

Regenerative agriculture needs greater attention in the CAP. It is at the nexus of

- Addressing food security
- growing healthier, more nutrient- dense food,
- reducing how much GHG farming emits,
- increasing carbon sequestration in agriculture

The food it produces can help address the root problem of chronic disease. In 2015, 30 million Americans had at least 30 chronic diseases; at current trajectory, that number will rise to 83 million in another decade. And who are the hardest hit? BIPOC. They are victims of food apartheid—an imbedded social and political form of discrimination. Hundreds of thousands of African Americans, Hispanic and poor people are killed every year by an invisible form of racism, a silent and insidious form of injustice. The highest rates of obesity, diabetes, and chronic disease are found in their communities. We can begin to fix that if we can make local, healthy fresh food more available and affordable. BLM has been focused on acute oppression and violence against African Americans—but what about the chronic daily tyranny of food apartheid, which is a key factor in higher infant mortality, shorter lifespans, chronic illness and poor mental health?

If we continue to degrade soil at the rate we have been, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that we will run out of topsoil in 60 years. Regenerative ag not only keeps roots in the ground to reduce erosion, it actually creates soil at significant rates. With the increase in organic matter, and the reduction in tilling, soil absorbs and sequesters more carbon. It also becomes more climate resilient, i.e., better able to withstand the vacillation in precipitation that we can expect as climate in MD changes. For every 1% increase of carbon in the soil, an acre of land can hold an additional 40,000 gallons of water.

Reduction in tillage and reduction/elimination of chemical inputs (hallmarks of regenerative ag) improves soil structure, chemistry and biology. With healthier soil we can grow healthier food. Growing more of our County's food close to home can greatly reduce food transportation miles, reducing GHG emissions from trucks and trains. Reduction in chemical inputs also means less manufacturing of those inputs, hence reduced GHG emissions that are produced by the manufacturing process. The reduction in tillage and chemical use also means lowered usage of GHG-emitting farm equipment.

I recommend funding for an additional position in the County's Office of Agriculture ASAP. The Biden Administration has been unequivocal in stating that agriculture will be a part of addressing climate change. In testimony before Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry, Tom Vilsack, nominee for Secretary of USDA pledged to focus on climate change initiatives and work to address racial inequities in agricultural assistance programs. Key provisions of the Agriculture and Nutrition Title of the FY2021 Budget Reconciliation include: a portion of \$4 billion in total funding to purchase agricultural commodities from farmers and to support their delivery to families through non-profits, emergency feeding organizations, and restaurants and a portion of \$4 billion in total funding to strengthen supply chains and build further resilience in response to the pandemic. That includes providing financial assistance for equipment and supplies for food processors, farmers markets and similar entities to respond to the pandemic and protect

workers and financial assistance in the form of \$100 million and overtime USDA fee relief that will help ensure processing capacity for small meat processing plants that have been at maximum capacity during the pandemic. Dedicated funding is to provide debt relief to black, indigenous, and farmers of color, as well as over \$1 billion to improve land access, address heirs property issues, establish an equity commission, and to create a legal center to provide legal advice and resources to BIPOC farmers.

There are also several carbon banks started by private companies and by philanthropic foundations to pay participating farmers to farm regeneratively to increase the amount of carbon that is sequestered in their soil. That's another potential source of funding. There is/will be a lot of money out there and we need to ensure that Montgomery County farmers get some of it. I recommend funding an additional post at the County's Office of Agriculture so that there's a dedicated position for pursuing this funding and to educate interested farmers. There's also a 2 year old effort in Maryland called the Million Acre Challenge, sponsored by a number of state NGOs including the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and Future Harvest, that provides technical assistance to farmers who want help transitioning to regenerative agriculture. Their goal is to convert a million acres to regenerative ag during this decade. The county should be encouraging more MoCo farmers to get involved.

The CAP needs to reflect a better understanding of regenerative agriculture and of farming and of how the Ag Reserve functions. One of the most important practices in regenerative agriculture is not even mentioned; managed rotational grazing of livestock. This builds a permaculture system that improves soil, enhances carbon sequestration and properly done, can ensure that the carbon is disseminated far down in the soil profile to be locked there for extended time periods—much the way the American prairie did. It needs to be included. The Montgomery County Green Bank is suggested to develop incentive financing and revolving loan funds. The Green Bank's mission is focused strictly on energy, and to give regenerative agriculture sufficient weight, that would need to be revised. In the next paragraph, it's suggested that the County will particularly need to incentivize the rebuilding of healthy soils in the Ag Reserve using transferable development rights (TDRs). As that program is currently set up, there's no way it can be used to incentivize healthy soils. Furthermore, even if were revised, it would only affect properties that have not yet sold their TDRs, which would miss a significant chunk of farmland in the Reserve.

In a county in which 60% of land being farmed has been leased to farmers, to truly effect large scale transition to regenerative agriculture, the County needs to help farmers and/or landowners to obtain grant funds, not just loans. Hence my suggestion above that there be a new position in Office of Ag with a dedicated staffer to work on obtaining those funds and/or guiding farmers to obtain them.

There's too much focus on silvopasture in the Regenerative Agriculture section. It's important, but there's no reason to go into technical issues in an example that relates how it can be detrimental to farming, especially as there are solutions. Please use that space to provide more information on the co-benefits of regenerative agriculture, including ecosystem services like enhanced biodiversity and better runoff control.

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