

# COG FARM POLICY COMMITTEE

Community Centric Report - June 2025



**Report (CCR) on COG's Food and Agriculture Regional Member (FARM) Policy Committee's progress toward its Two-Year Strategic Plan: 2023 to 2024**

## About COG and FARM

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) unites leaders from across the region to address major challenges, including managing growth and enhancing the quality of life for nearly six million residents. In 2021, COG's Board of Directors, representing 24 local governments, launched the the Food and Agriculture Regional Member (FARM) Policy Committee to strengthen regional food security through collaboration.

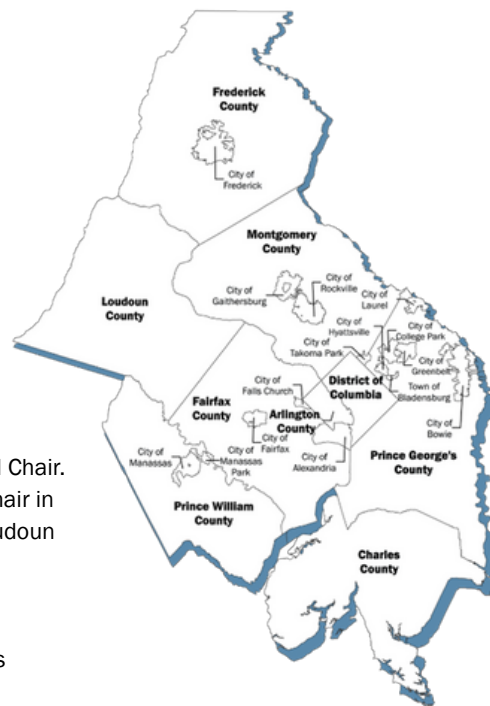
## FARM Policy Committee

From 2023 to 2024, Fairfax Councilmember Jon Stehle served as FARM Chair. Montgomery County Councilmember Andrew Friedson became FARM Chair in 2025, with District of Columbia Councilmember Zachary Parker and Loudoun County Supervisor Laura TeKrony serving as Vice Chairs.

By the end of 2024, FARM had 31 members; terms are two years and renewable. In addition to COG member jurisdictions, FARM also includes subject matter experts. These members included:

- Capital Area Food Bank
- FRESHFARM
- Loudoun Soil and Water Conservation District
- O'Neill Institute, Center for Community Health Innovation at Georgetown Law
- Maryland Hunger Solutions
- MD Department of Agriculture
- VA Cooperative Extension
- VA Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

## COG Member Jurisdictions







Visiting FRESHFARM's Food Prints Program at District of Columbia elementary school, during the 2024 farm tour hosted by DC Councilmember Zachary Parker and the FARM Committee.

## FARM Delivers on Its Mission When:

1. Local governments, policymakers, and communities are informed about leading practices, trends, and legislation to improve food system resilience and equity.
2. FARM communicates with state and federal staff and policymakers about the policies and investments needed to achieve its mission and priorities
3. FARM's priorities are widely embraced as regional priorities, with strategic connections to schools and education highlighted and developed.



Third Annual Policy Forum with USDA in 2024

## FARM's Mission

To support the development of long-term regional direction and collaboration toward a more resilient, secure, equitable, and connected food and farm economy across urban, suburban, and rural communities in the Metropolitan Washington region. Our vision is to provide more of the region's food needs through sustainable and equitable practices.

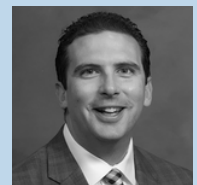
FARM meets bimonthly. In addition, it hosts an annual member retreat and special events.

FARM also has two Work Groups comprised of staff level experts in agriculture, business development, conservation, food security, and food policy and systems from around the region.

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"As FARM's Chair, I successfully led a team effort to make urban agriculture a by right use in the City of Fairfax in certain areas. This change was a result of hearing about what was happening in urban agriculture around the region, having the support and expertise of a diverse set of local champions, and discussions with our own agencies. I'm excited that we can now work to attract farm businesses to our community and improve access to fresh, healthy, local food."

**Jon Stehle,**  
Councilmember, City of Fairfax  
FARM Chair 2023 to 2024



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## FARM Education

From January 2023 to December 2024, FARM held two new member orientations and 13 regular meetings. These included the Loudoun County and District of Columbia farm tours, a Third Annual Forum with the U.S. Department of Agriculture at USDA Headquarters, and a joint meeting with the MD Food System Resiliency Council. FARM also held several other special events which facilitated additional education, peer-to-peer exchange, relationship building, and action on identified priorities.

FARM's Work Groups, the Regional Agricultural Work Group (RAW) and DMV Food Council Collaborative (DMV FCC), held a Regional Food & Aggregation Distribution Summit last May, along with their regular work group meetings. Staff and research partners are implementing the first of several strategies to address the Summit's recommendations.



## 2024 Budget

Over the calendar year 2024, the COG member supported FARM Fund continued to provide the basis of support for most of FARM's activities. Part of the staff's salary was paid for by the food and water resilience project.

FARM 2024 EXPENSES + 2025 BALANCE	AMOUNT
Staff, Consultants, and Support Services	\$346,186.64
Direct Expenses: DC Farm Tour, FARM and Work Group Meetings	\$16,717.87
<b>2024 TOTAL EXPENSES:</b>	<b>\$362,904.51</b>
<b>2025 BEGINNING FARM FUND BALANCE</b>	<b>\$308,309.29</b>



Potomac Vegetable Farm, 2023 Farm Tour.

## FARM Meetings 2023 to 2024

During this time, FARM's meetings focused on:

- Addressing root causes and strategies for food insecurity, with a focus on childhood food insecurity in the region. Learning about the multi-faceted U.S. Farm Bill, and its critical importance to FARM's mission and priorities.
- Hearing from small farmers and technical assistance providers about challenges like land access, farm viability, regulatory barriers, a changing climate, and the need to address the historic disenfranchisement of Black farmers by building lasting relationships, trust, markets, and a commitment to farmer-driven solutions
- Supporting supply chain resilience at all scales, whether on the local and regional scale by investing in cold storage, equipment, food procurement, and farm incubators, or through working with the region's largest food suppliers (i.e., large grocers) to develop optimal practices and regulatory changes to help them restore food flows into the region as quickly as possible in emergencies.
- Federal, state, and local government policy and regulatory changes to protect farmland and prime agricultural soils, and to promote urban agriculture and farm business viability throughout the region.

## FARM Policy Outreach

FARM, and in some cases, the COG Board, took several policy positions on federal and state legislation during this time:

<b>FEB 2023</b>	Supported MD Senate Bill 557 and House Bill 628 to make healthy school meals available to all students.
<b>FEB 2023</b>	Supported MD House Bill 514, to expand the Maryland Meals for Achievement In-Classroom Breakfast Program.
<b>MAY 2023</b>	Commented on USDA Proposed Rule to expand Community Eligibility (CEP) Provision supporting more schools to provide healthy free school meals for all. The rule was changed.
<b>NOV 2023</b>	Supported DC Bill 25-35, Universal School Meals Amendment Act of 2023, to make healthy school meals available to all students.
<b>JAN 2024</b>	Supported a proposed expansion to the Child Tax Credit in The Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act of 2024.
<b>MAR 2024</b>	Submitted a Congressionally Designated Spending Request (CDS), seeking funds for a three-year study on agricultural land access and resource needs in the COG region.
<b>MAY 2024</b>	Submitted Farm Bill 2024 Reauthorization Priorities to House and Senate leadership and COG's Congressional Delegation, covering five titles in the bill ranging from nutrition to conservation.
<b>OCT 2024</b>	The COG Board passed Resolution R29-2024 - Federal and State Actions to Reduce Food Insecurity.



# Key Learnings 2023-2024

## 1. Support for Small Farms & Growers

- Invest in shared infrastructure (e.g., cold storage, value-added facilities).
- Address land affordability and protect prime farmland through zoning.
- Support product diversification, consumer education, and grant-based aid for small farms and markets.

## 2. Policy & Advocacy

- Build coalitions for Farm Bill advocacy beyond the region.
- Align urban farming policies across jurisdictions to reduce regulatory complexity.

## 3. Addressing Food System Inequities

- Reform procurement systems that disadvantage marginalized producers, particularly African American farmers.
- Strengthen the USDA's urban agriculture program with increased funding and technical support.

## 4. Food Insecurity & Economic Drivers

- Tackle rising food insecurity, notably among middle-income households.
- Address impacts of inflation, reduced SNAP benefits, and uneven pandemic recovery.

## 5. Community Food Access & Infrastructure

- Support farmers markets as part of economic development planning.
- Expand cold storage to improve supply chain resilience and food access.

## FARM Organizational Milestones

- Chair Stehle prioritized establishing regular cadence of annual meetings, farm tours, and USDA forums.
- Launched a two-year strategic plan with accountability reporting.
- Welcomed new members and alternates.
- Deepened engagement with federal agencies and Congress.
- Contracted a subject matter expert for additional support to FARM
- Expanded staff capacity to assist FARM, engage in food access coalitions, and connect members with resources.



Three Part Harmony Farm, Washington, D.C.,  
2024 Farm Tour

## What's Ahead for FARM?

- Onboard new members and draft FARM's 2025–2026 Strategic Framework
- Continue bimonthly FARM/Work Group meetings and host Aggregation Summit 2.0
- Hold the annual farm tour and deepen USDA relationships
- Implement the COG Board's 2024 Resolution on food insecurity
- Share key state and federal policy updates with stakeholders
- Advocate for regional food security programs at the state and federal level.
- Build research ties and start the third What Our Region Grows report
- Grow the Ag Work Group's technical and case study capacity
- Partner with other COG Committees to broaden expertise and benefits



1. George's Mill Farm. The Loudoun County Board of Supervisors and county government hosted a farm tour for the FARM Committee in 2023.