

FOOD SECURITY IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY

In the fall of 2016, the Montgomery County Council authorized (Bill 19-16), the development of a 5-year plan for a food secure county. The ensuing strategic plan, “A Food Secure Montgomery: What we know now and what we can do,” was delivered by the County Executive to the County Council in January 2017. The Plan describes a food secure community as one “in which all people at all times have access to safe, sufficient, nutritious food, with dignity.” In 2016, nearly 13.9% of the county’s children and 7% of county residents were estimated to be food insecure. The Food Security Plan’s goal is to reduce food insecurity by at least 10% each year.

STRATEGIC PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Bill 19-16 mandated that the many organizations inside and outside Montgomery County government that are part of the county food system be consulted and that relevant demographic and geographic information on poverty and food insecurity be collected. The County Executive Office team charged with drafting the Food Security Plan gathered these data from Feeding America (<http://www.feedingamerica.org>), from the Census Bureau, especially the American Community Survey (<http://www.census.gov/programs=surveys/acs/guidance/comparing-acs-data.html>), from the Montgomery County Food Council, county reports, state reports and directly from residents through immigrant advisory groups and listening sessions. These data provided a picture of specific groups of county residents who are at risk, their barriers to food security and where these residents are located in the county.

Findings

The Food Security Plan identifies five general categories of food insecure residents: children, seniors, people with disabilities, people living below the Self-Sufficiency Standard (SSS) and foreign-born residents. More specific groups are identified within these broad categories. The Maryland Self-Sufficiency Standard is determined by how much income families of various sizes and compositions need to make ends meet without public or private assistance in each county in Maryland, at a minimally adequate level. The SSS is currently estimated at \$91,252 for a family of four in Montgomery County.

Children There are about 50,000 children living in poor families in Montgomery County: 20,000 children live below the federal poverty level and 30,000 more live in low-income families. To reduce food insecurity for these children, the federal government provides Free and Reduced-priced Meals (FARMs) for breakfast, lunch and snacks. More than 55,000 students in Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) are in households that qualify. Even with food assistance programs like FARMs, barriers such as insufficient awareness of programs and a lack of transportation to meal sites create food insecurity. And many of the children who participate in FARMs during the school week are still food-insecure on weekends as well as during summer vacations from school. Children living with a single or unmarried parent can be particularly at risk; single heads of household are frequently females whose median income was \$38,228 in 2015. The Plan states “children who are food insecure are at greater risk for long-term poor health consequences, behavioral and social difficulties and poor school performance”

Seniors People over 60 years of age with a low-income who are aging in place are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity. Montgomery County’s population is steadily aging; the 2015 Montgomery County Summit on Aging Report projects the number of residents age 65 or older to more than double between 2010 and 2040. Currently 20,000-30,000 seniors are identified as aging in place without enough money to meet basic needs at a minimally adequate level (the Self-Sufficiency Standard). With 25% of county seniors living alone and in isolation and 14% without a vehicle, seniors aging in place may not know about or be able to access food assistance programs. Public transportation to food sources is often a challenge: bus routes may be long and inconvenient or may not go to the stores, markets or food banks. Low-income seniors who have medical dietary restrictions (approximately 15,000-25,000) are especially at risk for food insecurity. Because medical costs absorb a large part of the monetary resources of these seniors, limited funds are available for healthy food. Finally, the report identifies seniors with Limited English

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Proficiency (LEP) who account for about 10% of the county's population as vulnerable to food insecurity. Some faith and community-based organizations serve LEP seniors, as do county agencies such as the Department of Health and Human Service's Senior Nutrition Program and the Montgomery Coalition for Adult English Literacy, but these services are not adequate to fill the need identified by the Plan.

People with Disabilities In 2015, about 82,497 people in Montgomery County had some form of disability such as mobility impairments, psychiatric and developmental disabilities and visual or hearing impairments. Approximately 20,000-30,000 of this cohort live beneath the Self-Sufficiency Standard. For many people with a disability, access to a reliable source of sufficient nutritious food is frequently challenged by shortages in a budget compromised by medical expenses, with limitations on transportation to food sources and with difficulties in shopping for food in a store not designed to accommodate people with disabilities. Communication may also be a barrier, especially for those with LEP, those who have difficulty fully communicating and for those who are deaf, non-verbal or hard of hearing.

Other Residents Below Self-Sufficiency Standard Some individuals and families in Montgomery County earn too much money to qualify for federal food assistance but not enough money to afford the basic necessities of daily life—to be self-sufficient. Because of the high cost of living, including housing costs, the Self-Sufficiency Standard for Montgomery County for a family of four is \$91,252. Income eligibility for federal food assistance programs is \$44,995 (WIC) and \$31,590 (SNAP). Those who fall into the gap between the federal poverty levels and the Self-Sufficiency Standard are often referred to as the working poor. Many of these working poor are also plagued by limited access to transportation; an estimated 7.5% of Montgomery County households do not have access to a vehicle. At listening sessions held to collect data about food insecurity, county residents shared reasons why they fail to enroll in assistance programs for which they are eligible: pride which prevented them from accepting assistance, resistance to government assistance, social stigmas, benefits too low to warrant the investment of time needed to apply and an onerous application process. The county is attempting to calculate how many persons eligible to receive assistance are not enrolled in those programs.

Foreign-born Residents The foreign-born population in Montgomery County in 2014 was 325,927 people, an increase of 11% from 2010. During this same time period, 81,987 foreign-born people lived below the 200% poverty line—an increase of 23% from 2010. National estimates put the rates of food insecurity for this population between 30% and 60%. In addition to poverty, other factors that influence food security among the foreign-born include immigration status, English proficiency and cultural food requirements. County residents of undocumented immigration status, who number between 80,000 and 90,000 and of whom 30,000 to 40,000 are under the 200% poverty level, are not eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). SNAP and TANF are some of the strongest programs to alleviate food insecurity. Sometimes even eligible immigrants, because of misconceptions of deportation or danger to relatives in their homes, do not apply to these programs. Another barrier to food security for foreign-born residents is limited proficiency in English; approximately 6% (60,000) of the county's population is LEP. If a LEP resident does not live in a community where his or her native language is commonly spoken, that person is especially disadvantaged. Seniors of East Asian descent were identified as particularly vulnerable, lacking a community of native Asian and Pacific Island language speakers who could help access food assistance. Finally, foreign-born residents who access food assistance programs may encounter few culturally appropriate foods at a food bank, a community or faith-based organization or even at large food assistance providers like the Capital Area Food Bank or Manna.

FEDERAL AND STATE FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Because food insecurity is often due to poverty, any income support can improve food security for a low-income household by increasing household purchasing power. The method of delivering federal and state assistance varies from cash benefits to food commodities offered directly to recipients to nutrition education. The most widely-utilized programs are described below.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP is a federal aid program administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and implemented through states to increase the food purchasing power of low-income households. SNAP is the current name for the former U.S. Food Stamp program. In Maryland, SNAP is called the Food Supplement Program (FSP) and operates through the

Department of Human Services (MDHS). Under SNAP (a.k.a. FSP), the state deposits money directly onto debit cards which recipients use to buy certain foods at grocery stores, other food retailers and some farmers' markets. These farmers' markets are identified on the list of markets in the Montgomery County Food Assistance Resource Directory and are limited by the availability of card processing equipment. The debit cards may be called Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards or, in Maryland, Independence Cards.

Under SNAP, states screen applicants for eligibility based on a household's size, income and expenses. To be eligible for SNAP, a household's gross income must be at or below 130% of the federal poverty threshold; that threshold is not adjusted for regional cost of living, which gives residents in higher-cost areas like Montgomery County relatively less purchasing power. A low-income person is usually ineligible for SNAP if an institution provides most of their meals. SNAP benefits for "able bodied adults without dependents" are limited to three months in a three year period unless the individual meets certain criteria (exemptions include pregnancy, homelessness, enrollment in school or vocational training, participation in combination of volunteering, work search activities, employment and/or schooling for a total of at least 20 hours per week and participating in an approved work activity). Recent benefit changes for seniors increased the minimum benefit from \$16 to \$30 per month and simplified their enrollment process. Undocumented non-citizens are ineligible for SNAP, but lawfully present non-citizens may be eligible.

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

WIC is a federal aid program run by USDA through state grants for low-income pregnant women, new mothers, breastfeeding women and children under age five who are at nutritional risk. WIC provides for supplemental food, infant formula, nutrition education, some healthcare and social services and breastfeeding support. In Montgomery County, WIC is administered by the non-profit Community Clinic, Inc (CCI) with five centers: Gaithersburg, Germantown, Langley/Takoma Park, Rockville and Wheaton.

WIC eligibility is based on category and family income. Unlike SNAP/FSP, citizenship and immigration documentation is not considered for eligibility. According to the Economic Research Service, about half of all infants, a quarter of all children ages 1-4 and a third of all pregnant women in the U.S. participate in WIC. Unlike SNAP, in which many eligible people do not participate, it is believed that almost all of those eligible for WIC are enrolled.

Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP)

FMNP is a federal aid program for WIC recipients (FMNP-WIC) and low-income seniors (SFMNP). FMNP is run by USDA through state grants. Recipients may use their FMNP benefits to buy certain foods from qualifying farmers, farmers' markets or roadside stands which are then reimbursed by the state. Federal funding covers all the food costs of FMNP and 70% of administrative costs; states must contribute at least 30% of their FMNP administrative costs. WIC participants in FMNP may be issued FMNP benefits on top of their WIC benefits. SFMNP is run by the Maryland State Department of Aging (MDoA) and during the market season eligible seniors get six checks worth \$5 each for a total of \$30 which can be used at qualifying farmers' markets.

Free and Reduce-priced Meals (FARMs)

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a federally-assisted meal program run by USDA operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. USDA provides schools with USDA-purchased food that is domestic and largely surplus. NSLP is the second largest food and nutrition assistance program in the U.S. (SNAP is the largest). In 2016, NSLP provided low-cost or free lunches to over 30 million children a day in over 100,000 schools and residential childcare settings. Any student in a participating school may buy an NSLP lunch, but only students in households with incomes under 185% of the poverty threshold may receive a free or reduced-price lunch. Approximately 35% of Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. In FY15 MCPS reported \$40.5 million in federal reimbursement for the FARMs program. High schools with over 45% FARMs recipients in 2015 are Watkins Mill, Northwood, John F. Kennedy and Wheaton.

The School Breakfast Program provides federal cash assistance from USDA to states to run nonprofit breakfast programs in schools and residential childcare institutions. State education agencies administer the program at the state

level; local school authorities operate it in schools. In Montgomery County 67% of low-income students who participated in the school lunch program also participated in school breakfast.

Schools that have a FARMs population of 50% or more or have a feeder school with 50% or more FARMs-eligible students offer after-school snacks and/or suppers. MCPS began offering suppers in 2010, serving 46,050 meals that year and 299,860 in 2015.

Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) provides nutritious meals to low-income children when school is not in session. The Maryland SFSP reimburses organizations for meals and snacks served to children in areas or programs where over half of the children qualify for free or reduced-price meals under NSLP. SFSP usually reimburses for up to two meals or snacks per child per day. Migrant programs and camps may be reimbursed for up to three meals per child per day

Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNPE)

EFNPE programs are free and provided by community nutrition educators through the University of Maryland Extension Service. The EFNEP program works with many partners in the community who recruit participants for lessons in English and Spanish with a goal of improving diet. Topics range from major food groups, food resource management and food safety to physical education, food label reading and making healthy choices. The educators report that obesity is a big problem and the literacy level is low, but that participants in the programs are eager to learn.

Food Supplement Nutrition Education (FSNE)

University of Maryland Extension FSNE Nutrition Educators partner with Title I schools, after-school programs, farmers' markets and Manna Food Center in Montgomery County to introduce youth (grades pre-K to 12) and adults to healthy options, while also providing them with the skills and knowledge needed to make healthy choices about food and physical activity. FSNE's nutrition education curricula cover a wide range of topics from "farm to table", Smart Shopping Strategies and the importance of exercise. Youth have the opportunity to try fresh foods and produce in a positive environment. During the growing season, demonstrations at Farmers' Markets identify vegetables by name and show how to prepare dishes using them. Grocery store tours show how to read labels, make price comparisons and identify healthful foods. The University of Maryland Extension Master Gardner program is also a partner working closely with FSNE and youth to create school gardens to teach sustainable food gardening practices and encourage the enjoyment of fresh locally grown produce.

MAJOR LOCAL FACILITATORS

The federal food assistance programs depend on money and food products being distributed from the federal to the state to the local community. In 2016, the Montgomery County Office of Management and Budget identified 13 programs targeted to hunger relief supported by \$6.2 million in county, state and federal funds. The Montgomery County Food Council has identified over 100 unique non-government county-based organizations providing food assistance.

Montgomery County Food Council

The Montgomery County Food Council is an independent council formed and led by individual community members and representatives of local businesses, government, non-profit organizations and educational institutions that broadly represent the county's food system. The development of the Food Council was supported by the County Council and County Executive and announced in October, 2011 with a purpose to meet the food-related educational and nutritional needs of county residents and also to have a direct impact on agricultural jobs in the county. The council works to address the broad range of issues surrounding food and food sourcing in our county with working groups engaged in activity relating to environmental impact, the food economy, food literacy and food recovery and access.

The Food Council has recently published a Montgomery County Food Assistance Resource Directory with a map showing the location of food assistance types available including Choice Pantry/Discount Grocery/Mobile Markets, Meal Service, prepacked boxes, multiple services, SNAP/WIC enrollment sites and locations of senior congregate meals. The directory includes the name, location, contact information, hours of service, type of assistance,

accessibility (fees, appointments, documentation, limitations) and special features (language, benefit counseling, delivery, etc.) for 77 organizations.

Capital Area Food Bank

The Capital Area Food Bank (CAFB) is the largest organization in the Washington metro area working to solve hunger and its companion problems. CAFB is a member of Feeding America from which it obtains food; it also accepts donations from individuals and other organizations. In Maryland, The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), a partnership between USDA, farmers and states, is administered by the Department of Human Services (MDHS). USDA ships the commodity foods to states and state agencies select local organizations (usually food banks) to receive, store and distribute TEFAP food. CAFB receives and distributes TEFAP food for Montgomery County and also provides Montgomery County food assistance providers with food from other sources. Large and small food providers in the county place regular orders with CAFB and send their trucks to pick up that food. CAFB has recently committed to a focus on more nutritious food and is consequently turning down excess contributions of bread and sweet baked goods.

Manna Food Center

Manna Food Center's mission is to eliminate hunger in Montgomery County. The Center is providing food to 32,000 county residents each year and helping to distribute food to soup kitchens, food pantries and emergency shelters county-wide. Of the food they distribute, about 37% comes from grocery store rescue, 18% from food drives, 12% from Capital Area Food Bank and the rest from purchases, TEFAP, farm-to-food bank and individual and commercial donations. Eligible individuals can call Manna's main office to place an order for a box of food and schedule where (at any one of six distribution sites or 13 community drop-off locations, with varying hours of operation) they would like to pick it up. To be eligible, an applicant must live in Montgomery County and have an income beneath the Self-Sufficiency Standard; the application asks for the applicant's name and address and for information about ethnicity, primary language, family size, income from a variety of sources and method for reaching a distribution site. Custom food boxes are available for those with diabetic or other medical needs including allergies (e.g. gluten free) and for vegetarians and those with religious/cultural restrictions. Manna is in the process of "transitioning our distribution sites as much as possible to choice pantries where people can take the foods that match their particular preferences and needs".

FOOD SECURITY 5-YEAR PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

The Plan provides a set of strategies with recommendations that cover a 5-year period and are targeted to five categories of residents experiencing food insecurity: children, seniors, people with disabilities, foreign-born residents and people living below the Self-Sufficiency Standard. The strategies by period are:

- Year One: Implement mechanisms to gather more and better data; establish policies that will bring existing food assistance programs into better alignment; deploy near-term tactical solutions to increase participation in existing programs; strengthen the food assistance network through enhanced communication.
- Year Two-Three: Build capacity in high-need areas through strategic investments in infrastructure; deploy new programs via partnerships with retailers and the healthcare system; reduce transportation-related barriers to food access.
- Year Four-Five: Transition the system from one that simply feeds people to one that empowers them through food literacy, workforce and economic development programs; develop plans for a food system that is more resilient.

Year One Recommendations and Progress

On March 12, 2018, approximately one year after the rollout of the Food Security Plan, representatives of the Montgomery County Food Council, the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services and CountyStat presented the Year One Update of the Food Security Plan to the County Council Health and Human Services Committee. A summary of the report on the status of Year One recommendation follows.

Standardize Data Collection and Reporting One of the primary challenges to creating the Food Security Plan was the lack of consistent, quality data at a local level. During the first year of the Plan's implementation (2017), the

Montgomery County Food Council created a Data Standardization Survey to collect information about data that is currently captured by the county's food assistance providers related to their food recipients and the programs they offer. The survey's results and the data collected during 2017 were shared at meetings of relevant providers. The survey results combined with feedback from providers will be used to draft a recommended list of standardized data sets. Food assistance providers' collection of standardized data will allow for a more accurate understanding of the scope of food assistance resources, a means for more effectively measuring the impact of the services provided and a better insight into food insecurity in the county. Sixty-nine percent of county-funded organizations and 25 other organizations responded to the survey as of January 2018. Although the Food Security Plan recommended that data collection standards be included as a part of the county grant application criteria for FY19, that recommendation has not been implemented.

Analyze Transportation In response to the Food Security Plan's finding that county residents in areas with limited transit options have difficulty getting to grocery stores, food pantries or other food resources without a vehicle, a Year One recommendation asks that MCDOT, in partnership with CountyStat (the performance management and data analytics team), analyze the routes of the RideOn system in relation to food access. During Year One MCDOT provided the transportation analysis data in a raw data format to CountyStat for analysis and recommendations. The five areas of focus for the CountyStat analysis are: resident access to food assistance sites; resident access to food retail sites and farmers' markets; the distribution of food assistance and recovered food; transit routes during daytime, evenings, weekend and rush hour; and transfer times and costs.

Identify High Priority Zones With the collaboration of the Food Council, Manna Food Center, the Capital Area Food Bank and the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, CountyStat has created a new online platform dedicated to quantifying, to the most accurate degree possible, the level and incidence of food insecurity in the county. This platform, called FoodStat, will be launched to the public on May 1, 2018. FoodStat will focus on vulnerable populations, benefits program participation, location data, Food Assistance Resource Directory data and relevant demographic data. FoodStat's data will be available to the public; a private user dashboard option will also be available for county agencies to conduct research. At this point, a list of over 80 datasets has been submitted to CountyStat to begin collection and mapping of the data.

Create, Support and Encourage Information Sharing Resources The Montgomery County Food Council created a Food Assistance Resource Directory, a hard copy brochure described on page four, containing a list of food assistance providers in Montgomery County. The brochure has been distributed to all food assistance providers. The Food Council is exploring distribution in hospitals, clinics, libraries, WorkSource Montgomery locations, community centers, county service centers, Montgomery County Public Schools and Montgomery College and the Universities at Shady Grove. The directory is available on the Food Council's website: <https://mocofoodcouncil.org/foodassistance/>. The Food Literacy Working Group of the Food Council added its efforts to promote food security information sharing; it created phase one of a Food Literacy Assessment to assess all food education resources including culinary skills, gardening, food safety and nutrition classes. The assessment will identify service gaps and necessary infrastructure, training and other resources in order to attract investment and support to enhance existing and create new food education programs. Phase one involved key informant interviews with five larger food education providers in Montgomery County. Phases two and three of the assessment will include roundtable discussions with stakeholder groups and residents.

Support Provider-to-Provider Training and Capacity Building The Food Council created a Training, Connectivity and Resources Survey in 2017 to collect information from food assistance providers on their training needs, potential for increasing capacity (or barriers to doing so), the availability of culturally appropriate foods and the usefulness and format of provider-to-provider connectivity and information sharing platform. Several conclusions reported in the survey were: eight out of 25 providers felt they could increase their capacity and their biggest challenges were data collection, limitations of space and facilities, language barriers with clients, consistent staff/volunteer support, reliable availability of food to distribute and donor concerns about liability. The survey indicated that training is currently offered in food safety and handling and nutritional content and education. Training is needed in data collection, volunteer management, advocacy/outreach and customer service.

Leverage Existing Programs During the first year of implementation, attempts to expand participation in existing programs met some success with additional appropriations in the FY18 county budget. \$200,000 was included to expand the Senior Nutrition Program in DHHS and \$150,000 to expand the Food, Fun and Fitness program of the County Recreation Department. In addition, the FY18 budget included \$300,000 to expand the weekend bag program, a program to extend food availability to FARMs-eligible students. Other programs that were expanded to serve more students were Kids in Need Distribution (KIND) by the Manna Food Center and Women Who Care Ministries (WWCM). Private funding to expand programs is in progress through the work of the Transforming Communities Initiative and a Business Leaders Fighting Hunger coalition.

Increase Benefits Application Outreach A significant number of county residents eligible for federal and/or local food benefits are not enrolled in food assistance programs or do not access community food resources. The Food Recovery and Access Workgroup of the Montgomery County Food Council is working on a Train-the Trainer Model and a Benefits Application Assistance Toolkit to increase participation in food resources programs for those eligible to participate.

Assess the Need for Culturally Appropriate Food in Assistance Programs Identifying the degree to which county residents are food insecure because of a lack of culturally appropriate and/or faith-based appropriate foods from food providers is being undertaken through a needs assessment by a student team at American University. Results are expected to be reported this spring.

Explore New Datasets To continue to define food insecurity subpopulations and issues, the Food Council has engaged the Community Action Agency to discuss building food insecurity screenings and referrals into all CAA partner programs and initiatives. A listening session on food insecurity for children under age 5 is being planned for April, 2018 at the TESS Community Services Center to assess the magnitude of the issue, the demographics and the location in which it is concentrated and barriers faced by the families of such children. Surveys are also being conducted to collect data about food insecurity among college students and residents with mental health issues.

Strategies and Recommendations for Years 2-3

The Food Council and its partners note that significant progress has been made in meeting their goals in Year 1; successful Year 1 strategies and solutions will be ongoing while Years 2-3 recommendations are implemented. The broad Year 2-3 recommendations laid out in the Food Security Plan are listed here with one illustrative example for each.

Build Capacity in Existing Organizations Create the opportunity for large food providers like Capital Area Food Bank and Manna to mentor small faith-based organizations that have food assistance programs.

Establish New Programs in Areas of Greatest Need Expand the Senior Nutrition Program to 5 days a week, 12 months a year.

Engage Community Partners and the Private Sector Healthcare providers can be effective partners in reducing food insecurity if providers are trained in identifying signs of food insecurity and have the information needed to refer patients to food assistance programs and providers.

Communications FoodStat, the new online platform for assessing and informing the food service community about food security, can be used to provide enhanced communication among food providers and between a food insecure resident and the location and resources of a food provider.

Increase Retail Food Access For county residents who have limited food retail options, opportunities need to be explored to attract new retailers and to incentivize stores to stock healthy food items.

Adjust and Increase Transportation Resources Based on the results of the Year 1 transportation survey and data analysis, invest in transportation resources for food providers to get food to the needy and in transportation vouchers for people with limited access to food providers.

Maximize Participation in Benefits Programs Increasing SNAP and WIC authorized locations (e.g. through mobile and online vendors) would aid beneficiaries of these programs to use their benefits in more places and with greater convenience.

Expand Food Production Opportunities Increase home and community gardens by replicating a wide variety of successful gardening programs that exist in the county.

Considerations for Years 4-5

In Years 4-5, the Food Council intends to move the Food Security Plan and the system it has created from one that simply feeds people to one that empowers them through food literacy and through workforce and economic development. The following **Considerations** help structure this goal.

Expand Food Literacy Capacity

- Promote food preservation as a tool for increasing access to local, nutritious food.
- Increase available nutrition and culinary skills educational programs in communities
- Incorporate food literacy more extensively in the K-12 curriculum
- Increase garden capacity

Create a Disaster/Emergency Preparedness Plan for Food Security Develop distribution and communications strategy for food access in the event of an unexpected event.

Encourage Workforce and Economic Development County plans and actions to secure a reliable food source for all residents have the potential of new work opportunities. Workforce training programs should consider including a grocer career pathway. The Economic Development Corporation and WorkSource Montgomery could establish a “Start Up Grocer” program that incentivizes opening grocery stores in underserved areas or in areas in need of ethnic markets.

The Montgomery County Food Security Plan’s strategies and solutions are intended to evolve as FoodStat collects new data and the many stakeholders working for a food-secure Montgomery County interpret and apply these data.

Consensus Question

LWVUS Current Position: To support most of the recommendations and strategies of the Food Security Plan, we can rely on the LWVUS position on meeting basic human needs, which includes: "The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that one of the goals of social policy... should be to promote self-sufficiency for individuals and families, and that the most effective social programs are those designed to prevent or reduce poverty. Persons who are unable to work, whose earnings are inadequate, or for whom jobs are not available have the right to an income and/or services sufficient to meet their basic needs for food, shelter and access to health care."

Consensus Question: The following consensus question is focused on some specific obstacles to food security that the LWVUS position does not speak to. In addition to assistance in meeting food needs, should the county support programs to address food insecurity by facilitating:

1. enrollment in SNAP
2. means to cope with LEP (limited English proficiency)
3. public transportation to food sources
4. nutrition education
5. other

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