Food Security in Montgomery County: Shared vision, common outcomes, and collaborative capacity building

Food Security Plan Community Update
Friday June 28th, 2019

Amanda Nesher, Food Security Programs Manager
The Food Security Strategic Plan

• Spring 2016 - Bill 19-16, The Strategic Plan to Achieve Food Security, was introduced and unanimously passed by County Council in July 2016

• Plan developed from public discussion forums, listening sessions, in-person interviews and roundtable discussion groups in partnership with more than 300 collaborators, including businesses, nonprofits, local and government agencies and food assistance providers.

• Plan released by the County Executive in January 2017
Our Shared Vision

Our community is a place where all people at all times have access to safe, sufficient, nutritious food in order to lead fulfilling lives and contribute to making Montgomery County, MD a place where all live in dignity.
Food Insecurity

This map displays the food insecurity rate for each census tract in the Capital Area Food Bank's service area. Food insecurity is measured by the US Census Bureau annually. County and sub-county estimates are also calculated annually, using data from the US Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service. The map is based on data from Feeding America, the national umbrella organization for food banks.

Root Causes of Food Insecurity

- **Poverty:** 6.7% of residents live below the poverty level of $24,600 (for a family of four)

- **Living Below the Self-Sufficiency Standard:** The self-sufficiency standard for a family of four to afford basic amenities in Montgomery County is $91,252 per year

- **Federal Food Assistance Program Ineligibility:** Many Montgomery County residents earn too much to qualify for food assistance programs but not enough to reach the self-sufficiency standard

- **Lack of Transportation:** Residents without reliable transportation may be limited to convenience stores with limited nutritious foods

- **Employment Status:** 3.2% of Montgomery County residents were unemployed in March 2019
Populations Most At Risk For Food Insecurity

Children
Children were found to have insufficient food during summer and on weekends, and had a higher food insecurity risk if they were living in single parent households and were children of color. Childhood food insecurity can, among other things, result in long-term poor health consequences, behavioral and social difficulties and poor school performance.

Seniors
6.6% seniors in Montgomery county are estimated to live below the poverty level, and around 20-30,000 live below the self sufficiency standard. Many are also aging in place and in isolation, with limited access to transportation and technology, limited English proficiency, physical and mental disabilities and medical dietary restrictions.

People with Disabilities
Families with a disabled member were estimated to be 2 to 3 times more likely to be food insecure. Working aged adults with disabilities are twice as likely to live below the poverty level as adults without disabilities. Barriers to food security include lack of case management, limited communication ability, restricted mobility, and access to transportation to purchase and/or prepare food.

Foreign Born
50-60,000 foreign born residents were living at or below 150% of the poverty level in 2016. Food insecurity in this population results from factors such as language and cultural barriers, a lack of culturally appropriate food, and fear of asking for help, especially in mixed documentation status families.

Other Risk Factors
- living below the self-sufficiency standard
- having limited access to transportation
- being eligible but not enrolled in benefits
- being homeless
- having faith based dietary restrictions
- working two or more jobs.
Recommendations: Year One

- Standardize Data Collection and Reporting
- Transportation Analysis
- Identify High Priority Zones
- Increase Connectivity, Collaboration and Information Sharing
- Leverage Existing Programs
- Explore New Datasets
Food Assistance Resource Directory

Hard copy brochure in English launched Fall 2017 and the Spanish version released in Fall 2018

Online database of Food Assistance Providers, searchable by zipcode, keyword and location, released in January 2019

Updated annually and distributed throughout the County by the Food Council, DHHS, and cross-sector community partners

3,000+ hard copies distributed in schools, healthcare settings, food assistance sites, community centers, colleges, and DHHS departments.

The Food Is Medicine Program, in which healthcare providers such as Montgomery County hospitals and clinics screen and connect patients at high risk of chronic, diet-related diseases with healthy food assistance options to manage their illnesses, uses the Directory as part of their referrals system.

Thank you to the Transforming Communities Initiative through the Institute for Public Innovation, Montgomery County government, the Healthcare Initiative Foundation, and CountyStat for making this resource possible.
Strengthening Food Assistance Infrastructure & Enhanced Communication Strategies

**Food Recovery & Access Working Group ("FRAWG")**

Build capacity of food assistance organizations, amplify the work of Community Food Rescue, and integrate local and regional efforts into the work of community, non-profit, business and government stakeholders.

Connects 160 community partners virtually through the FRAWG listserv.

314 people attended 11 meetings in 2018, representing 32 different organizations that provide direct food service to residents.

**Networking and Collaboration Opportunities**

**Sharing of Best Practices:**
- Voter Registration, Resources to Help Immigrants in Montgomery County, Community Eligibility Provision In Schools, Public Charge Rule Change
- Site Visits and Guest Presenters
How helpful has it been to have the Food Security Plan as a centrally established policy to guide the work of food assistance providers in the County?
Most beneficial aspect of FRAWG meetings?
Connectivity, Collaboration and Information Sharing

SNAP Training Webinar

Food Assistance Provider Toolkit

Screen & Intervene Toolkit

FoodStat Tutorial

Engage new partners: CFR capacity-building mini-grant recipients

Food Security Plan Community Update
Community Findings & Recommendations

Caregivers of Children Under 5

IN 2018 DHHS, MCFC AND COLLABORATING PARTNERS HELD:

9 focus groups
54 caregivers of children under 5

in English, Spanish, Amharic

FINDINGS INCLUDED THE NEED FOR:

- More culturally appropriate food education
- More clarity about food assistance resources and benefits
- Higher benefits amounts to reflect the high cost of living
- More efficient and cost effective transportation options

Residents with Mental Health Disabilities

DHHS and the Food Council have begun conducting listening sessions with mental health professionals and clients at Family Services Inc., to discuss the barriers and challenges to accessing and preparing healthy food experienced by Montgomery County residents with mental health illnesses.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengthen Food Assistance Infrastructure</th>
<th>Strategically build capacity of smaller organizations &amp; establish new programs</th>
<th>Health in all Policies for Food Assistance (Establish nutrition goals and standards for food assistance)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support and expand food recovery</td>
<td>Engage Community Partners and the Private Sector</td>
<td>Enhanced Communication strategies</td>
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<td>Increase retail food access and expand food production</td>
<td>Better Connect Health Care Community to Food Security</td>
<td>Maximize participation in benefit programs</td>
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MONTGOMERY COUNTY FOOD COUNCIL
Community Advisory Board
The Food Council awarded an AmeriCorps VISTA in August 2018 by the Alliance to End Hunger, in order to connect the community voice to the ongoing implementation of the Food Security Plan. In March 2019, the Food Council was informed that another VISTA will be awarded for the 2019-2020 service year, and recruitment has already begun.

Community Outreach on Food Security
MCFC staff led or participated in more than 110 partner meetings, 18 advocacy meetings, and 30 conferences or speaking engagements in 2018
Food Security Community Advisory Board Feedback

Why did you join the FSCAB?

- To give input and improve the nutrition of families in the County who rely on Food Bank donations
- To learn about resources that I can share with my community
- To speak for those in my community who cannot speak for themselves
- To become a leader in my community
- Knowing that so many people in our community go without food really touched my heart and I wanted to help change that and make a difference

What does being on the FSCAB mean to you?

- I have the opportunity to share my views and make a difference for food security in my community
- I hope we can continue our efforts to make legislative changes for food security
- I am learning how to talk and listen to members of my community
- I am affiliated with a group that is making an impact on the lives of others - I am overjoyed to see the smile on someone's face when I share resources on food, clothing and other information with them; thanks for choosing me to be a part of the Board!
Nutrition Standards for Food Assistance Providers

Meets monthly to explore nutrition standards that food assistance providers can subscribe to in order to attract healthier food donations and facilitate the most nutritious and healthful food choices for their clients.

Presented national models to the full Working group at the January 2019 meeting and led discussion on opportunities and challenges for implementing in Montgomery County.
Connect the Health Care Community to Food Security

Health Care and Food Access FRAWG Subgroup “Screen & Intervene” Program

Meets monthly convening representatives of the healthcare community in Montgomery County, including the Primary Care Coalition, CHEER, IPHI, MedStar Montgomery, Suburban Hospital, Adventist Healthcare and Holy Cross Health

Developing a “Screen & Intervene” program for healthcare providers in Montgomery County to build on the existing Food is Medicine Program

Rolling out a training webinar for hospitals and clinics in Montgomery County in 2019, outlining the importance of nutritious food as a social determinant for health, and recommending the creation of food insecurity screening procedures and robust referrals systems to become an integral part of each institution’s programs and services.

Partnering with DHHS to explore how a “screen & intervene” program can be introduced at all MCPS School-Based Health Centers
Advocacy

- Oral and written testimony and comments on County, State, and Federal legislation.
- Policymaker engagement.
- Policy committee leads year-long strategies to research and establish issue-specific policy recommendations.

Environmental Impact

- Food waste reduction
- Increased organics composting capacity and education
- Increased awareness of plant-based diets
- Support implementation of Strategic Plan to Advance Food Waste Composting
Food Education

- Advocacy and education on gardening and agriculture, food safety, food marketing, nutrition, cooking/shopping/preparing food, waste avoidance.
- Develop policy recommendations through Food Literacy Assessment, including senior food education needs.
- Highlight MCPS School Wellness successes.

Food Economy

- Create market linkages and networks between farmers, food and beverage entrepreneurs, chefs, restaurateurs, distributors, retailers, institutions, and consumers of local foods.
- Build the production and distribution capacity of local producers and provide resources to support businesses as they scale.
How Community Partners Help Fight Hunger

- Join the Food Recovery and Access Working Group or Food Advocacy Listserv.
- **Serve as a food distribution site** for Capital Area Food Bank or Manna Food Center.
- **Volunteer** for SNAP Outreach or with one of the 75+ community organizations in Montgomery County that serve meals, run food pantries, and provide food boxes to local residents.
- **Register your community as a regular Community Food Rescue volunteer food runner.**
- **Start a garden** on your property to grow food and donate it to local residents. Contact the UMD Master Gardeners Grow It Eat It for ideas and support.
- **Use your community’s licensed kitchen** as a site for preparing meals to donate or provide kitchen access for a local food business entrepreneur or cooking education program.
- **Advocate as a resident or community group on policy issues** that affect food access for local residents.
- **Commit to sharing information** with your community about the extent of food insecurity in Montgomery County and the role every resident, business, and organization can play in addressing this issue.
- **Serve as an MCPS summer meals site** for children in your community.
- **Raise and donate food and funds** for local food assistance initiatives.
Implementing Food Security Plan
Recommendations:
Opportunities & Challenges
Expanding Access to Benefits Programs

JD Robinson, Anti-Hunger Program Assistant, Maryland Hunger Solutions

JD joined Maryland Hunger Solutions in February 2018 as an Outreach Intern and is now the SNAP Outreach Coordinator. In his role he is aiding the organization’s efforts to educate and support the citizens of Maryland with applying for and maintaining their SNAP benefits. A graduate of McDaniel College, he has been working in the food and nutrition space for 3 years.

- According to a recent report by Maryland Hunger Solutions, 64% of Montgomery County residents who are eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are NOT enrolled - the largest number for any County in Maryland.

- The Senior Hunger and SNAP Outreach Program, co-created by the Food Council, DHHS, Maryland Hunger Solutions and the Community Action Agency, trains community volunteers to provide food insecure seniors with referrals to basic needs resources, as well as help them complete SNAP applications.
Increasing Availability of Culturally Appropriate Food

Susan Topping, Senior Director of Partners and Programs, Capital Area Food Bank

Susan’s career has focused on local food access and sustainable agriculture over the last 18 years. She has worked on vegetable and dairy farms, ran farmer’s markets and led programmatic teams that worked to build a bridge between sustainable agriculture and affordable food access. Today, she works in partnership with nonprofit organizations across Montgomery & Prince George’s County, Washington, DC and Northern Virginia to decrease food insecurity through a variety of food access interventions, wellness programs and partnerships. Her responsibilities include: strategic planning, fundraising, compliance oversight, Federal Nutrition Programs and public policy.

- 339,188 Montgomery County residents (or 32% of the total MoCo population) were born in another country.

- There are more foreign-born residents in the County than residents born in Maryland.

- FRAWG’s Culturally Appropriate Food Subgroup is exploring ways to increase education around the foods most familiar to different members of our community, as well as increase the availability (through agriculture, production or retail) of foods most commonly eaten by different populations.

- The Capital Area Food Bank works to source and provide culturally appropriate foods through a network of food assistance partners and program’s it implements directly in the community.
Combatting College Student Food Insecurity

Carmen Poston-Farmer, Student Affairs Operations Director, Montgomery College

Carmen Poston Travis is the Director of Student Affairs and Initiatives at Montgomery College. She has 25 years of experience in educational and vocational administration which includes K-12, vocational rehabilitation, and higher education. She also serves on the American Association for Women in Community Colleges (AAWCC) board of directors as the Executive Director. One of her most prized accomplishments is the establishment of the Montgomery College’s Student Health and Wellness Center for Success.

• According to national statistics released by the Hope Center for College, Community and Justice in April 2019, 45% of the 86,000 respondents to their #RealCollege survey reported being food insecure in the prior 30 days, with 56% of respondents being housing insecure and 17% of respondents being homeless in the previous year.

• Montgomery College recently established a Student Health and Wellness Center for Success, which provides students with resources on Health & Safety, Mental Health, Physical Health, and Health, Human Services & Nutrition.

• Within the Human Services & Nutrition arm, the Fuel for Success Food Campaign was born, which includes initiatives such as Grab and Go snack bags, Lunch on the Go, Mobile Markets and the Doughnation Program to address food insecurity at Montgomery College.
Expanding Food Recovery

Cheryl Kollin, Program Director, Community Food Rescue

Cheryl is the Program Director of Community Food Rescue, the coordinated network for food recovery in Montgomery County, Maryland. Community Food Rescue, a program of Manna Food Center, takes a systems approach to reducing wasted food and increasing good food to people experiencing hunger. CFR was awarded Edible DC Magazine’s People’s Choice award and Bethesda Magazine’s Green Award. Cheryl is a founding member of the Montgomery County Food Council. Cheryl has an MBA in sustainable business from the Bainbridge Graduate Institute.

- In the United States, food waste is estimated to be between 30-40% of the food supply, which adds up to $160 billion.

- 146,000 tons of food is thrown away every year in Montgomery County alone, with much of it still being perfectly find to eat.

- Community Food Rescue is made up of 340 members - 152 food businesses, 61 recipient agencies, and 127 volunteer food runners.

- In 2018, Community Food Rescue recovered and redistributed 1,953,137 lbs. of food, representing 1.63 million meals.
Implementing Food Security Plan Recommendations: Opportunities & Challenges

Moderator: Morgan Wiggan, Farmers Market Program Manager, Crossroads Community Food Network

Expanding Access to Benefits Programs
JD Robinson, Anti-Hunger Program Assistant, Maryland Hunger Solutions

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For more information about these programs or to get involved, please contact Amanda Nesher at anesher@mocofoodcouncil.org