



MEETING SUMMARY (DRAFT)

Friday, July 18th
10 am to 1 pm

Meeting agenda and panelist biographies can be found at:

<https://www.mwcog.org/events/2025/6/20/food-and-agriculture-regional-member-farm-policy-annual-forum/>

On Friday, July 18th, 108 FARM and FARM Workgroup members, along with other stakeholders joined the committee, at COG and online, for a policy forum. This three-hour event replaced FARM's June Bimonthly meeting.

Participants heard from eight panelists on topics ranging from challenges facing small farmers, food prices, tariffs, healthy food access, federal nutrition benefits, and more for the first part of the event.

Following lunch, in-person participants broke into groups for focused discussion, networking, and facilitated reporting of highlights.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The federal government's role in supporting food security and systems transformation is contracting.
 - Through administrative and Congressional actions, like passage of the FY25 Budget Reconciliation package, the federal government is scaling back its foundational role in supporting food and healthcare access, particularly for the low-income residents who need it the most.
 - The region's states and local governments will be faced with difficult decisions at a time when the federal workforce and jobs are also being hit hard.
- State and local governments, and other stakeholders, need to protect and utilize programs as efficiently as possible and collaborate to make every dollar go as far as it can.
 - Fewer federal dollars are and will be available to fund essential social services, increasing need and demand for resources, and new requirements to provide state and local funding for programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).
 - **Action Item:** One way that existing funding could go further in agriculture is by leveraging the annual Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBG) that states receive differently.
 - The SCBG Program will receive some increased funding through the Reconciliation Bill.

- States can encourage more *applied* research projects between small, specialty crop producers, Cooperative Extension, and land grant institutions that could be funded through
 - Conducting research on small farms would provide research benefits, and direct, positive impacts to the farm's business (i.e. technological improvements to improve efficiency on small farms).
- Cuts to SNAP and Medicaid will result in losses and decreases in these benefits with likely cascading effects to free school meals.
 - Some of the changes to SNAP and Medicaid will go into effect as soon as the federal government issues implementation guidance.
 - State agencies will request a delay implementing these because of the time and cost required to do.
 - Examples of changes to SNAP which will occur in the near term include new work requirements, the removal of refugees and trafficking victims from the program, limits on who can deduct energy and utilities assistance from their qualifying income for SNAP, elimination of the internet deduction, etc.
 - Other changes such as the increase in states' share of the cost for SNAP administration, and new responsibility* to pay part of the cost of the benefits themselves, will go into effect in a few years.
 - Action Item: * It's essential that states bring down SNAP payment error rates to avoid or reduce the share of benefits they will be required to pay if they do not.
 - [Shifting the Burden: How the Recently Passed Budget Reconciliation Package Reshapes SNAP and Strains State Budgets - Food Research & Action Center](#)
 - Reductions in SNAP and Medicaid enrollment will have a negative impact on the number of children who directly qualify for free school meals through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).
 - CEP allows high need schools to serve free school meals to *all students* when a certain percentage of them qualify for these based on their enrollment in programs like SNAP or Medicaid.
- Food prices are going to remain high.
 - In June, the U.S. saw a jump in consumer prices, probably driven by tariffs. Prices will likely continue to rise through the spring of 2026.
- Small farmers are facing increased costs due to tariffs on imports, uncertainty and challenges in maintaining new sales channels, and on-going labor challenges; however, they are also thinking creatively about new partnerships.
 - Farmers import items like seed plugs, gloves, fertilizer, and equipment to support production.
 - Some small farmers have been able to work directly with schools and food banks for the first time through the federally funded Local Food Purchase Agreement and Local Food for Schools programs. These channels are normally closed to small farmers because these institutions generally don't have funds to work with them.

- FY25 funding was cancelled which will impact access to nutritious local food and farm viability and resilience.
 - New partnerships will have to be made. One example provided was working with an employer to provide nutritious local food to employees facing food insecurity.
 - Farm labor availability is an on-going challenge, and workers need to be compensated with living wages, annual pay increases, etc., just like other employees in any other industry.
 - Farm labor availability is an on-going challenge, and workers need to be compensated with living wages, annual pay increases, etc., just like other employees in any other industry.
 - There is a need for new, labor-saving technology for farms of all sizes, and not necessarily to replace people.
- The Reconciliation Bill completely de-funded the SNAP-Ed Program beginning in FY26.
 - SNAP-Ed's mandate has been to develop policy, systems, and environmental changes to increase healthy food access for residents living with 185% of the Federal Poverty Line.
 - This decision will lead to a loss of services (to residents and farmers), expertise, and jobs.
 - Many of the themes and needs identified during the policy forum's panels fall within what SNAP-Ed does or is able to do: providing consistent marketing support, developing partnerships and solutions to overcome transportation barriers, implementing solutions so that SNAP customers can access, healthy local food at lower prices while ensuring that farmers also receive the prices they need, and more.
- There is a strong need for regional collaboration, support, and partnerships between local governments, non-profits, businesses, and educational institutions to navigate the challenges, impacts, and speed of federal changes.

FARM ACTION ITEMS

- Integrate any consensus or opportunities for regional action identified during the meeting into FARM's two-year strategic plan.
- Chair Friedson will be developing and issuing a local food procurement challenge for COG member jurisdictions this year.
- Regional Marketing Collaboration: COG will initiate a conversation across state and local governments to explore data sharing and ongoing, collaborative opportunities to promote local farms, CSA programs, etc. to raise the visibility of local agriculture further.
 - Explore data sharing partnerships to reduce the administrative burden on farmers and staff.
- Advocate for simplifying SNAP retailer certification for farmers. FARM and others should ask USDA to simplify the process for farmers so they can more easily accept federal nutrition benefits at farmers markets, through CSAs, etc.
 - A collaborative effort could help streamline the process.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES

Food Security and Food Access

- Reduce SNAP error rates to minimize shifts in benefit costs from the federal government to states.
- Organize transportation from senior centers, recreation centers, and apartment complexes to farmers markets to increase access to fresh local food.
- There are some changing patterns in how people come to food pantries. There are also procurement challenges.
 - It's important to work together to address these needs.
 - This should include consideration of more group procurement
- Support greater network development, capacity, and transparent communication among food generators, food recovery programs, food pantries, and composting facilities to improve transportation and logistics and prevent more food from going to waste.
- Explore establishing spaces for local food drop-off and packaging, involving community members in service hours to improve fresh food distribution to neighborhoods in need.

Small Farmers, Food Production, and Infrastructure

- Encourage applied research projects between small, specialty crop producers, Cooperative Extension, and land grant institutions that could be funded through annual Specialty Crop Block Grants.
- Hold resource awareness events to inform localities, producers, and others about available state and local resources (i.e. Virginia's Agriculture and Forestry Industry Development Fund) to support farmers, infrastructure development, etc.
- Form new partnerships with farmers, businesses, and nonprofits to address food insecurity and support local agriculture.
 - There's a need for creative and innovative solutions to address gaps in infrastructure and transportation. Collaboration across regions is crucial.
 - Create shared resources and infrastructure to support small and mid-scale farmers like shared equipment, processing facilities, and distribution networks.
 - One way that local governments and other employers can help CSAs and small farmers diversify and increase sales opportunities is to provide healthy, local food for staff.

Resources

- The [CSA-Innovation Network has resources](#) for farmers and employers, like the [CSA-to-University Toolkit](#)
- The [Milken Institute's Feed Change](#) initiative has a new resource available: [A Blueprint for Employer-Led Food as Health Strategies](#)
- Public and private sector engagement is needed to support under-resourced farmers.

- Support relationship building among farmers to facilitate more, valued peer-to-peer learning.

Engagement and Education

- It's important to engage people who want to take action to support food security and related issues.
 - Many don't know how to engage - there may be a need for a volunteer system to bring people and resources together.
 - Create plans to engage volunteers in a sustained and authentic manner.
- Tap into institutional knowledge, such as faith-based institutions and underground networks, to connect with existing networks and share stories.
- Provide community education and outreach programs to raise awareness about the importance of supporting local and regional food systems (i.e. workshops, farm tours, school programs).
- Work to shift the mindset that food should be cheap to highlight the real costs of production and the importance of fair wages, raises, healthcare, etc. for farmers and farm workers.
 - Local food's nutrition and longer life are important values to emphasize
- Develop and implement joint marketing campaigns to promote local food and support small farmers.
 - This could involve regional branding, advertising, and public awareness efforts.

Local Food Procurement and Promotion

- Make system-level changes in food procurement practices and strengthen cross-sector partnerships to address food access challenges.
- Review and simplify local procurement practices to increase the purchase of locally produced food to benefit farmers and the community
- Greater access to data is needed to meet local purchasing requirements, including distributors.
 - Climate goals could be leveraged to obtain data and make the case for purchasing local products, which would also meet sustainability goals.
- Review and simplify local procurement practices to increase the purchase of locally produced food to benefit farmers and the community
 - There's a need for idea sharing and including producers in the conversation to ensure that procurement efforts are effective and comprehensive.
 - Supply side challenges must be addressed, such as limited capacity of producers to fulfil demand, labor challenges, seasonality, etc.
- Incentivizing regional collaboration and addressing supply-side challenges will help individual jurisdictions overcome local challenges.

Food Systems Funding and Leveraging Publicly Owned Assets

- Use creative approaches to finance food system transformation considering the challenges with traditional funding tools like philanthropy and federal government funding.
 - Consider donor-advised funds and creative financing tools, such as blending capital and creating zero-interest loans, to support local and regional food systems' development.
- Think about publicly owned assets, such as land, that could be supportive of local and regional food systems development, despite challenges in zoning and land use regulations.
 - Maryland will incentivize the use of regenerative agricultural practices in exchange for longer term leases on state-owned property, as part of the Chesapeake Legacy Act signed by Governor Moore this spring.
 - Collaboration among small, local municipalities to drive economic development, map assets, and use land to serve communities is recommended.

OTHER

Chair Freidson called the meeting to order at and adjourned it at

FARM MEMBER ATTENDANCE

Andrew Friedson, Chair, Montgomery County Council
Laura TeKrony, Vice Chair, Loudoun County
Marybeth Connelly, City of Falls Church
Matt de Ferranti
Jessica Landsman, City of Takoma Park
Danielle McKinney, City of Greenbelt
Dalia Palchik, Fairfax County
Ralph Smith, City of Manassas
Yesy Amaya, City of Manassas Park
Heather Bruskin, Montgomery County Office of Food System Resilience
Tara Clemons Johnson, Montgomery County Council (Alternate)
Charles Green, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Julia Gross, MD Hunger Solutions
Sara Hoverter, Georgetown University Law, O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law
Caroline Howe, DC Office of Planning/DC Food Policy Council
Meredith Ledlie Johnson, Virginia Cooperative Extension
Joe Liu, Capital Area Food Bank (Alternate)
Megan Milliken, Chesapeake Bay Funders Network
Katie Stevens, Frederick County Office of Agriculture
Jon Stehle (emeritus member)

SPEAKERS

Ashley Drakeford, Director of Small Business Development, The Capital Market of 20743
Ona Balkus, Committee Director, DC Council Committee on Health
Salaam Bhatti, SNAP Director, Food Research and Action Center

Sara Beckwith, Interim Senior Deputy Director, Community Health Administration, DC Department of Health

Kate Fitzgerald, Principal, Fitzgerald Canepa, LLC

Charles Green, Deputy Commissioner, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Emma Jagoz, Owner, Moon Valley Farm, Frederick County, MD

Gale Livingstone, Owner, Deep Roots Farm, Upper Marlboro, Maryland

James M. MacDonald, PhD, Research Professor, Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of Maryland

PARTICIPANTS

Adair Ravenscraft

Akanksha Sinha

Alice Chalmers

Alyssa Seibert

Andrew Resnick

Annette Nielsen

Annika La Fave

Annmarie Hart-Bookbinder

Ashley Drakeford

Ayesha Holmes

Beth Sastre

Bethany Krupicka

Beverly Wheeler, EdD

Brittany Cook -MDEM-

Brooks, Alisa

Burton, Nadine M

Campbell, Carly

Carla Cash

Catherine Nardi

Cokie Nanka, CIP

Corey Welcher

Daniella Ochoa Gonzalez

Darren Jarboe

Deb Haynes

Eleni Shepard

Elisa Solomon

Elizabeth Borst

Elizabeth Teuwen

Ellie Bomstein

Emily Landsman

Gabby Headrick

Grace Leatherman

Harumi N ReisReilly

Heather Bruskin

Jaren Hill Lockridge

Jocelyn Tidwell

Joseph Peralta

Josue Salmeron

Julia Gross

Julia Raymond

Kellie Del Signore

Kera Johnson, (DOH)

Kim Rush Lynch

Kowalczyk, Barbara

LaMonika Jones

Lindsay Adams

Lauren DeSimone

Lily Duran (AFAC)

Lisa Ragain

Lorien MacAuley, PhD; MCFC

Margaret Todd

Mark Scott

Martin Proulx

Matt Mulder

Maureen McNamara Best

Melissa Jensen

Michele Burton

Molly

Nancy K Nunn

Natalia Salazar Lahera

Nathan

Pam Hess, Arcadia

Piper Phillips Caswell

Rachel Clark

Ralph Smith

Robin McClave

Samuel Wilson

Selena Singleton

Shannon McDonald -MDE-

Stacy Kubofcik, MARBIDCO

Stephanie Hopkins

Stephanie Lansing

Steve McHenry, MARBIDCO

Stuart Vermaak

Sydney Garner

Tariq Sheriff

Tazeen Ahmad
Warren Hansen, Office of Chair Friedson

Yuki Kato (she/her)

COG Team

Steve Bieber
Sydney Daigle
Christine Howard
Wyetha Lipford
Clark Mercer
Lindsay Smith
Sydney Wright