

My name is Elizabeth Martins. I live in the year-round shelter at Progress Place, and I have lived there for just over a year after having been at other shelters, including IWWEC at Crabbs Branch, IWEC at 2 Taft, and Rainbow.

I am a member of the Food Justice Coalition and Housing Justice Montgomery advocacy groups.

As a member of the Food Justice Coalition, we value food accessibility, affordability, and sovereignty for every single person in Montgomery County. We see these values reflected in the programs and grants of Office of Food Systems Resiliency, and urge the County Council to add supplemental funding and programming to sustain them.

I am also the youngest granddaughter of a farmer and shipbuilder from North Carolina. That is why I am here today – to make an appeal to you to help local food growers who deserve incentives, especially when real estate taxes go up and up, and as other funding decreases. For example, federal grants and programs on climate resilience and sustainability that have been affected by the current presidential administration. For example, if local growers had tax breaks written into policy that they could rely on, rather than agriculture use assessments, like the closed federal peanut allotment, which may or may not lead to tax benefits, then fresh produce could be more affordable. In essence, local growers and farmers in the community would be fairly compensated for their good deeds.

Programs such as the Farm to Food Bank and the Resident and Community Garden Grants similarly fund local growers, and ensure produce is more affordable and accessible to community members, while compensating local farmers. Additional funding towards these grants could take these programs to the next step in building local food systems resilience. It would lead to fair, livable compensation for farmers. Protecting the proposed enhancement to the Food Systems Education Grant which will offer training at community gardens will also support farmers and small growers throughout Montgomery County. This would also increase the yield of high-quality, nutritious food.

Without investing additional funds or incentives, it is not clear how farmers and community garden growers can continue to operate over the coming years.

Because I witnessed my grandfather making trips between VA and NC to help his father tend the farms, I understand the benefits of having high-quality food fresh from the farm to the table. I have also seen the benefits of generous donors who give the first fruits of their crops and livestock to the homeless shelters. It would be nice if Montgomery County Council could ensure that future generations see the same, by meaningfully investing in these programs.

Respectfully, I ask the Council to protect the Food Systems Education enhancement in the budget, and invest more into the Farm to Food Bank program, so that all of us can eat healthy, nutritious meals.