



Localizing Food Justice in Montgomery County

Piloting Transit Stop Farm Stands in Low-Access Food Areas

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Executive Summary

Improving food access for all residents has been a priority of Montgomery County government since 2018 when CountyStat released the FoodStat data that indicated higher levels of food insecurity among residents than previously realized. When the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated existing food access challenges, the County invested heavily in food distribution programs offering free food to qualifying households. Distribution falls short, however, of adequately promoting overarching food justice, which requires a more comprehensive and systematic approach that allows consumers and producers greater autonomy and sovereignty over the Montgomery County food system. Advancing food justice necessitates addressing the gap in market access points for residents to employ free choice purchasing power over affordable and healthy produce.

Transit stop farm stands have proven successful at building food system resilience by making local food more accessible and affordable to all people while simultaneously incentivizing investment in local agriculture. Using learnings from experts in the food space and best practices from an existing transit stop farm stand model in Atlanta, this report proposes the introduction of a transit stop farm stand pilot project in Montgomery County, offering a recommended approach, outlining a proposed budget for the program, and identifying ideal pilot locations and opportunities for longer term expansion.

**“Food is national security. Food is economy.
It is employment, energy, history. Food is everything.”
-Chef José Andrés**

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About the Fellow

Katie Faryniarz is a Master of Public Policy student at Georgetown University specializing in environmental policy, sustainable development, and local diplomacy. Before graduate school, Katie worked in medical advocacy in Chicago, supporting clients' efforts to improve access to quality care for patients. During college she interned on mayoral and gubernatorial campaigns, in state higher education policy and advocacy, and for public health policy experts and researchers. Katie holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison where she graduated in 2018 with majors in Legal Studies and Environmental Studies.



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Background

Food Insecurity in the United States

Food insecurity is defined as a lack of consistent access to enough food for every person in a household to live an active, healthy life (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022). Food insecurity can be experienced at different levels of severity, from uncertainty around one's ability to obtain food, compromising on one's food quality and variety, reducing one's food intake and/or skipping meals, and spending a day or more without food (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2022). In 2021, more than 33.8 million people, including over 9 million children, were living in food insecure households in the United States (Feeding America, 2011-2022). Low-income and minority households are disproportionately affected by food insecurity, with these groups more than twice as likely to be food insecure than White households and households above the poverty line (USDA-Economic Research Service, 2023).

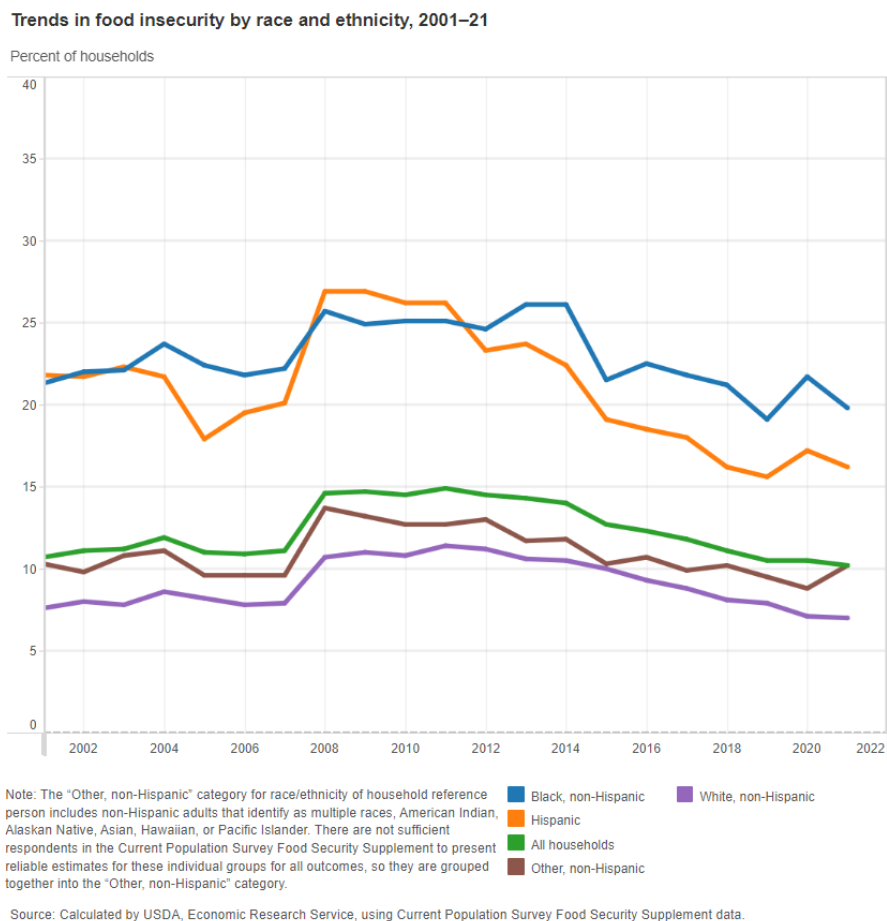


Figure 1: Rates of food insecurity by race & ethnicity (2001-2021)

Food Insecurity in Montgomery County

These disparities are consistent in Montgomery County, where according to Feeding America, 8.9% of the County, or 93,590 people experienced food insecurity in 2021, up from 6.1% of the County population in 2017 (Feeding America, 2022). Similarly in line with national standards, Montgomery County's BIPOC residents experience food insecurity at a much higher rate than White residents. In 2021, 17% of Black and 9% of Latinx residents in the County were food insecure, compared to just 3% of White residents (Feeding America, 2022). Poverty levels are also distinctly correlated with food security, demonstrated in the heat maps below (darker red and blue indicating higher percentages) that show how the areas where food insecurity levels are higher are primarily located along the same path as the areas with higher percentages of households living below the poverty line (Office of Health and Human Services, 2022).

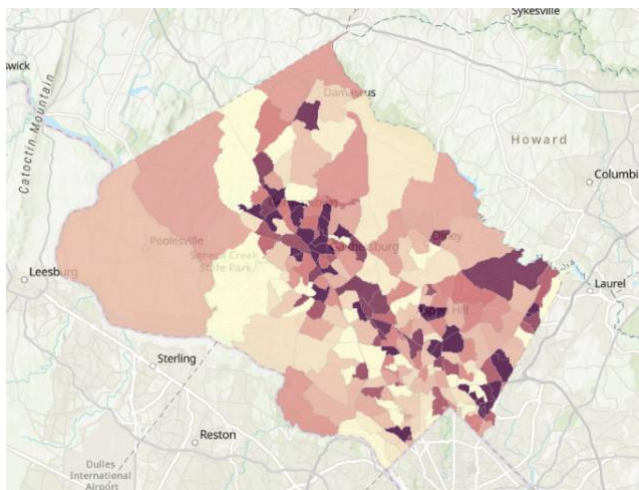


Figure 2: Percent of Families Living Below the Poverty Line

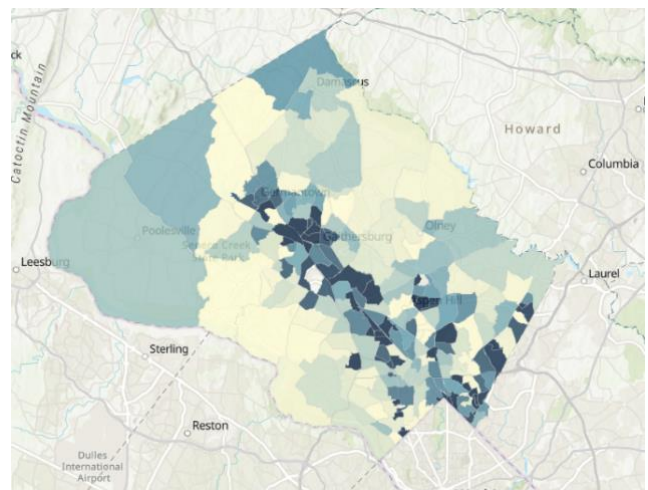


Figure 3: Percent of Families Food Insecure

County Efforts to Address Food Insecurity

CountyStat's release of the [FoodStat report](#) in 2018 shed light on the reality of food insecurity throughout the County. The findings instigated a period of investment in food distribution, through grant-funding to organizations serving under-resourced communities in low-access food areas, that resulted in a growth in the number of food assistance providers and distribution sites that existed around the County. The progress made was short-lived, however, as the COVID-19 pandemic

exacerbated existing challenges to food security and introduced new barriers to food access for County residents. By 2022 the number of residents indicating that they had experienced or were experiencing food insecurity nearly doubled, leading to an influx in requests for resources to an already stretched assistance system (Manna Food Center, 2021). In response to the urgent need for more resources to improve food access, the County quickly expanded their scope for funding to include more in grants as well as the direct purchase of food to be distributed to food assistance providers, ultimately totaling an investment of more than \$30 million throughout the pandemic (Montgomery County Council, 2021). This dramatic increase in funding for distribution has enabled the number of food assistance providers and distribution sites to grow in tandem, and today more than 120 resources and locations exist for residents seeking access to affordable food (Montgomery County Food Council, 2020).

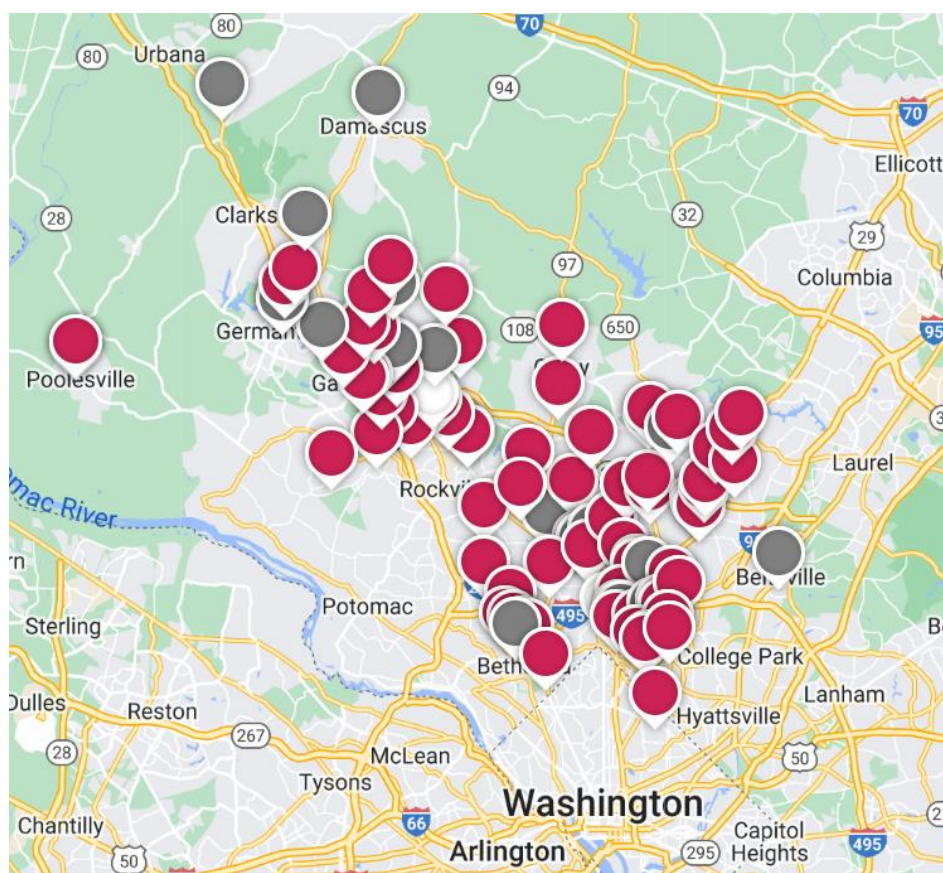


Figure 4: Montgomery County Food Assistance

Food Security vs. Food Justice

While distribution is an important component of food security, achieving food justice requires a more systematic approach. Food security is only a component of the Food Justice Movement (FJM) more broadly, which uses a holistic and structural view of the food system that sees healthy food as a human right and addresses structural barriers to that right (FoodPrint, 2018). The FJM aims to ensure universal access to healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food, while simultaneously advocating for the safety and well-being of those involved in the food production process (Boston University Community Service Center). Using a food justice lens, the capacity for communities to build autonomy and sovereignty over their own food and agriculture systems is paramount, and the power of people to produce and purchase a variety of healthy and sustainable food of their choosing is essential to establishing that control (Pimbert, 2015).

Tackling Food Justice in Montgomery County

Within Montgomery County there remains a notable gap in market access points for County residents to purchase their own food at affordable prices. Across the US, other food systems facing similar challenges have become testing grounds for innovative programs that aim to localize food justice, using food access and choice as means to empower disenfranchised communities. Through partnerships between city governments and government agencies, non-profit organizations and NGOs, local farms, and food assistance providers, low-access food areas nationally have seen the introduction of food justice-oriented pilot programs that address discrepancies in all aspects of the overarching food system. From mobile grocery stores housed in repurposed school and city buses to vertical farms in refurbished warehouses, the push for food justice is increasingly targeted, informed, and comprehensive, and is taking place in myriad creative forms. Transit stop farm stands are one such development, and one that has the potential for success in Montgomery County.

Transit Stop Farm Stands

Transit stop farm stands are small local produce stands situated around transit stops that operate during peak commuting hours. Food justice is key to the mission of transit stop farm stands, as they offer a well-rounded approach to addressing inadequacies in all facets of a region's food systems—producers, consumers, and the land and environment overall benefit from such programs. Transit stop farm stands promote food justice in three key ways:

1

Convenience and access: Transit stop farm stands meet people where they are.

Their location in central transit hubs allows individuals without the time or means to travel to the grocery store to purchase affordable produce without having to go out of their way to do so. Transit stop farm stands operate during hours when commuters are traveling home from work so as to reach the greatest number of people. Additionally, transit stop farm stands offer a new location for patrons enrolled in nutrition benefits programs like SNAP/EBT and WIC to use their funds, extending the usability of these benefits to new convenient markets.

2

Choice: Transit stop farm stands provide a market access point for residents to exercise choice over the foods they purchase and consume.

High levels of need paired with capacity and resource challenges require that food banks and existing food distribution programs largely provide pre-packed food offerings, often consisting primarily of non-perishable items like pasta and canned produce, and less regularly with fresh produce, meats, and dairy products. Many non-perishable items are highly processed with minimal nutritional value compared to their fresh counterparts. Additionally, produce provided is more likely to go to waste when choice is stripped, as taste varies dramatically between people and different cultural and ethnic groups, and many produce items must be cooked in particular ways that may be unfamiliar to or unfeasible for certain people. Therefore, by allowing consumers to choose the produce that they want to eat and cook, transit stop farm stands can supplement existing food distribution programs and reduce food waste.

Building food system resilience: Transit stop farm stands encourage investment in the local food system that translates to increased production at the local level.

By partnering with local farms to stock the produce selection, transit stop farm stands offer farmers the opportunity to reach new customers and consumers the opportunity to access local food more easily and affordably, subsequently incentivizing the farmers to grow more to meet the increased demand. This local food system support is attractive at the federal level as well, with similar programs around the country successfully acquiring grants that support program continuation and expansion, enabling more local farms to contribute and increase production.

Piloting Transit Stop Farm Stands in Montgomery County

Transit stop farm stands can take several approaches, however, the most common are aggregated produce and vendor-run models.

A vendor-run approach operates similarly to an individual farm stall at a standard farmer's market, in which a farmer and/or their employees set-up a table and tent to sell their food items at internally determined prices. This approach puts the onus entirely on the farmer to manage the stand, and in the case of Montgomery County, would require minimal involvement from government outside of oversight and determining a food justice centered pricing structure that would incentivize farmer involvement and keep costs low for customers. While on the surface this approach is simpler to enact, it has several limitations that must be considered, particularly around its ability to take a food justice-oriented approach.

Therefore, an aggregated produce model, further described below, can be implemented in a way that prioritizes food justice and thus is the preferred method for a transit stop farm stand in Montgomery County.

Aggregated Produce Model

An aggregated produce model is run and managed entirely without farmer involvement, either in-house by the County or by a third-party or community partner. In this model, the managing body aggregates produce from farms around the County to sell at the stand without the farmers needing

to be in attendance. Though more intensive and costly from the County's perspective, the aggregated produce model offers several important benefits that would contribute to its ability to address food injustice in the County to a greater extent than the vendor-run model.

Model Benefits

Primarily, this approach reduces the burden on farmers to participate. Farmers in Montgomery County are stretched incredibly thin. Many are requested to sell at all the farmers markets in the County, as well as several in Washington, DC and neighboring Maryland and Virginia counties. While the opportunity to get their produce and other products to consumers they may not otherwise reach can be profitable to them, the farmers that I spoke with were in consensus that the opportunity costs of participating—time and money—often outweigh any true advantage they receive. Most farms in Montgomery County are small by national standards. In 2019, the average Montgomery County farm was 117 acres and just 30% of the County's farms were greater than 50 acres in size (Office of Agriculture, 2019). In comparison, the average farm size in the US is 446 acres (USDA-Economic Research Service, 2018), and small farms average 231 acres (Dunckel, 2013). As a result of this small size, most, if not all Montgomery County farms are hands-on operations with the farmers involved in every aspect of the business along with support from few employees. Participating in farmers markets takes these hands away from the farm as involvement requires that vendors properly clean their produce, load and transport it to the market, manage the stall for several hours, and dispose of or transport back any unsold items. Monetarily the cost of participating is also steep, as farmers must rent or purchase refrigerated transport and onsite cold storage to ensure the produce doesn't spoil in the summer heat. As a result of the many associated costs, Montgomery County farmers are selective about the markets they participate in, justifying their involvement by the revenue they anticipate and still rarely breaking even. The aggregated produce approach eliminates these associated barriers, as farmers would be receiving guaranteed revenue for the produce that they contribute each summer without having to sacrifice the time and money that revenue would otherwise entail.

Additionally, the aggregated produce model facilitates access for consumers to a variety of produce options at affordable prices. By compiling produce from multiple farms, the County can ensure that an array of produce is available to sell, rather than being limited by what one farmer can provide.

This flexibility is beneficial to the farmers as well who can then plan how much they grow based on what the expectations are for their contributions. For example, whereas at many farmers markets there are multiple stands selling the same produce at the same time, the County can work with farmers at the forefront of the growing season to align on a schedule for the produce that will be provided by different farms and what they will be compensated for their contributions. This is especially helpful for ensuring all Montgomery County farms can participate and contribute no matter their size and what types of produce they grow. While the vendor-run approach is likely to inadvertently prioritize involvement from larger farms who can stock the farm stand more fully with an array of staple produce items, the aggregated model allows small farms to contribute whatever they are able, to be supplemented with contributions from larger farms to fill any gaps in produce offerings.

Finally, the aggregated approach promotes racial equity and social justice (RESJ) priorities on both the producer and consumer sides of the food system. Primarily, by running the farm stands independently of farmer involvement, the County can help expand the purchasing power of residents enrolled in nutritional benefits programs like SNAP/EBT, WIC, Maryland Market Money (MMM), Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP), etc. The ability for farms to accept purchases made using benefits requires specific training and technology that many farmers in the County do not have the capacity to undertake. As a result, the single vendor-run approach is unlikely to offer comparable benefit to both producers and consumers, especially in terms of equity—either all farms have equal opportunity to participate but consumers are not always able to purchase using nutritional benefits, or all benefits can be used but only farms with the capacity to accept these benefits are offered the chance to run the farm stand. Using the aggregated approach can also further allow the County to be more targeted in its partnerships with local farmers, providing them the chance to prioritize investment in BIPOC farmers and farmers growing culturally specific produce. BIPOC farmers make up just two percent of agricultural land ownership in the US today (USDA-National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2019), and in Montgomery County just two farms are BIPOC-owned while the remaining BIPOC farmers can only afford to rent land from larger farms (Future Harvest). By stocking the stand with produce from multiple farms, the County can help increase the visibility of diverse farmers and farmers offering more diversity in their produce.

Aggregated Produce Model Case Study: MARTA Markets – Atlanta, GA

The MARTA Markets (MM) initiative was established in 2015 in partnership with Atlanta’s transit authority, MARTA, as a program under the 501(c)3 nonprofit Community Farmers Markets (CFM), which had been working since 2011 to meet the demand for more efficiently managed, community-based, sustainable farmers markets in the Atlanta metro area (Community Farmers Markets).

The program was uniquely designed through a collaborative effort between CFM, other local food organizations, and MARTA in



Figure 5: MARTA Markets

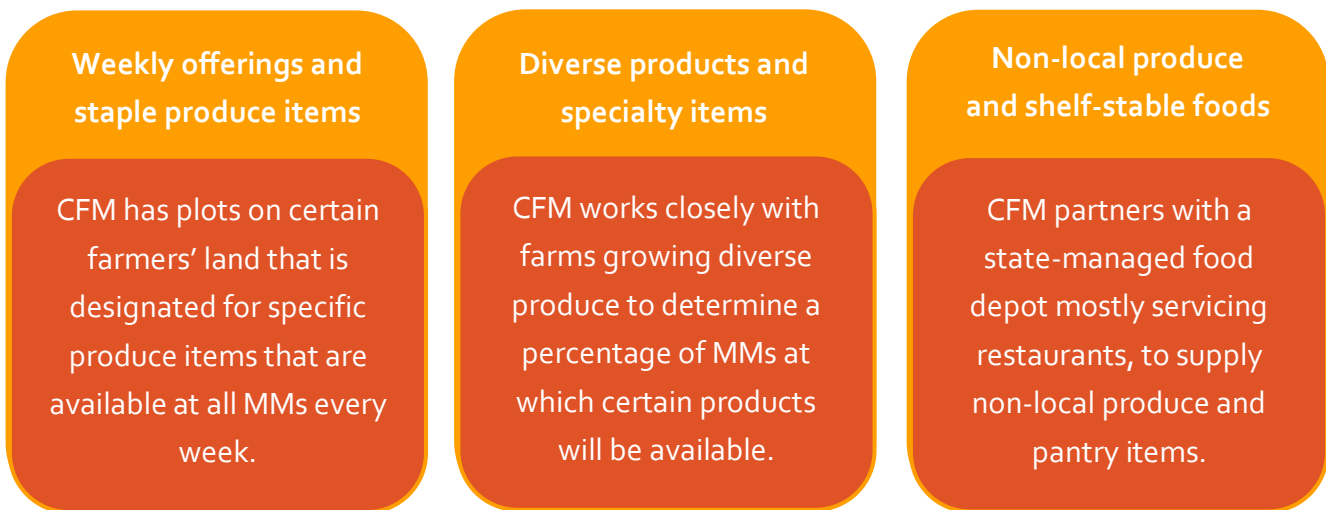
recognition of the potential role that Atlanta’s transit system could play in promoting food justice across the city. The first MM, then just one tent-and-table set-up in a single MARTA station, opened in the summer of 2015 as part of a 10-week pilot project. Today there are MARTA Markets operating each week at seven transit locations, featuring five semi-fixed produce stands that offer 15-18 unique produce items as well as other locally produced essentials and value-added foods like peanut butter, baked goods, juice, and prepared foods (Community Farmers Markets). Alongside the local produce and foods, MMs source some non-local produce, such as bananas, to ensure that patrons can do a large portion of their fresh food shopping at the markets versus having to complement their purchases with a trip to a separate grocery store for non-local essentials.

Model Overview

The MARTA Markets are run entirely by Community Farmers Markets with support from key partners, sponsors, and volunteers. CFM has dedicated staff members who coordinate purchases and pick-up of all food items from several weekly, rotating, monthly, and seasonal local vendors and store all items in CFM’s refrigerated warehouse prior to being brought to the markets to be sold. As would be the case for a pilot introduced in Montgomery County, CFM’s management of the entire purchase and sale process allows them to accept all benefits programs. Further, they partner with a non-profit organization that matches all produce purchases made through EBT, providing recipients

more purchasing power with their EBT funds. For example, \$2 spent using EBT is worth \$4 at the MMs.

The expansion of the MMs throughout the city has been made possible by federal USDA grants under the Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP) and Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP). The grants enable CFM to purchase set amounts of food from suppliers on pre-determined schedules, ensuring vendors have a guaranteed revenue stream during that period, sell the purchased items at the markets at fair prices, and donate any unsold produce to local food banks to eliminate food waste and support efforts to build resilience in Atlanta's food system. Depending on the needs of the community and produce costs, CFM works with farmers and other suppliers on a tiered basis. This tiered system ensures that the MMs are stocked with items that patrons are purchasing and using, allows CFM to keep their costs manageable and consistent based on product desirability, and enables farmers to plan how much of their produce they grow or set aside for the MMs and what they will make for their contributions on an annual basis. The participating vendors contribute with staggered frequency and are broken down as follows:



Finally, over the past eight years, CFM has continuously worked to incorporate programming that expands its reach and its capacity to serve the Atlanta community. Through partnerships with organizations focused on SNAP-Education and benefits outreach and assistance, CFM has been able to both support patrons already enrolled in SNAP by offering food education and cooking demos, as well as screen those interested in determining their eligibility and walk them through the enrollment

process. Their SNAP-Ed partnership simultaneously introduced CFM to local “Food is Medicine” programs and services, allowing the MMs to serve as pick-up places for people in Produce Prescription cohorts. As the MMs were growing this partnership was a simple way to provide assured sales and get more people in the door.

Since the first MARTA Market was established in 2015, CFM has demonstrated through targeted and informed programming how a food justice approach can and should be built into interventions aimed at addressing food insecurity.

Pilot Program Implementation

Ensuring a food justice approach is built into the aggregated produce model requires that the pricing structure benefits not only the producers and consumers, but also the Montgomery County food system as a whole. Based on learnings from the MARTA Markets and insights from four Montgomery County farmers and others with expertise in the farmers market space, I have identified a potential pricing model that supports this aim.

Proposed Pricing Model

1

The County purchases desired produce from farmers at Farm to Foodbank prices or using a similar pricing system.

The [Farm to Foodbank Price List](#) was developed based on a survey conducted by the Montgomery County Food Council and the Office of Agriculture staff on various local farms to streamline and standardize the pricing of local produce, meats, dairy, etc. for sales to local food banks and food assistance providers (Community Food Rescue). The prices generally fall between USDA wholesale and retail prices, so even though farmers could sell at higher prices at farmers markets, the guaranteed revenue from regular sales to Manna and other food providers helps to ensure farmers are adequately compensated for their participation.

2

The County sells produce at transit stop farm stands at USDA wholesale prices.

To keep costs low to consumers and to make purchasing local produce more cost efficient than buying commercial products from grocery stores, the County could utilize [USDA](#)

wholesale prices when selling at market. In combination with the ease at which customers who qualify could use nutrition benefits program dollars, this pricing structure would keep farm stand produce affordable and facilitate access to local produce that otherwise is more expensive. The revenue that the County gains from these sales could then be recycled to support produce purchases for the next month or help fund another component of the project's continuation.

3

The County donates any unsold produce to local food banks and other food assistance providers and food distribution programs.

To reduce food waste and continue supporting existing food assistance programs, the County could partner with local food banks and organizations supporting food distribution to take unsold produce. Doing so would have the dual benefit of reducing the burden on the County of discarding or storing any leftovers and may present an opportunity in the future for the County to decrease existing food assistance funding if donations from the farm stands adequately cover produce needs for food banks and other food distributors.

Product	Purchase Price per lb	Purchase Amount (lb)	Total Cost	Sell Price	Total Revenue	Variance
Broccoli	\$3.50	50	\$175.00	\$2.75	\$137.50	-\$37.50
Tomatoes	\$2.50	50	\$125.00	\$2.33	\$116.50	-\$8.50
Total			\$300.00		\$254.00	-\$46.00

Figure 6: Example Pricing Structure & Costs to County

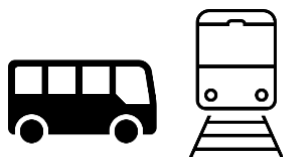
Proposed Budget

In addition to purchasing the produce from farmers, a transit stop farm stand pilot program will require program coordination and operations support, staffing, stand set-up materials, and the purchase of a refrigerated van or truck. Assuming the pilot will be implemented at three transit locations for four hours a week each over 10 weeks, I have compiled the following estimated budget for the first year of the program:

Item (3 stands, 10 weeks)	Description	Cost Range
Program Coordination & Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preliminary project planning, including coordination with farmers, transit authority, and any location managers (eg, Urban District) Ongoing project and budget management 	\$20,000 - \$25,000
Produce Purchasing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on calculated cost of purchasing 60 pounds of apples, cucumbers, radishes, tomatoes, corn, zucchini, strawberries, peaches, eggplants, and cherries using Farm to Foodbank prices (20 pounds per stand) Actual produce sold will depend on produce seasonality and how many types of produce are needed 	\$15,000 - \$20,000
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2-3 staff members at each stand along with project management staff 	\$10,000 - \$15,000
Cold Storage Van/Truck	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refrigerated van or truck to keep produce fresh The cost of purchasing a refrigerated vehicle depends on its size and whether it is purchased new or used 	\$50,000 - \$120,000
Stand Set-Up Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stand materials including tent, tables, produce bins, cash register, etc. Graphic development for promotion and onsite signage 	\$5,000 - \$10,000
Miscellaneous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any miscellaneous costs not already considered in estimate 	\$5,000 - \$10,000
Monitoring & Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing data collection about the state of food insecurity in the County Tracking farm stand attendance, sales and use of benefits during sales, farm participation, etc. Collecting community feedback on a regular basis and making program updates, when possible, to meet resident needs 	\$5,000 - \$15,000
TOTAL		\$110,000 - \$215,000

Identifying Pilot Locations

For monitoring and evaluation purposes, as well as to ensure broad access to its benefits, the transit stop farm stand pilot program should include two or three preliminary locations, including at both metro and bus stops. When identifying potential locations, there are several key factors that can inform whether a transit stop farm stand achieves its desired impact of expanding healthy and affordable produce access to food insecure households using a food justice-oriented approach.



Transit Options

- Bus and Metro access
- Ridership details



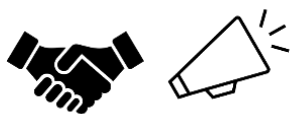
Community Demographics

- Average household income levels
- Food assistance program eligibility
- Racial and ethnic make-up



Existing Food Availability

- Rates of food insecurity
- Proximity to affordable grocery and food stores
- Availability of culturally specific food items



Political Will & Community Engagement

- Local food access advocacy efforts
- District-level interest in organizing a local farmers market

Based on these considerations, I have identified several potential locations for transit stop farm stands throughout the County that could be successful as part of a pilot program.

Germantown MARC Station	Germantown Transit Center	Glenmont Metro Station
Lakeforest Transit Center Gaithersburg	Lockwood Drive & New Hampshire Ave Bus Stop White Oak	Rockville Metro Station
Viers Mill Road & Atlantic Ave Bus Stop Twinbrook	Whalen Commons Poolesville	Wheaton Metro Station

For the purposes of this proposal, I have selected Wheaton as my model location to demonstrate what the pilot could look like in practice, and what logistical elements must be considered when planning for the introduction of the farm stand.

Why Wheaton?

- Wheaton is centrally located on the Red line and has access to approximately 20 bus lines, including both Metrobus and RideOn.
- Demographics
 - Wheaton is one of the more diverse areas of the County, with more than 42% of residents identifying as Hispanic, 16% identifying as Black or African American, and 10% identifying as Asian. White residents make up about 23% of the population (Data USA).
 - As of 2020, approximately 78.4% of Wheaton residents were US citizens, which is lower than the County average (86%) and the national average (93.4%) (Data USA).
 - Of the ~51,200 people who live in Wheaton, nearly 43% are foreign-born compared to the national average of 13.5% (Data USA).
- Despite having several restaurants, including various ethnic food options, a Safeway Market, and a Giant Foods, the Wheaton Urban District has some of the highest rates of food insecurity in the County, with approximately 16.7% of residents identified as food insecure in 2021 (Capital Area Food Bank, 2023a).

- The Wheaton Urban District and community has previously expressed interest in organizing a farmer's market in the region, however, they do not have the financial capital necessary to undertake the project.

Wheaton Transit Stop Farm Stand

The Wheaton Transit Stop Farm Stand would take place in Marian Fryer Town Plaza during the week. Convenience is a central focus of transit stop farm stand programs, making it essential to consider when foot-traffic will be heaviest at identified pilot locations. Based on findings from CFM when organizing the



Figure 7: Marian Fryer Town Plaza

MARTA Markets, most commuters are traveling via transit between 3:00pm and 7:00pm during the week, making those hours ideal for reaching the greatest number of people. That said, it is important that the County work to obtain Montgomery County-specific data as well. At the time of my research, ridership data from the Department of Transportation and WMATA was not made available to me, however, if accessible, this information can inform farm stand hours of operation, especially considering the prevalence of non-traditional work in low-income communities. If ridership data is not available, the County should consult local community organizations and residents to gauge when residents are most likely to be using local transit to ensure the farm stand is as convenient as possible for its target population.

Making the transit stop farm stand a success requires close partnership with local organizations like Wheaton's Urban District who help manage the space in which the farm stand would take place. This support would come in the form of reserving the area in the plaza, the cost of which would be free or negligible through the CUPF Enterprise Fund; coordinating allocated space in the building for storage; assisting with set-up and day-of oversight of the farm stand; and helping to designate parking in the Veteran's Square garage or other local parking areas as needed. The Urban District also noted the possibility of building and installing a semi-permanent structure in the plaza for the

duration of the pilot (eg, from Memorial Day through Labor Day), to facilitate ongoing promotion of the farm stand and reduce the burden of weekly set-up.

Pilot Expansion Considerations & Scale-Up Opportunities

Key Expansion Considerations

The introduction of transit stop farm stands in Montgomery County would enable the County to build mutually beneficial partnerships with local organizations and agencies. Primarily, the County should consider community partners whose interests may align with the goals of the transit stop farm stand. For example, community health clinics may have interest in exploring a “Food is Medicine” approach to public health care, especially as rates of diabetes among Black and Hispanic individuals is nearly double rates among White individuals and highest for adults living below the federal poverty line (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). By partnering with local health care providers and/or organizations like [Community FarmShare](#) who have a demonstrated commitment to addressing health disparities through healthy food access, the County could simultaneously undertake efforts to reduce the high burden of diseases like diabetes while supporting efforts to reduce food insecurity among County residents. Additionally, the transit stop farm stand program also offers the chance for the County to collaborate closely with local community development organizations and agencies. The people working within the communities that transit stop farm stands are seeking to serve are the most likely to truly understand what the needs of their residents are and therefore their perspectives will be vital for the program’s success. Finally, the County must work to engage the DOT and WMATA for communications and promotional strategy. Just as MARTA has done for the MARTA Markets in Atlanta, the DOT and WMATA can promote the farm stands on bus and metro advertising and support the development of marketing materials, amplifying the project to increase public awareness and augment its scope.

The pilot program also offers the chance for the County to approach food access at a more systematic level, by supporting efforts to facilitate benefits enrollment for residents. As of 2021 it was estimated that just 60% of Montgomery County residents eligible for SNAP were participating in the program (Capital Area Food Bank, 2022), representing some of the lowest uptake rates among all Maryland counties and a full 22 percentage points lower than the national participation rate of

82% (USDA-Food and Nutrition Service). According to the Capital Area Food Bank’s 2021 client survey, a combination of lack of awareness about programs, perceived ineligibility for benefits, fear of sharing information with the government, and complex and misaligned eligibility criteria between programs have contributed to the low enrollment in the region (Capital Area Food Bank, 2023b). At the same time, the SNAP enrollment process itself is unduly complicated, and the administrative burdens that accompany enrollment, especially for the County’s many non-Native English speakers, have likely served to dissuade many residents from accessing the benefits they are eligible for and entitled to. The counteract this difficulty, organizations like [Crossroads Community Food Network](#) have incorporated benefits outreach and education into their programming, offering benefits eligibility screening and for those residents determined to be eligible, walking through the remaining steps for enrollment in multiple languages so they can be better prepared to undergo the process. The County can launch similar enrollment support through engagement with community benefits partners and integrating benefits outreach into transit stop farm stand monthly programming.

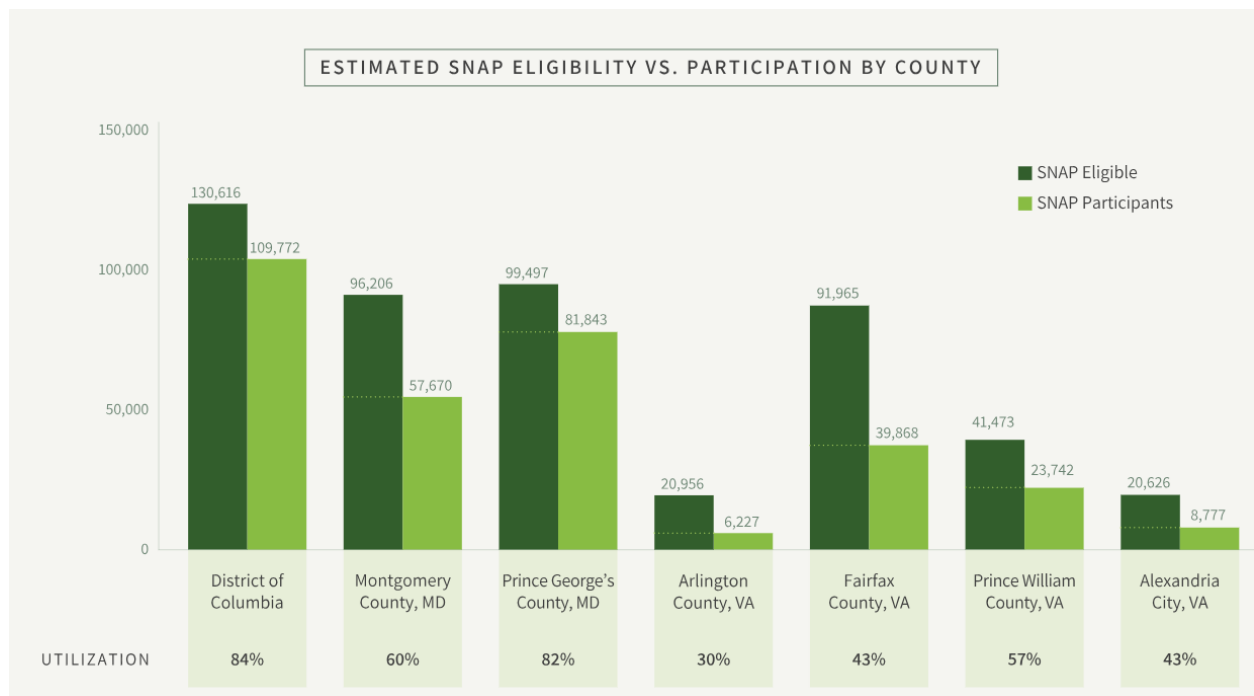


Figure 8: CAFB SNAP Eligibility vs. Participation

Scale-Up Opportunities

The proposed aggregated produce model offers several notable opportunities to scale-up the program should it be successful, the most obvious being the potential to expand the project to new transit stop locations and/or other similarly central and convenient sites throughout the County, such as libraries, community centers, schools, etc. Expansion to new locations will allow the program to be further targeted for specific vulnerable groups or communities. For example, to address high rates of food insecurity within the senior population, a new stand could be set-up in Elizabeth Square in Silver Spring, facilitating access to seniors living in The Leggett, as well as visitors to the Aquatic Center and residents of Elizabeth House. Additionally, as the program grows, the County will have greater access to the many state and federal grants that exist to support food access efforts across the U.S. Applying to federal grants like the Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP) and/or the Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP) as CFM did in Atlanta will help fund program expansion, create opportunities to better support local farming efforts, and reduce the cost burden on the County to maintain the project. Such grants could also support expansion through the purchase of a mobile grocery truck, which would enable the initiative to reach communities beyond the limits of the County's transit system. The ability to apply for such grants, however, requires that the County prioritize ongoing project monitoring and evaluation, collecting data about the state of food insecurity throughout the County, and engaging with community members for feedback on a regular basis.

Conclusion

Achieving food justice in Montgomery County requires a comprehensive approach that does more than just react to the food insecurity faced by County residents through distribution, but rather promotes localization of the entire food system from the inside out, establishing a foundation for broader food system resilience. The introduction of transit stop farm stands using the aggregated produce model has the potential to offer the County a justice-oriented approach to the challenges they continue to experience when working to address food insecurity. By creating a new market access point for County residents to exercise choice over the produce they purchase while expanding their purchasing power to make those choices, transit stop farm stands help residents build autonomy and sovereignty over their food system. Similarly, by utilizing a model that enables all

farmers to contribute to the farm stand produce, the program promotes equity among producers and incentivizes expansion of local growing, especially from BIPOC farmers. Montgomery County has long demonstrated a commitment to addressing food insecurity for its many vulnerable residents, but through the establishment of a transit stop farm stand pilot program in some of the region's low-access food areas, it can further cement itself as a leader in the food justice movement as well.

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