



**Montgomery County Food Council
Environmental Impact Working Group**

Feedback on Climate Action Plan

February 28, 2021

The draft Montgomery County Climate Action Plan (CAP) is an impressive analysis and set of recommendations intended to address the climate emergency that we are facing and to achieve the County's ambitious goal of reducing community-wide greenhouse gas emissions 80% by 2027 and 100% by 2035.

The Montgomery County Food Council's Environmental Impact Working Group (EIWG) has reviewed the actions outlined in the draft CAP, with consideration for the EIWG goals listed below, and in relation to previous recommendations submitted to the County. The recommendations below include the Food Council's suggested additions to the CAP, as well as the areas within the CAP recommendations that the Food Council is best equipped to support.

In the spirit of facilitating ongoing input and supporting the efforts of community organizations, the EIWG seeks to remain involved in the implementation of the CAP, and to identify and engage additional community partners that can play a critical role in relevant plan components. The EIWG also plans to advocate for County government to consider the cross-cutting goals of the CAP as they relate to other improvements of the County's food system (e.g., during master and sector planning processes, to consider opportunities to achieve co-benefits in climate or food system resiliency).

EIWG Goals for 2021

- Reduced food waste in Montgomery County
- Increased regional food waste composting capacity
- Support the establishment of community composting education sites and composting-related educational programs and outreach
- Increased local, sustainable food production and procurement through partnerships with community-based organizations, agricultural producers and food and beverage businesses, and public and private institutions
- Build partnerships and foster collaboration between environmental stakeholders throughout the County

- Support coordination of County planning processes related to food system sustainability, including Thrive 2050, Climate Action Plan, and 10 Year Solid Waste Plan, and support implementation of relevant recommendations within these plans

Racial Equity and Social Justice (P. 15-30)

- **Excerpt from CAP:** “Practice inclusive engagement strategies:
 - Use shared and simple language to make the link between climate risks and other risks more prominent and understandable to the community (e.g., highlight the health impacts and costs of climate change impacts).
 - Ensure information is disseminated in the language(s) of the community
 - Build campaigns and incentives based on people’s cultural practices, such as growing food at home or in their gardens.”
- **EIWG Recommendations**
 - Share information and/or presentations related to the CAP with the Food Council’s Food Security Community Advisory Board, four Working Groups, and Gardening Subcommittee, as well as other community-based organizations and groups, to solicit feedback from diverse perspectives within the County.
 - Collaborate with partners serving hard-to-reach populations or under-resourced populations, including those with higher energy burdens, and residents of the Agricultural Reserve, to collect data and identify service gaps.
 - Leverage the County’s food security network to distribute resources related to reducing food waste, recycling, sustainable at-home practices, and composting with community members.
 - Incorporate recommendations for Years 4 and 5 of the [Montgomery County Food Security Plan](#) into the CAP to align food access priorities with the CAP priorities.
 - Amplify the key community issues and priorities identified in the CAP (e.g., food insecurity and resources for community gardens, Table 2, p.27) by engaging food system partners.
 - Include a recommendation to develop a food system resiliency plan for Montgomery County.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions (P. 68-70)

- **Excerpt from CAP:** “The MoCo Made initiative supports purchasing foods and vegetables from local farms in the County.”
- **EIWG Recommendations:** Address important emissions areas outside of the GHG inventory, related to food procurement and rescue, such as:

- Establish a more comprehensive sustainable purchasing policy for the County that emphasizes:
 - Locally sourced, nutritious, and sustainable food
 - Menu options at County institutions that have lower carbon and water footprints, and promote plant-forward diets
 - Energy efficiency and energy conservation
 - Waste reduction (production and consumption)
 - Reduced packaging and/or use of recycled, recyclable, reusable, and/or compostable materials (serveware, product packaging, shipping materials)
 - Responsible shipping and transportation
- Expand the collection and redistribution of food fit for human consumption, by:
 - Mapping food recovery opportunities and coordinating with food rescue stakeholders to facilitate food redistribution to populations experiencing food insecurity.
 - Expanding food donor education related to proper food separation and storage, in partnership with DEP and Community Food Rescue.
 - Host education sessions, in partnership with the Montgomery County Office of Agriculture, for local farm partners to facilitate the use of the statewide food donation tax credit, and effectively increase the amount of food that local farmers donate to food rescue organizations.

Transportation Actions (P. 115-135)

- **Excerpt from CAP:** “On-road transportation, such as from cars and buses, accounted for 36% of 2018 emissions and offers the greatest opportunity for emissions reduction through electrification.”
- **EIWG Recommendations:**
 - Expand public transportation routes and resources, and enhance traffic management systems.
 - Leverage the relationships of the Better Buses Coalition to advance policies and legislation related to public transportation.
 - Facilitate walking and biking opportunities and make non-vehicle transport more viable over time.
 - Co-benefit: Alleviate transportation barriers that impact food and job access, as recommended in the [Montgomery County Food Security Plan](#) (Recommendation 10.2: Invest in new transportation resources and access programs).

Carbon Sequestration Actions (P. 136-148)

- **Increasing Tree Canopy:**
 - **Excerpt from CAP:** “Retaining a diverse and well-distributed tree canopy provides a wide array of social and economic benefits including reductions in energy use, enhanced business activity, and higher property values. This action promotes economic prosperity by creating job opportunities through development planning and review activities, landscape management, and arboriculture activities.” P. 141
 - **EIWG Recommendation:**
 - Include specific recommendation to implement tree cover along transit routes and stops and along routes to food access points; which increases viability of non-vehicle trips and increases accessibility/resilience of access for vulnerable or aging populations, especially as negative climate impacts like extreme heat days increase.
- **Regenerative Agriculture**
 - **Excerpt from CAP:** “The County should work with local farmers to increase regenerative agriculture practices in the County. Regenerative agriculture practices...increase carbon sequestration on farmland while improving biodiversity, the water cycle, and natural ecosystems.” P. 145
 - **EIWG Recommendations:**
 - Include a recommendation related to expanding County support for Equipment Share Programs through the Montgomery County Office of Agriculture that would expand food production and cultivation opportunities.
 - Include a recommendation for the County to coordinate on-farm composting training/workshops for table crop farm partners, in partnership with the Montgomery County Office of Agriculture and the Food Council, as a next step related to the passage of ZTA 20-04.
 - Include a recommendation for the County to expand the availability of in-County infrastructure such as shared use kitchens, cut and wash facilities and processing equipment for farm produce, meat, and grains, and aggregation and distribution infrastructure, as well as long-term access to affordable farmland and protected land leases, particularly for BIPOC and historically disadvantaged farmers, to address future food access crises.
- **Restore Soil Fertility, Microbial Activity, and Moisture-Holding Capacity**
 - **Excerpt from CAP:** “The County should boost soil fertility, microbial activity, and moisture-holding capacity on all properties throughout the County in order to

restore the earth's carbon, water, and energy cycles. By doing so, the County will maximize carbon sequestration of its soils." (P. 147)

○ **EIWG Recommendations:**

- Support sustainable community and resident gardening opportunities through increasing access to education and resources, and increase the visibility of the Food Council's Gardening Subcommittee efforts.
- Support the production and use of local compost.

Climate Adaptation Actions (P. 149-178)

● **Enhance Green Streetscapes**

- **Excerpt from CAP:** "Green streetscapes provide multiple public health benefits..."
- **EIWG Recommendation:**
 - Update green streetscape design standards (for improving pedestrian and bike safety, cool, permeable pavement, improved tree canopy, etc.) with emphasis on access to food, gardens, etc.

● **Expanded Community Gardens**

- **Excerpt from CAP:** "The County should create and promote more community gardens in urban and suburban areas to reduce farm-to-table distance and to promote food security. By expanding the number and location of community gardens, more County residents would be able to take advantage of increased connection to nature, connectivity with a community of gardeners, fresh and local food, increased food security and affordability, and a potential source of income."
- **EIWG Recommendations:**
 - Identify barriers and solutions to potential additional community garden sites (e.g., water, transportation, land access) and incorporate solutions into the CAP and other Countywide planning processes, so that as facilities are upgraded, solutions can be implemented and ultimately increase the availability of potential community garden space..
 - Establish long term protections for viable land for farming and community garden use, within the Agricultural Reserve, urban settings, and neighborhoods.
 - Incentivize sustainable local food production at all levels, such as in the Agricultural Reserve, on urban farms, via food producing gardens in schools, homes, and communities.
 - Support sustainable community and resident gardening opportunities through increased access to education and resources.
 - Expand urban farming opportunities, through zoning text

amendments if needed, and expand access to urban farm tax credits, to reduce farm-to-table distance and enhance educational opportunities for residents to grow their own food.

- Incorporate food resources into the proposed “resilience hubs”, and leverage the existing network of service consolidation hubs throughout the County.
- Establish community composting education hub sites throughout the County to foster a resilient, distributed network of accessible food scrap composting sites and access to healthy soil practices/amendments.

Public Engagement, Partnerships, and Education Actions (P. 191-206)

- **Excerpt from CAP:** “School gardens can offer a pathway for educators to teach students about topics as varied as climate change, ecology, earth science, food systems, business management, community engagement, nutrition, and history. Gardens can also be a way to teach students about where their food comes from and goes to if it is not eaten.” (P. 203)
- **EIWG Recommendations:**
 - Provide educational workshops and presentations to community members related to equity and social justice within the local environmental sector, and work with DEP to increase Countywide education on intersectional issues around climate and racial equity.
 - Partner with MCPS and existing efforts to increase in-school composting to provide educational resources and opportunities to students related to climate change.
 - Partner with the Food Council’s Gardening Subcommittee to support opportunities to expand and increase access to community and at-home gardening.
 - Engage cross-sector partners in a Climate Action Leadership Committee to continue assessing the implementation of the CAP and various other planning processes, and leverage the existing efforts of County-based environmental organizations and individuals serving as neighborhood champions.
 - Engage a wide variety of resident perspectives in the development of this Leadership Committee, in collaboration with the Montgomery County Chief Equity Officer.

What Can I Do? (P. 209-212)

- **Excerpt from CAP:** “Actions that Everyone Can Take:
 - 1. Transition to a low-carbon diet....2. Buy local...4. Start composting...” (P 212)
- **EIWG Recommendations:**
 - Work with the County’s Office of Procurement to source locally grown food

products that use reusable or recyclable packaging in County buildings and institutions

- Expand usage of sustainable packaging for all foods produced in the County, leveraging partnerships through the Green Business Certification Program and the MoCo Made program.
- Launch a public education and engagement campaign, in collaboration with the Food Council, to educate and encourage plant-based diets.

Zero Waste Task Force Planning and Initiatives (P. 215-216)

- **Excerpt from CAP:** “While solid waste accounted for only 2% of Montgomery County’s GHG emissions in 2018, it is an important area for continued improvement in both emissions reduction and environmental stewardship.”
- **EIWG Recommendations:**
 - Expand recommendations to explicitly encourage source reduction in purchasing and increased food donation/rescue as well as promoting food scrap diversion for food that cannot be donated.
 - Support the development of accessible and distributed food scrap composting infrastructure, to include curbside, community, on-site, on-farm, and commercial composting.
 - Address physical infrastructure needs, including the establishment of in-County food waste composting facilities and expanded recycling processing capacity, which are necessary to make significant progress towards meeting zero waste goals.
 - Establish innovative pilot projects to increase and evaluate opportunities to improve access to food scrap recycling and compost for every County resident.
 - Intentionally integrate Zero Waste principles and strategies into the County’s existing and new resource recovery and management plans.

Remaining Emission Sources and Potential Reduction Strategies

- **Agriculture emissions**
 - **Excerpt from CAP:** “GHG emissions from the agriculture sector comprise approximately a third of a percent (0.35%) of the County’s 2018 GHG inventory. There are a variety of strategies available to reduce nitrous oxide emissions from agriculture...including regulating amounts of nitrogen used on agricultural fields, limiting the months in which fertilizer usage is allowed, and subsidizing cover crops.” (P. 219)

- **EIWG Recommendation:**
 - Conduct a consumption-based emissions inventory for the County.
 - While consumption-based emissions are not currently included in Montgomery County’s inventory, studies in similar jurisdictions have suggested that consumption-based emissions would be 60% higher than the current approach for production-based emissions (p.70).
 - Consumption of food (and embodied carbon in the production, transportation, and waste management of food) accounts for a large share and presents an opportunity for education about the local food system and for personal and institutional action to implement more sustainable purchasing and consumption practices.

Paying for Climate Action Implementation (P. 225)

- **Excerpt from CAP:** “Expanding community gardens is a great win-win-win example, as it reduces emissions from food transportation, addresses food-chain disruptions, enhances food security for low-income residents, and sequesters carbon in the soil, assuming regenerative agricultural practices are used.” (P. 225)
- **EIWG Recommendation:**
 - Expand County investment in annual grants programs such as the Community and Resident Food Production Gardening Grant Program and Farm to Food Bank Capacity Building Grant Program, which encourage localized food production and aid in reaching the goals of the CAP.

Addendum: Existing Best Practices related to Climate Action

Carbon Sequestration:

- **Relevant Best Practices**

- Establish Green Mondays for County foodservice operations, where a plant-based option is the featured dish on Mondays. [Berkeley, CA](#) passed a resolution implementing Green Mondays in 2018.
- Establish a “Default Veg” catering policy for County events whereby attendees “opt in” to receiving a meat-based option but the default option is plant-based. This is popular practice in Europe, [especially in the UK](#).
- The [Good Food Purchasing Program](#) has been adopted by a number of jurisdictions, usually starting with the school district, including in the [District of Columbia](#).
- Work with local businesses to rename plant-forward food options on menus to appeal to a larger number of people.
 - In a test the [Better Buying Lab](#) did in the UK, changing the name of “Meat-free Breakfast” to “Garden Breakfast” and “Field Grown Breakfast” increased sales by 12 and 17 percent respectively.
- Set a target for reducing the County’s GHG emissions from food purchases by 25% by 2030.
 - Paris set a goal of reducing its food consumption-based emissions by 40% by 2030. Los Angeles, London, Tokyo, and 11 other cities around the world [committed](#) in October to aligning their procurement policies with [the planetary diet](#).
- Set a target for reducing the County’s meat purchases by 25% by 2030, including a phase-out of processed meat purchases by 2030, in favor of increasing plant-based sources of protein.
 - New York City set a goal of halving red meat purchases and phasing out processed meat purchases by 2030 in [their Green New Deal](#).

Regenerative Agriculture:

- **Relevant Best Practices**

- The Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Future Harvest CASA, Fair Farms, the Institute for Environmental and Energy Research, and the Institute for Local Self Reliance have established the “Million Acre Challenge” to promote regenerative agriculture practices in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.
 - Opportunity to partner with the Montgomery County Office of Agriculture and the many local farms already enrolled in conservation programs to achieve these goals.

Reducing Food Waste:

- **Relevant Best Practices**
 - [Community Food Rescue](#) matches food from local businesses that would have been thrown away and delivers it to groups helping people experiencing hunger through ChowMatch.
 - [Harvest Share](#) matches food from local home gardens with food assistance providers and community organizations
 - [Compost Crew](#) collects metrics on customers served, amount of food waste diverted from landfills, savings to the County’s budget, and other relevant data to help the County measure the success of this partnership. Compost Crew also already serves thousands of County residents and provides finished compost to customers.
 - The [Green Dining Alliance](#) is a restaurant sustainability certification program in the St Louis region that conducts on-site audits evaluating all areas of operations, including food waste production.
 - Philadelphia’s [Municipal Building Waste Audit Program](#) requires all City-owned facilities to submit an annual waste audit form.

Climate Adaptation:

- **Relevant Best Practices**
 - Baltimore City and the National Resources Defense Council developed the [Baltimore Food Waste Recovery Strategy](#), which includes an effort to educate residents about food waste reduction through the NRDC’s “Save The Food” public service campaign.
 - The “Zero Waste Philly” [Social Media Recycling Toolkit](#) includes pre-written posts, graphics, and suggested hashtags that make it easy for individuals and organizations to share information and success stories about food waste on social media.

