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The Montgomery County Food Council is an independent council formed and led by professionals, private businesses, government officials, individual members, community organizations, and educational institutions that broadly represent the food system both substantively and geographically.

Our mission is to bring together a diverse representation of stakeholders in a public and private partnership to improve the environmental, economic, social and nutritional health of Montgomery County, Maryland through the creation of a robust, local, sustainable food system.

The Food Council will launch with its first meeting on February 15th. Details can be found under the "Meeting Info" section of our webpage.

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## Vision, Mission & Goals



### **Mission**

Bring together a diverse representation of stakeholders in a public and private partnership to improve the environmental, economic, social and nutritional health of Montgomery County, Maryland through the creation of a robust, local, sustainable food system.

### **Vision**

Montgomery County cultivates a vibrant food system that consciously produces, distributes, and recycles food making it accessible to all citizens while promoting the health of the local food economy, its consumers, and the environment.

### **Definition and Purpose**

The Montgomery County Food Council is an independent council formed and led by individual members, professionals, private businesses, government officials, community organizations, and educational institutions that broadly represent the food system both substantively and geographically. The purpose of the Council is to

- (1) Serve as a forum for food system work in Montgomery County through connecting action groups, communities, businesses, and state agencies
- (2) Address challenges and opportunities in the local food system with a comprehensive and collaborative approach

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(3) Engage constituents with the local food system through job opportunities, volunteer projects, and purchasing practices

(4) Educate Montgomery County residents and institutions to promote a greater awareness of the entire food cycle: where food comes from, where it ends up, and its social, environmental, and economic impacts.

## Who We Are

A food council is a collection of diverse stakeholders that examine how well the local food system is serving its community, then find solutions to take action toward improving it.

## Food Council Goals

- **Develop the full potential of Montgomery County's food economy.** Support production and distribution of local food. Collaborate on training and development of local agriculture workforce. Promote local food businesses and entrepreneurs.
- **Improve food access.** Reduce social, legal, and financial barriers to consumption of local foods. Promote food self-sufficiency for all Montgomery County residents.
- **Promote greater public health in Montgomery County.** Support the development of a food system that encourages healthy food choices that reduce obesity, diabetes, heart disease and other diet-related illnesses.
- **Increase community food literacy.** Serve as a resource for constituents to engage with their local food system through job opportunities, volunteer projects, and working groups. Bring community focus to food driven issues in Montgomery County.
- **Improve our environment.** Promote sustainable methods for food production, processing, distribution, and waste management to help Montgomery County transition to a locally – and regionally – based food system.
- **Provide a local food forum.** Supply a venue for all

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stakeholders within the food system to convene, discuss, collaborate, and problem-solve.

### The Need

- Child food insecurity rate in Montgomery County (refers to a family's inability to afford adequate amounts of food during the year – 17.2% (40,260) – Maryland Hunger Solutions
- In Montgomery County, 1 in 6 children under 18 is at risk of hunger (U.S. Census ACS 2006-2008, Capital Area Food Bank)
- More than 257,000 residents (about 15 percent) in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties in Maryland are at risk of or experiencing hunger. Of these, 46 percent live in Montgomery County, ranked 10th nationally for highest median household income. (U.S. Census ACS 2006-2008 and U.S. Census American Community Survey, 2007 – Capital Area Food Bank)
- The Agricultural Reserve of Montgomery County is approximately 93,000 acres and it represents almost 1/3 of the County. We have 561 farmers that are involved in at least three major areas or components of the agricultural industry- Commodity/Live Stock operations, Horticulture/Table Food operations and Equestrian operations. In 2008 the County published a Farm Directory that lists 94 farms providing a wide range of agricultural products for sale. (Please note the Farm Directory is a County Wide publication which lists farms throughout the County and not just the Agricultural Reserve.) From these 94 farms there are 36 listed that provide Table food products and there are additional table food farms that are not listed in the Farm Directory. There are tremendous opportunities for more table food production in Montgomery County that can be done in such a way to promote the agricultural industry as whole. (Montgomery County Department of Economic Development – Agricultural Services Division)
- Montgomery County has more farmers markets than any other county in Maryland, however very few of the participating farmers come from Montgomery County.
- Maryland is on track to loose 560,000 acres of land to

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development which is equal to 175 Antietam National Battlefields, 40 Patapsco State Parks, 14 Assateague Islands, 112 Cunningham Falls State Parks, 84 Patuxent River State Parks, and 114 Deep Creek Lakes. Roughly the equivalent of the total land area of Anne Arundel and Prince George's Counties combined! (Governor O'Malley's PlanMaryland)

- Montgomery County's regulatory environment poses a challenging and expensive barrier to farmers doing business locally. These barriers can prevent the production of new agricultural processing businesses and local food products desired by the general public.
- There is a significant need for increased urban agriculture and community gardening opportunities in our county. The Montgomery County Parks department has established a model program over the past two years, with 10 different community gardens providing space for 600 families. Yet some of these gardens are only temporary, based on pending land use decisions, and all but one of the existing gardens already has a waiting list. With a county population of close to one million people and the demand on existing facilities, it is clear that Montgomery County needs a significant increase in community gardens and opportunities for urban (and suburban) agriculture. (Montgomery Victory Gardens)

### **The Potential**

*"With our nationally acclaimed Agricultural Reserve, our tradition of innovation, our talented workforce and our commitment to social justice, Montgomery County can create a healthy and sustainable food system that can be a model for the nation. With diverse stakeholders working together through the Food Council, we can create jobs and strengthen our economy while ensuring a healthy future for all of our residents."*

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-County Executive Ike Leggett

### **Objectives of 2012**