



Montgomery County Food Growers Association  
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Dickerson, Md 20842  
moco-food-farmers@googlegroups.com

March 15, 2023

To whom it may concern,

This letter serves as a request from the Montgomery County Food Growers Association to have a voice in the selection of a new leader in the Office of Agriculture following the retirement of Jeremy Criss.

Jeremy Criss has been instrumental in the success of the food farmers in the County and for that matter, all farmers in the County for decades.

His understanding of the intricacies of County and state government has allowed us farmers to focus on the job of growing food while ensuring our success navigating the complicated and confusing language and processes of County government.

For example, throughout the pandemic, Jeremy and the Office of Agriculture were instrumental in helping farmers get funding to produce more table crops to sell through Manna for those in need. This funding, along with that of the capacity building grant, has increased the local food supply significantly.

Because of his immense knowledge of agricultural topics, we as farmers started to really place a foothold in the County, growing by leaps and bounds over the last decade and with no signs of stopping.

Our general concern, however, is that with his retirement, any replacement might not have the same level of understanding and appreciation for the work Jeremy and his team do daily to ensure that we as farmers are successful.

For this reason, we wish to meet to discuss his future replacement. We strongly urge the County to provide an opportunity for both Jeremy and the farm community to have a voice in the selection process for the new Director of the Office of Agriculture.

We also strongly believe this position must remain as a merit-based position. We are not interested in a “yes” person that is at the whims of any County executive. It has been clear over the years that the County Executives, County Council, and the Office of Agriculture do not always agree. It is imperative that this position is allowed to speak the truth, however unpopular, in order to advocate on our behalf and to ensure the farmers' best interests are front and center to all decisions that affect us and our farming operations.

We ask for a meeting to discuss this and the administrations' succession planning strategy, timeframe, and how you envision including farmers in the selection process. Ideally, this process will begin sooner rather than later to allow Jeremy time to transfer knowledge to the new Director.

We look forward to working with you on this endeavor.

Sincerely,

Montgomery County Food Growers Association

Nazirahk Amen and Amanda Heinbaugh (Purple Mountain Grown)

Indhu Balasubramaniam (Amaranth Acres)

Alan Black (Do No Harm Farm)

Wade Butler (Butlers Orchard)

Hallie, Tyler and Ben Butler (Doc Waters Cidery)

Erica Coady (Co-Founder of Common Root Farm)

Amy Falcone (Bellavita Farm)

Tom Farquhar (Sandy Spring Gardens)

Jenny Freeman (Community Farm Share)

Marc Grossman (The Farm at Our House)

Marcey Guramatunhu (Chirandu Farm)

Linda Lewis (Lewis Orchards)

Michael Protas (One Acre Farm)

Mark Ross (Metro Microgreens)

Laurie Savage (Brown Cow Creamery at Savage Acres Farm)

Robert True (Blueberry Gardens)

Woody Woodroof (Red Wiggler Community Farm)

Tope Fajingbesi & Niyi Balogun (Dodo Farms)

Bridgette and Jesse Downer (Chicken of the Woods Permaculture Farm)

Kristin Rydland (Love & Grit Farm)