

Montgomery County Office of Food Systems Resilience

Fall 2023 Recap Newsletter

The Montgomery County Office of Food Systems Resilience (OFSR) wishes our partners and neighbors a happy holiday season; there are many exciting food system initiatives for us to celebrate! The OFSR was officially launched in February 2023 with the hiring of our Executive Director, Heather Bruskin. Two additional team members, Juan Cruz (Performance Management and Data Analyst) and Catherine Nardi (Program Manager) started in August. The Office is tasked with developing and implementing interagency budgetary, regulatory, and operational strategies to build a more equitable, efficient, resilient, and sustainable food system in Montgomery County. The vision of the OFSR is to create a community where all Montgomery County residents can obtain healthy, nutritious, and culturally appropriate foods without fear of financial stress, and to cultivate a local food system that is able to adapt to and recover from disruptions.



Since its inception, the OFSR has established a [Strategic Plan](#) that outlines a variety of interconnected policy, investment, collaboration, and data initiatives that will lay the foundation for systemic shifts in our local food system.

To date, our efforts to accomplish the goals within our Strategic Plan have included:

- Managing the FY23 Resident and Community Gardening Grant program, funding 10 community organizations that will reach more than 2,000 residents with access to food and gardening education opportunities
- Engaging in six County Council work sessions to guide policymaking related to food system priorities
- Conducting a survey of Food Assistance Providers in Montgomery County, collecting 83 total responses that will inform County-led initiatives to connect more residents to food resources and build capacity within the non-profit sector
- Leading two “Interagency Food System Coordination” convenings to foster connectivity among more than 65 colleagues representing 26 total government agencies and offices, and to leverage the diverse perspectives and insights of these partners to add value to OFSR-led food system initiatives
- Engaging with more than 50 community-based organizations and partners to consider, develop, and implement resident-driven, innovative, and equitable strategies related to food access and security, climate change adaptation and mitigation, economic opportunity, and emergency preparedness

Some additional OFSR highlights from this past fall:

Visit to HarvestShare Garden: HarvestShare is an entirely volunteer-led organization that brings together residential and community food gardeners in Montgomery County around a shared goal of growing extra produce in their gardens for donation to local food pantries. HarvestShare also supports several grow-to-donate gardens where all produce is given to food insecure families in our County; including a plot in Potomac. (photo)



Tour of 4P Foods in Warrenton, Virginia: 4P Foods has three main areas of business: delivering weekly groceries direct from farmers to residents in the DMV region, providing locally farmed, regenerative food to businesses, and cultivating institutional partnerships to connect locally grown food with schools. The OFSR team visited the 4P warehouse in Warrenton, Virginia alongside Maryland Delegate Lorig Charkoudian, County Council Vice President Friedson, and representatives from the Montgomery County Revenue Authority and County Executive's Office to learn more about how this aggregation and distribution facility can serve as a model for Montgomery County.



[The Strategic Plan to End Childhood Hunger](#) was shared to the public in September 2023 through the leadership of the County Executive, Councilmember Gabe Albornoz, the Department of Health and Human Services, OFSR, Montgomery County Public Schools, and the Montgomery County Food Council. This Plan outlines 14 strategies, including novel approaches and expansions to existing programs, that are geared towards supporting the 396,000 Montgomery County households that are at risk of experiencing food insecurity. Several recommendations within the plan have already been activated, including expanding the Community Eligibility Provision and Maryland Meals for Achievement programs in 58 and 117 schools, respectively. The OFSR is continuing to partner with government agencies and community-based organizations to explore and implement additional strategies within the Plan, such as a Food is Medicine pilot program and expanding retail food access for residents experiencing food insecurity.

Tour of the UDC Agrivoltaics Site and A. Mario Loiderman MS Reach Hub: Earlier this fall, the OFSR had the opportunity to join representatives from the Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection, Montgomery County Public Schools, and the Office of the County Executive to tour two sites that serve as regional best practices informing innovation in our local food system: the agrivoltaics demonstration site at Firebird Farm, managed by the University of the District of Columbia (UDC), and the REACH Hub at A. Mario Loiderman Middle School. UDC has constructed an agricultural production system for research at Firebird Farm, consisting of solar photovoltaic canopy and rainwater harvesting technology. The climate impacts of this novel system are being monitored to better inform local urban farmers, and the project is intended to guide recommendations for optimal solar angles that benefit food production and energy harvesting.

The first *Resilience, Education, Action, Climate, and Habitat* (REACH) Hub in MCPS is in development at A. Mario Loiderman Middle School, and is part of an MCPS effort to build climate resiliency, and expand learning and teaching opportunities for students and teachers at school sites. The Hub at Loiderman MS will include about an acre of urban farming and outdoor classrooms, and will offer programming for students, families, and the community such as farmers' market, movie nights, and training. The REACH hub is expected to impact approximately 10,000 students and community members each year.



Our next newsletter will be shared early in 2024.

Stay in touch! Contact us at ofsr@montgomerycountymd.gov with questions or feedback.