



June 11, 2024

The Office of Food Systems Resilience has been actively engaging with county, state, and regional partners to implement a wide range of food system programs and policies this spring. As the 2024 Fiscal Year comes to a close, we are reflecting on the impact of our efforts to date, and opportunities to connect with more residents and organizations in our work over the coming months.

OFSR Programs Update:

The April meeting of the OFSR's Interagency Convening featured a panel discussion focused on emergency food system response plans in the County. Liz Leach, Director, MCPS Division of Food and Nutrition Services, Patrick Campbell, Deputy Chief Operating Officer, Department of Health and Human Services, and Mara Parker, Climate Resilience Coordinator, Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, presented updates on their agency's existing emergency response plans as it relates to food access and food system resiliency. More than 40 representatives from more than 15 County government and MCPS agencies attended this convening and shared questions and ideas related to community engagement and outreach strategies, cultural responsiveness, and future emergency planning efforts.



The OFSR continues to connect with agency and food system partners to ensure that existing emergency plans continue to serve as the foundation for establishing protocols and processes that ensure residents can stay connected to services despite potential disruptions.

Grant Programs Update:

In the past three months, the OFSR has awarded more than \$1.4 million in funding to 30+ organizations to support the implementation of the [Strategic Plan to End Childhood Hunger](#). These investments will support the creation or expansion of diverse and innovative strategies that address food insecurity through partnerships with Montgomery County Public School sites and pediatric healthcare providers, and via direct outreach to residents. More details about each grant program and the funded projects are included below.

The FY24 School-Based Food Assistance Grant Program is supporting eight food assistance providers and more than 30 total MCPS school sites, facilitating weekly or bi-weekly access to culturally relevant staples, fresh produce, and kid-friendly snack foods. The funded organizations are listed below:

- [Community Farm Share](#), [Manna Food Center](#), [Nourishing Bethesda](#), [Rainbow Community Development Center](#), [Shepherd's Table](#), [Small Things Matter](#), [So What Else](#), and [The Upcounty Hub](#)



The OFSR team, along with County Executive Marc Elrich, Councilmember Gabe Albornoz, and partners from the Office of Community Partnerships, the Montgomery County Food Council, and the MCPS Office of the Chief Medical Officer had a chance to see a school-based food assistance grant program in action at Stephen Knolls School in May. The school is partnered with Shepherd's Table to provide prepared, medically-tailored meals to 25 households, serving almost 50% of the school's population.

The FY24 Food as Medicine Grant Program is supporting five partnerships that will provide healthy, locally-sourced food to pediatric patients and their families who are experiencing food insecurity. The funded partnerships are listed below:

- [Adventist Healthcare](#) partnership with [One Acre Farm](#) and [Community Health and Empowerment through Education and Research \(CHEER\)](#)
- [Holy Cross Health, Germantown](#), partnership with [Community FarmShare](#)
- [Casa Ruben](#) partnership with [Centro de Apoyo Familiar](#)
- [Community FarmShare](#) partnership with the MCPS School-Based Health and Wellness Centers
- [Community Health and Empowerment through Education and Research \(CHEER\)](#) partnership with the MCPS School-Based Health and Wellness Centers

The FY24 SNAP Outreach Grant Program is funding five state-designated community-based organizations to conduct outreach and provide application assistance to households with children aged 0-5 years old who may be eligible to enroll in and receive

benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The FY24 awardees are:

- Montgomery County Food Council, [Manna Food Center Inc.](#), [Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Washington Inc.](#), [Community Engagement and Consultation Group, Inc.](#) And [Food Research and Action Center DBA Maryland Hunger Solutions.](#)

The FY24 Resident and Community Gardening Grant Program will make awards later in June to community-based organizations that facilitate opportunities for County residents to grow, harvest, and access fresh, culturally-relevant produce and gain greater food sovereignty. 15 organizations submitted applications for this opportunity, totaling more than \$650,000 in total funding requests.

The OFSR is actively leading the implementation of a variety of additional programs to bolster food accessibility and affordability for households with children and build the capacity of our local food system in alignment with the Strategic Plan to End Childhood Hunger. The OFSR launched the MC Groceries program in May to connect residents experiencing food insecurity with a monthly stipend to spend on groceries through Instacart Fresh Funds. In close collaboration with the Navigation Unit and Children, Youth, and Families division of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the OFSR began outreach related to the MC Groceries program this past month to families that have been identified by DHHS and meet the eligibility criteria for participation. This invite-only program will support families that have at least one child aged 0-18, are not eligible to receive SNAP benefits due to income or citizenship eligibility restrictions, and have access to a case manager through their engagement in another DHHS program. Participants will begin utilizing their benefits this summer, and the initial program period is expected to run through November 2024.

Additionally, the OFSR's FY24 Food System Infrastructure Grant Program, administered by Manna Food Center and with generous support from the Morningstar Foundation, has awarded more than \$350,000 in funding to 14 County-based, food-producing farms and food assistance provider partners to establish cold-storage infrastructure onsite and incentivize these partners to continue participating in the [Montgomery County Farm to Food Bank Program](#). This infrastructure will also reduce food waste within our food system by ensuring that a greater volume of local food can be safely stored until distribution to residents.



The OFSR, Manna, and the Office of Agriculture are continuing to explore additional opportunities to build the capacity of the local agricultural community to contribute to food security initiatives and to access new market opportunities throughout the region. For instance, the OFSR has joined Manna Food Center’s farm tour series to learn more about the crops that our local farms are producing and the connection between the Agricultural Reserve and the food security network.

Our team has appreciated the opportunity to attend and participate in a variety of community events over the past several months, including a Happy Hour at 7Locks Brewing to celebrate Food Waste Prevention Week with the Montgomery County Food Council and Manna Food Center, the launch of the Childhood Hunger Collaborative, and an Earth Day Celebration at the MCPS REACH Hub at A. Mario Loiderman Middle School.



Additionally, the OFSR had the opportunity to present at two conferences this spring to connect with food system partners in the region and across the country. The Maryland Department of Environment's Food Summit in March engaged hundreds of leaders throughout the state to share best practices related to food waste reduction, food waste composting, and other strategies related to climate change adaptation and mitigation. The Office of Food Systems Resilience was featured on a panel that discussed local collaboration and coordination, alongside the Caroline County Division of Food and Nutrition Services and the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments.

In May, the OFSR was honored to facilitate a panel on local-level strategies to support food access and security at the National Anti-Hunger Policy Conference. The panelists represented key partnerships that have been closely involved in the Strategic Plan to End Childhood Hunger; Councilmember Gabe Alborno, Nanya Chiejine, Executive Director of the Montgomery County Food Council, and MCPS Pupil Personnel Worker Kassie Cardona shared their perspectives on the unique attributes and assets that have facilitated the success of the Plan's implementation



We look forward to continued engagement with the community over the summer months, and wish our partners and supporters a healthy, sunny summer season. As you plan your summer adventures, consider supporting our County's food producers at a local farmers market, many of which offer SNAP and WIC matches, or by picking berries at a local fruit orchard, or check out [Foodie Fridays through Montgomery Parks](#) if you want to learn more about our regional food system.

