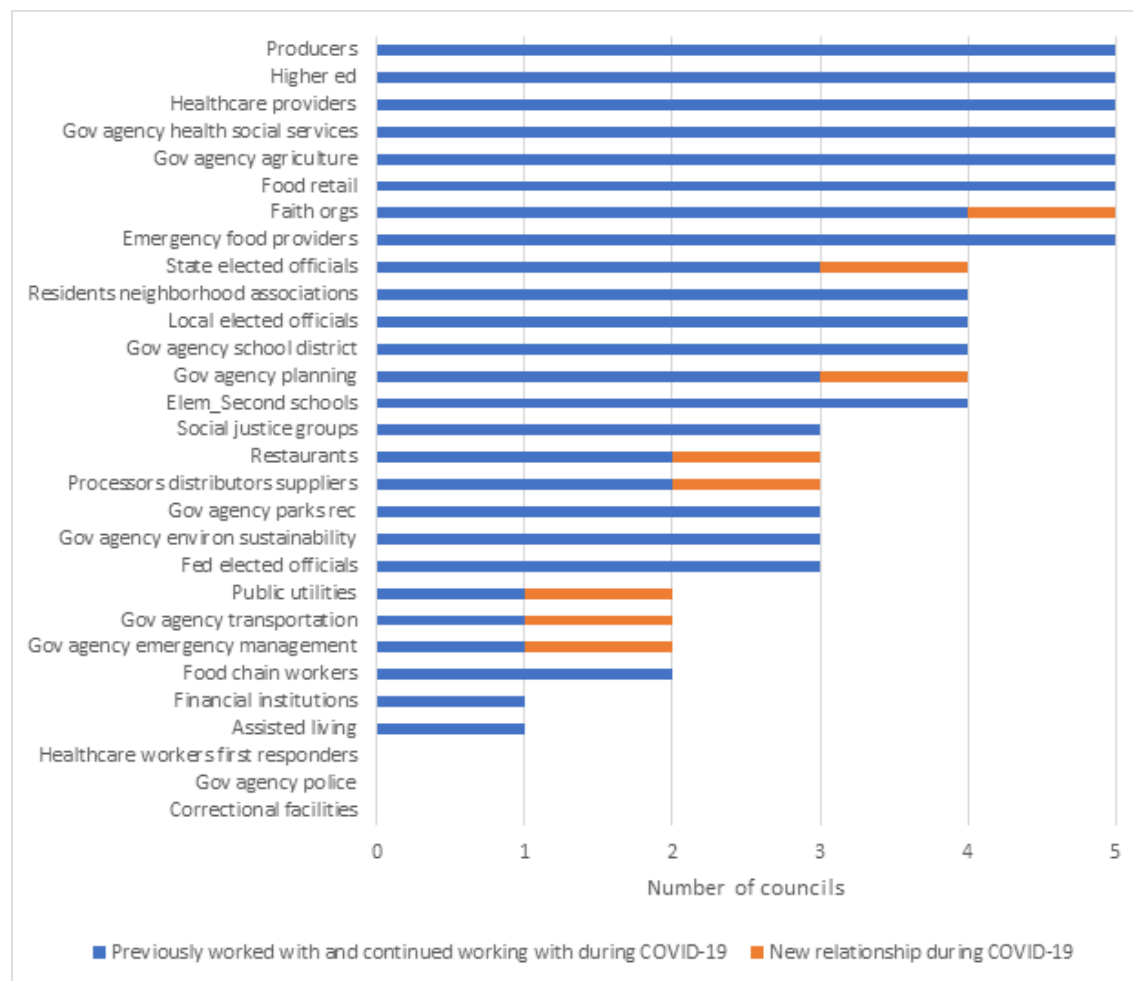


Figure 6: Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, Food Policy Council Network survey, 2020

Councils have cultivated many new relationships to operate in this challenging environment. The top new partner was emergency management services, with 25% of councils reporting that they worked with them for the first time (and 22% of councils continued previous partnerships with them).

There are six food councils in Maryland:

- Baltimore Food Policy Action Coalition
- Frederick County Food Council
- Montgomery County Food Council
- Prince George’s County Food Equity Council
- Southern Maryland Food Council
- Western Maryland Food Council

While they differ in their organizational structure, funding, staffing, and focus areas, they share a vision to create a healthy, resilient, and more equitable food system for their communities. These collaboratives are built on trusted relationships, which take time, goodwill, and resources to develop. Maryland’s food councils would benefit by having stronger relationships with several state agencies, not only during disasters but also during steady state to be more strategic and effective in their regions. Other

counties and regions in Maryland have established food councils in the past which are no longer functioning at this time for a variety of reasons, including Baltimore County, Howard County, and the counties of the mid-shore.

Using CLF’s national survey results, here is a summary of the specific actions reported by each food council in Maryland. Survey results demonstrated that food councils across the State took on a major communication, coordination, and advocacy role between their communities and local governments.

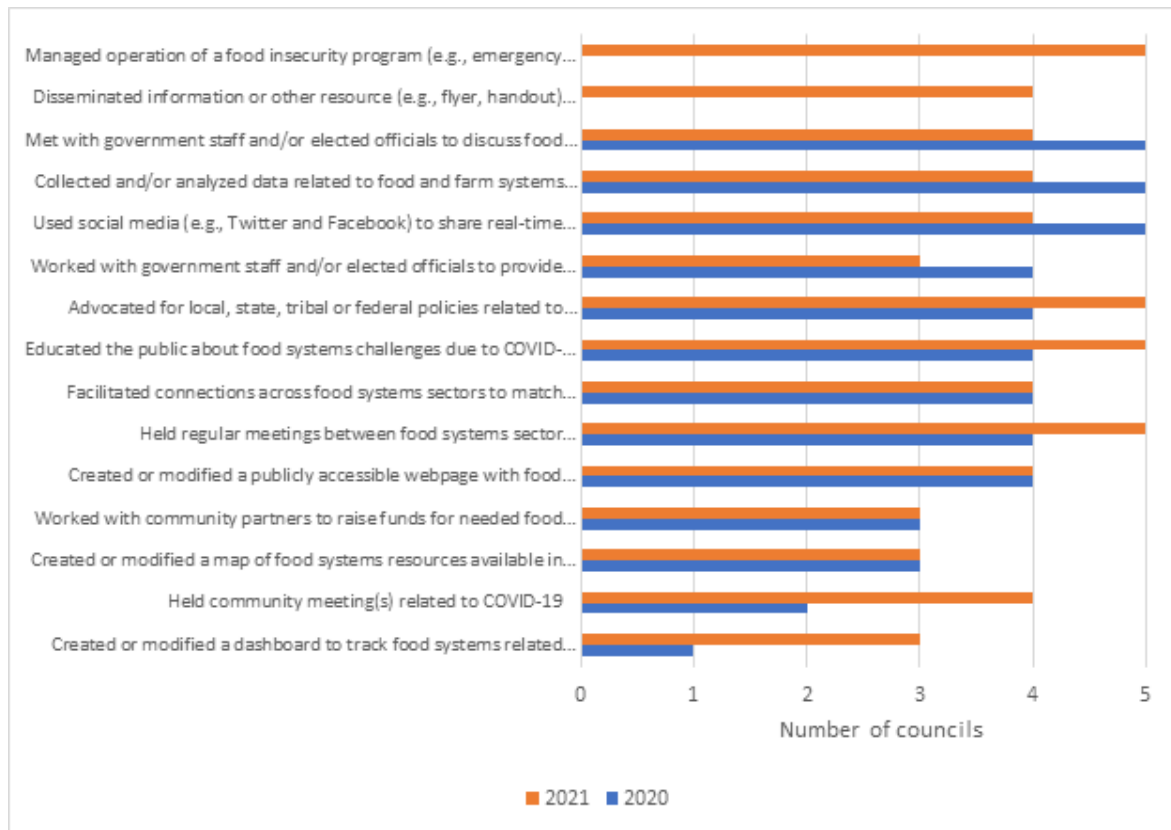


Figure 7: Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, “Actions taken by Maryland food councils in response to COVID-19 (2020)
Note: The first two options were only included in the 2021 survey

Baltimore Food Policy Initiative

The staff of the Food Policy and Planning Division that oversees the Baltimore Food Policy Initiative pivoted completely into food distribution operations. The Food Policy Action Coalition met virtually bi-monthly to provide citywide food-related COVID-19 information, creating a space for food response community partners to share concerns and updates.

The Food Policy and Planning Division oversaw the COVID-19 Emergency Food Response and was able to obtain full FEMA reimbursement for its food response work. As of March 2021, Baltimore City distributed 731,000 food boxes (55.6M servings of fruits and vegetables) and funded \$82,000 in urban agriculture projects through the Healthy Food Priority Area Funds.

Frederick County Food Council

Frederick County Food Council (FCFC) started an online farmers market (FrederickFreshOnline.luluslocalfood.com) to support small and beginning farmers while providing safe access to local food and safe markets for farmers. FCFC is growing the market and intends to encourage more small farms to participate. It also hopes that through donations it can support food insecure families in Frederick County. The online market had over 130 members and 8-9 producers as of summer 2020. As of Sept 2021 FCFC has sold \$65,000 in local foods sourced from 20 local farmers and food producers to 426 members through a network of four COVID-safe, drive thru customer pickup locations throughout the county every Wednesday.

FCFC has also participated in statewide advocacy, mostly supporting Fair Farms work. It is participating in the Frederick County Resiliency Working Group planning and will be submitting recommendations for a resilient food system. FCFC, working with Frederick County Farm to School (a Community Food, Advocacy, Resources, and Education [FARE] program), supported buying local produce to send home to families in need in partnership with the Blessings in a Backpack program. It also publishes a newsletter, "Digging In," about food resources in Frederick County.

Montgomery County Food Council

The Montgomery County Food Council is a nonprofit serving as the primary connection point for businesses, nonprofits, government agencies, and residents around food system issues in our County. We bring together over 2,000 local and regional partners in community-wide education, advocacy, and capacity building initiatives. MCFC work builds a more resilient, sustainable, and equitable local food system by enhancing food access for the over 100,000 County residents at risk for hunger, expanding food education opportunities for all residents, supporting the County's farms and food and beverage entrepreneurs, and addressing the impact of local food production, distribution, and recycling on our natural resources.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have served as co-lead to the Montgomery County Food Security Task Force, coordinating \$23M+ in innovative food access strategies including five grant-making programs that funded over \$2.8M total in food security initiatives, a Farm to Foodbank Program purchasing nutritious produce from 30+ local farms, expansion of SNAP outreach and farmers market benefits, and direct support of over 120 food assistance provider organizations. Beginning in March 2020, the Food Council has convened biweekly Food Security Community Calls, to date welcoming over 3,500 attendees that facilitate collaboration and highlight cross sector resident resources like rental and utility assistance, family violence and mental wellness programs, census and voter registration outreach, and more. The Food Council also maintains a COVID-19 Local Food System Resources page, providing a comprehensive searchable map of food resources for residents, which has been accessed over 25,000 times during the pandemic. Our work is Countywide but connects closely with partners throughout the County, including Fairland and Briggs Chaney.

Prince George's County Food Equity Council

The Prince George's County Food Equity Council (FEC) focuses on coordinating the diverse partners and County agencies working to address the food assistance response to support residents. While FEC has ramped up efforts to address urgent direct food assistance needs to residents, it remains focused on long-term solutions and building infrastructure to help prepare the County to be more resilient in the face of future crises. Some examples of FEC's work include:

- Influenced regulations around farmers markets reopening during COVID-19 and successfully advocated for funding for a County-level food security coordinator and task force
- Created and launched the County's only comprehensive online food assistance directory in English and Spanish, which has received over 120,000 hits since as of May 2021.
- Launched the county's first food recovery platform to reduce food waste and increase food donations to food assistance providers and pantries
- Purchased, retrofitted, and sited three refrigerated trailers to increase cold storage capacity for food assistance providers throughout the county
- Co-hosted 20 virtual convenings for over 70 food assistance providers, non-profit partners, and County agencies and leadership in partnership with the Department of Social Services
- Coordinated with our County Executive's office, county agencies, regional food councils, and the philanthropic community to ensure we are taking advantage of resources available and implementing promising practices and that there is widespread awareness of the food access needs of residents
- Coordinated direct food donation to partners resulting in over 10,000 daily prepared meals delivered to residents at the peak of the pandemic
- Coordinated with food businesses such as regional food hubs, restaurants, farmers markets, and growers to connect them to market opportunities that address both their needs and the needs of food-insecure residents
- Provided educational resources and advocacy support for food businesses, growers, farmers markets, and restaurants
- Coordinated with 211 and the Health Department's COVID-19 hotline to direct staff to relevant food resources
- Provided County Council members and the County's Library System with resources to share with their clients and constituents
- Conducted resident food navigation services including connecting residents to food assistance providers

Western Maryland Food Council

The Western Maryland Food Council includes Washington, Allegany, and Garrett Counties. The WMFC operates as part of The Western Maryland Resource Conservation and Development Council's (WMRC&D). The pandemic disrupted the Western Maryland Food Council itself, with lapses in funding. WMFC has not yet secured funding for staff again. Volunteers, Council members, officers, and community allies have assisted mainly with emergency food distribution at schools, the food bank, and more. The Council continued to meet virtually and meetings served as network and information-sharing forum for cross-sector collaborations and

communication. WMSH executive committee members were trained to use, and include as a resource on their website, Path 2 Help, a free and easy-to-use online platform (powered by Aunt Bertha) that connects community members to free and reduced-cost programs and resources, including food resources and transportation. The WMFC hosted a virtual food conference, "Growing a Healthy Food System in a Pandemic World." This served to promote community discussion around ways to improve the food system during and after the pandemic. Income from the food conference is used for local food projects and upcoming food conferences. As a result of the conference, top priorities were identified. A grant proposal was submitted to the Rural Maryland Council. This proposal, "Western Maryland Food Resiliency Project," was fully funded. They are awaiting the final grant agreement. Projects to be completed as part of the grant include: establishing a farm to restaurant forum, creating a directory of agriculture education resources, creating a directory of community gardens, surveying food pantries to identify needed infrastructure for handling local foods, and investigating next steps for the WMFC to become their own non-profit organization.

Appendix E: Acronyms

ALICE Households	Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed Households
AMS	Agricultural Marketing Services
ARPA	American Rescue Plan Act
BRFSS	Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System
CARES Act	Coronavirus Aid, Relief, & Economic Security Act
CDC	Center for Disease Control and Prevention (US)
CLF	Center for a Livable Future
COADs	Community Organizations Active in Disasters
COVID-19	Disease caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2
DC	District of Columbia
DCM	Direct Certification with Medicaid
DHS	Department of Human Services (MD)
DoIT	Department of Innovation and Technology (MD)
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization
FAP	Food Assistance Providers
FARE	Food, Advocacy, Resources & Education
FARM	Food and Agriculture Resilience Mechanism
FCFC	Frederick County Food Council
FEC	Food Equity Council
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FSRC	Food System Resiliency Council
GIS	Geographic Information System
MARBIDCO	Maryland Agricultural & Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation

MCFC	Montgomery County Food Council
MDA	Maryland Department of Agriculture
MDEM	Maryland Department of Emergency Management
MMM	Maryland Market Money
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSDE	Maryland State Department of Education
NIFA	National Institute of Food and Agriculture
NSLP	National School Lunch Program
OSPREY	Operational Situational Picture for Response to an Emergency
P-EBT	Pandemic- Electronic Benefit Transfer
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
SBP	Survivor Benefit Plan
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
TEFAP	Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program
UN	United Nations
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USDHS	United States Department of Homeland Security
WIC	Women, Infants, and Children
WMFC	Western Maryland Food Council