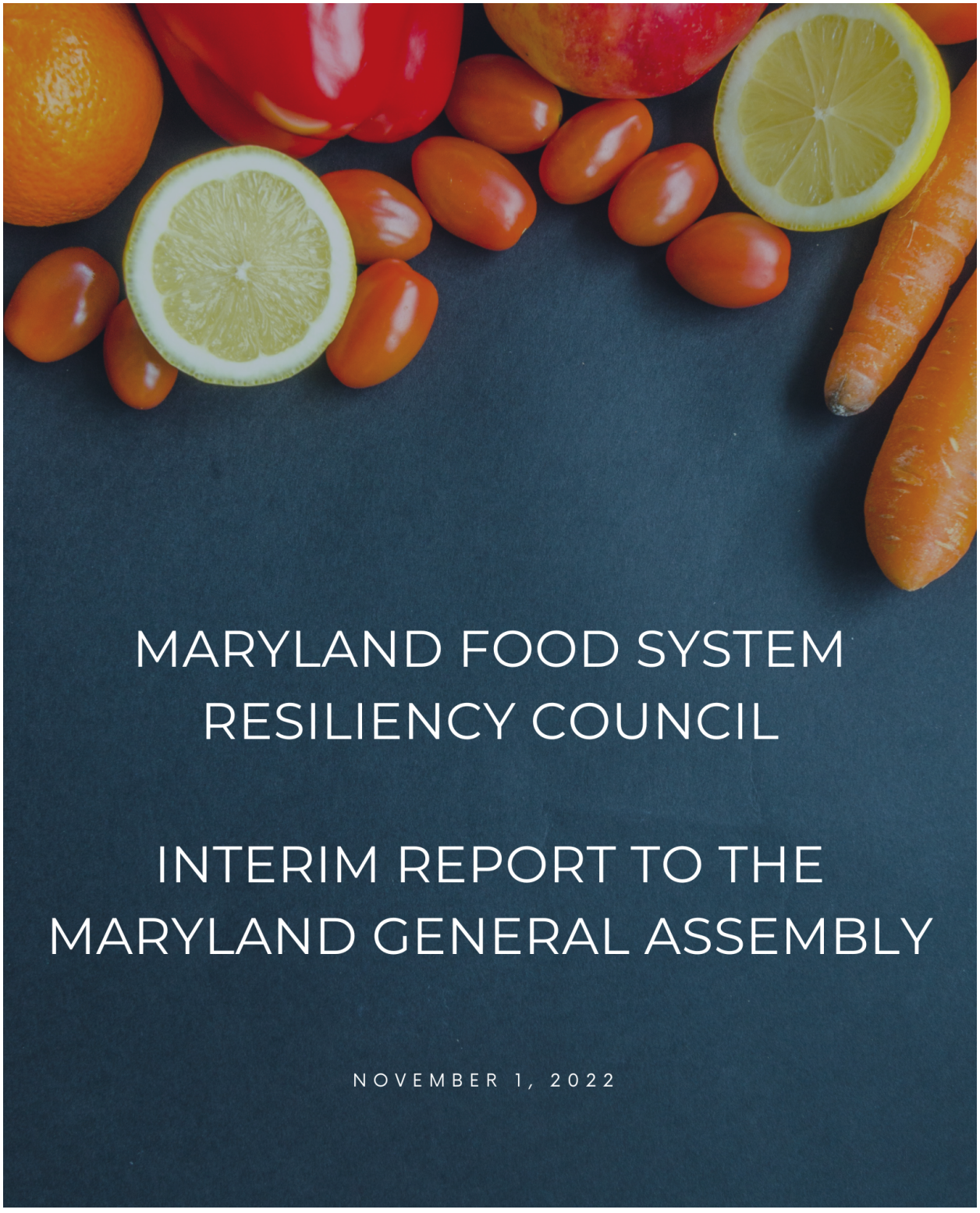

MARYLAND FOOD SYSTEM RESILIENCY COUNCIL

INTERIM REPORT TO THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

NOVEMBER 1, 2022

The Honorable Larry Hogan
Governor
State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

The Honorable William C. Ferguson, IV
President
Senate of Maryland
State House, H-107
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Adrienne A. Jones
Speaker
Maryland House of Delegates
State House, H-101
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Report required by Public Safety Article §14-1103(c) (MSAR # 13046)

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent response highlighted and exacerbated systemic challenges in the food system on local, state, and national levels. Food insecurity and the need for assistance skyrocketed as response measures resulted in the temporary closure of businesses and reduced access to normal support services. The impact to communities across Maryland is ongoing; the Maryland Food Bank indicated that in May 2022 registration for food assistance increased by 24.8%.

We must acknowledge ongoing consideration of the lessons learned regarding our local food supply chain. The pandemic demonstrated that we need innovative ideas and investment into our state's food production capabilities, focusing on mitigating and preparing for climate change impacts on our food system. Overall reduction of food waste and improved employment of best practices for local composting and food waste processing methods will build our resilience in the face of changing environments.

The Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (FSRC) was established pursuant to Chapter 725 of 2021 in order to work toward a more resilient food system. The law cites four goals for the Council:

1. To address the food insecurity crisis in the State resulting from the COVID–19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis;
2. To develop, on or before November 1, 2021, equity and sustainability policy recommendations to increase the long–term resiliency of the food system;
3. To expand the impact of existing food council organizations; and
4. To develop, on or before November 1, 2021, a strategic plan to increase the production and procurement of Maryland certified food.

This year the FSRC developed its second legislatively-mandated report, detailing determination for the statewide food policy council's long term structure:

a.) Appropriate policy and legislative changes;
b.) Potential ways to restructure the Council, such as:
    i.) Placing the Council within a different agency or organization; or
    ii.) Enacting a sunset provision for the Council;
c.) Any other recommendations of the Council.

The co-chairs of the Maryland FSRC respectfully submit this report on behalf of the 33 appointed Council members. The report submitted to you today is the result of intense work by the Council members and stakeholders across the State, working together to develop recommendations and policies which will improve production, distribution, and access to culturally-appropriate, nutritious food for the nearly 1 in 3 Marylanders who are food insecure.

While we are confident the recommendations in this report can be acted upon now to increase food system resiliency in Maryland, we also acknowledge that much remains to be done. Years of racial inequity, climate change, and shifting policy priorities have resulted in the food system we have today; the Council reaffirms its commitment to the time and thoughtful dialogue needed to identify additional concrete, sustainable steps to improve the systems that impact the food security of Marylanders.

The Council will continue to meet regularly and develop policy recommendations around all four goals laid out by Chapter 725 over the next year, and we look forward to the submission of our next report in November 2023. Based on the work already done, we have full confidence forthcoming recommendations will continue to build resilience into the entirety of the Maryland food system for the benefit of all Marylanders.

Sincerely,

Russell J. Strickland
Secretary, Maryland Department of Emergency Management
Co-Chair, Maryland Food System Resiliency Council

Sydney Daigle
Food Equity Council Director, Prince George's County Food Equity Council
Co-Chair, Maryland Food System Resiliency Council

Council Membership Roster

Organization	Name
Maryland Department of Emergency Management (FSRC Co-Chair)	Russell Strickland
Food Council Member (FSRC Co-Chair)	Sydney Daigle *Prince George's County Food Equity Council*
Maryland State Senate	Katie Fry Hester
Maryland House of Delegates	Lorig Charkoudian
Maryland Department of Human Services (FSRC Co-Vice Chair)	Mischelle A. Williams
Maryland Department of Agriculture (FSRC Co-Vice Chair)	Mark Powell
University of Maryland College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (FSRC Co-Vice Chair)	Stephanie Lansing
Maryland Farm Bureau	Jeremy V. Criss *Montgomery County Department of Agriculture*
Maryland Agricultural & Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation	Stephen McHenry
Food Council Member	Heather Bruskin *Montgomery County Food Council*
Food Council Member	Lee H. Babcock *Frederick County Food Council*
Food Council Member	Theresa Stahl *Western Maryland Food Council*
University of Maryland Extension Maryland SNAP Ed	Lisa Lachenmayr
University of Maryland Eastern Shore Small Farm Program	Berran Rogers
Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology	Nancy Nunn
Public School System	Beth Brewster *Caroline County Public Schools*
Statewide food insecurity advocacy organization	Michael J. Wilson *Maryland Hunger Solutions*
Farmer	Les Richardson *Richardson Farms (Baltimore County)*
Food business owner	Heather Buritsch *Headwaters Grille (Talbot County)*
Food business owner	Jon Class *Class Produce*

Food system policy expert	Dena Leibman
Racial equity in food system policy expert	Diana Taylor *Anne Arundel County Partnership for Children and Families*
Food system policy expert	Anne Palmer *Johns Hopkins* *Center for a Livable Future*
Food system policy expert	Lindsay Adams *Baltimore City Food Policy and Planning*
Food system impacts on climate change and environment expert	Chloë Waterman *Friends of the Earth*
Food nutrition and public health expert	Daphene Altema-Johnson *Johns Hopkins* *Center for a Livable Future*
University of Maryland Eastern Shore Extension	Moses T. Kairo
Maryland State Department of Education	Leslie Sessom-Parks
Maryland Department of General Services	Mike Myers
Maryland Food Bank	Meg Kimmel
Capital Area Food Bank	Adam LaRose

Executive Summary

The Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (FSRC) was established pursuant to Chapter 724/725 of 2021, sponsored by Senator Katie Fry Hester (Senate Bill 723) and Delegate Lorig Charkoudian (House Bill 831), in order to work toward a more resilient food system and to address systemic impediments which influence food insecurity in Maryland. The law sets four goals for the Council:

1. To address the food insecurity crisis in the State resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis;
2. Develop equity and sustainability policy recommendations to increase the long-term resiliency of the food system;
3. Expand the impact of existing food council organizations; and
4. Develop a strategic plan to increase the production and procurement of Maryland certified food.

The legislation charged the Maryland Department of Emergency Management (MDEM) and the University of Maryland College of Agriculture and Natural Resources with staffing the Council and authorized the Secretary of Emergency Management to appoint Council members in accordance with the membership described in the legislation.

Beyond the appointed Council members, additional stakeholders were engaged through subcommittee meetings and other forums to ensure a transparent, accessible process for individuals and organizations active in the Maryland food system. Monthly Lunch and Learn sessions were provided to Council members, subcommittees, and other interested parties, which typically included a presentation from an organization or government agency responsible for a portion of the food system, followed by facilitated discussion. Subcommittees focused on developing draft recommendations for their assigned goals and objectives based on the subject matter expertise and experiences of the subcommittee members. Subcommittees also occasionally invited guest speakers to discuss a specific initiative or topic to better inform recommendation development.

The Council and subcommittees met regularly over the course of 2022 to develop the second legislatively-mandated report. The 2022 report to the Maryland General Assembly details determination for the statewide food policy council's long term structure, which includes:

a.) Appropriate policy and legislative changes;
b.) Potential ways to restructure the Council, such as:
    i.) Placing the Council within a different agency or organizations; or
    ii.) Enacting a sunset provision for the Council
c.) Any other recommendations of the Council

The Council determined that subcommittees would focus on continued work toward items not undertaken from the first report, due to the short amount of time between convening the group and the November 2021 report due date, as well as researching future structural options for the Council.

The Maryland Department of Emergency Management was identified in legislation to both co-chair and staff the Food System Resiliency Council. While MDEM staff assisted in drafting the content of this document as part of that requirement, this report reflects the wisdom, knowledge, and experience of the expert members of the Council. This document and the recommendations below are not a Maryland Department of Emergency Management product, but a product of the FSRC.

Those recommendations are as follows:

Goal 1: *Address the food insecurity crisis in the State resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis*	Legislation required?	Is Funding Required?	Page Number
Recommendations from 2021			
Recommendation 1.1: Establish and maintain a statewide food system map incorporating data elements from existing maps to provide a holistic view of existing need, services, and gaps.	No	Yes	13
Recommendation 1.2: Local and state emergency management agencies should review and update emergency response plans to include non-congregate feeding capabilities.	No	No	15
Recommendation 1.3: The state should coordinate statewide emergency contracts for widespread non-congregate feeding needs.	No	No	16
Recommendation 1.4: Establish a Maryland Food and Agriculture Resilience Mechanism (FARM) program at the Maryland Department of Agriculture to provide funding for direct purchase of food by food assistance organizations from local farmers and provide technical assistance to farmers and food business owners. (Connected to 1.10)	Yes	Yes	17
Recommendation 1.5: Fully fund the Office of Resilience and the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council. (Connected to 1.9)	No	Yes	21
Recommendation 1.6: Encourage the State government to integrate social safety net programs to enable better access for Marylanders.	No	Yes	23
Recommendation 1.7: Conduct an assessment of existing Federal and State food system grants, programs, and resources and analyze gaps in	No	No, as long as council	26

Maryland's participation in the available opportunities.		is funded	
Recommendation 1.8: Evaluate food system metric best practices and collaborate with State government to better understand existing performance metrics for food system-related spending.If the FSRC is fully funded, this could be undertaken by the Council staff. Otherwise, contractual support will likely be needed to support this project.	No	No, as long as council is funded	27
Recommendations from 2022			
Recommendation 1.9: The Food System Resiliency Council will become a formal independent, established body within the Maryland Department of Emergency Management.	Yes	Yes	27
Recommendation 1.10: Fully fund the Maryland Food and Agricultural Resilience Mechanism (FARM)	No	Yes	28
Recommendation 1.11: Establish an Online Resource Database for Local Maryland Agriculture	No	Yes	28

Goal 2: *To develop, on or before November 1, 2021, equity and sustainability policy recommendations to increase the long–term resiliency of the food system*	Legislation Required?	Funding Required?	Page Number
Recommendation from 2021			
Recommendation 2.1: Allocate funding to increase the cold storage capacity across the state to meet immediate needs. Complete an assessment of existing cold storage resources in the state to better understand current resources to address gaps in the future. (Connected to 2.4)	No	Yes	29
Recommendation 2.2: Expand and modernize use of food benefits, including Maryland Market Money and EBT.	Yes	Yes	30

Recommendation from 2022			
Recommendation 2.3: Establish and sustain Regional Agriculture Centers (RACs) in four MD regions (Eastern Shore, Western, North/Central and Southern)	No	Yes	33
Recommendation 2.4: Establish a Distributed Network of Cold Storage for Food System Resiliency	No	Yes	35
Recommendation 2.5: Fund the Grant Program to Reduce and Compost School Waste (Connected to 4.4)	No	Yes	36

Goal 3: *To expand the impact of existing food council organizations*	Legislation Required?	Funding Required?	Page Number
Recommendations from 2021			
Recommendation 3.1: Established a state-grant funded program for food council start-up, sustainment, and expansion costs. (Connected to 3.2)	No	Yes	37
Recommendations from 2022			
Recommendation 3.2: Establish a requirement and supportive funding for Maryland counties to identify a local food system coordination body, such as a local food council.	Yes	Yes	38

Goal 4: To develop, on or before November 1, 2021, a strategic plan to increase the production and procurement of Maryland certified food	Legislation Required?	Funding Required?	Page Number
Recommendation from 2021			

Recommendation 4.1: Provide incentives to encourage Maryland school systems to purchase Maryland food. (Connected to 4.6)	Yes	Yes	40
Recommendation 4.2: Increase access to and use of technology to create and modify platforms to connect producers directly with consumers.	No	Yes	42
Recommendation 4.3: Diversify opportunities for small- and mid-scale producers.	No	Yes	43
Recommendation 4.4: Support statewide, regional, and local incentives or one-time grant programs to increase the number of food waste sites. Provide complementary technical assistance to local or regional entities to establish private sector or local government food waste programs.	No	Yes	44
Recommendation 4.5: Increase education on source separation of food waste and possibilities for on-farm composting/digestion.	No	Yes	45
Recommendation from 2022			
Recommendation 4.6: Fund the Maryland Farm to School Grant Pilot	No	Yes	46
Recommendation 4.7: Conduct a Comprehensive Statewide Food Supply Value Chain Studies	No	Yes	46
Recommendation 4.8: Expand Technical Assistance to Farmers Market Managers and Organizers	No	Yes	47
Recommendation 4.9: Baseline Assessment and Reduction of Maryland's Greenhouse Gas Emissions for Public Food Purchasing	No	Yes	47

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Introduction

The Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (FSRC) was established pursuant to Chapter 725 of 2021, sponsored by Senator Katie Fry Hester (Senate Bill 723) and Delegate Lorig Charkoudian (House Bill 831), in order to build a more resilient food system in the State and to address those systemic impediments which influence food insecurity in Maryland. The law cites four goals for the Council:

1. To address the food insecurity crisis in the State resulting from the COVID–19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis;
2. To develop, on or before November 1, 2021, equity and sustainability policy recommendations to increase the long–term resiliency of the food system;
3. To expand the impact of existing food council organizations; and
4. To develop, on or before November 1, 2021, a strategic plan to increase the production and procurement of Maryland certified food.

During 2022, Council members focused on achieving the mandated charges to develop the second report to be presented to the Maryland General Assembly, which details determination for the statewide food policy council's long term structure:

a.) Appropriate policy and legislative changes;
b.) Potential ways to restructure the Council, such as:
    i.) Placing the Council within a different agency or organization; or
    ii.) Enacting a sunset provision for the Council;
c.) Any other recommendations of the Council.

The Council directed subcommittees to continue work on topics that were listed in the "Next Steps" section of the initial report presented to the General Assembly in 2021. Specifically, the subcommittees were charged with determining a strategic recommendation to directly expand the impact of existing food council organizations, continuing to examine how to improve support for local production and food waste efforts, and examining policies related to equity in the food system. Furthermore, exhaustive research helped the subcommittees understand and determine best practices involving regenerative agriculture, composting, and improving the infrastructure of the Maryland food system. A full list of the 16 recommendations endorsed by the Council in 2021, and updated recommendations endorsed in 2022, as they relate to the legislative goals and requirements can be found in Appendix B of this document.

Recommendations

The following is a detailed discussion of the recommendations endorsed by the Food System Resiliency Council and is reflective of the work undertaken in 2021 and continued in 2022.

Goal 1

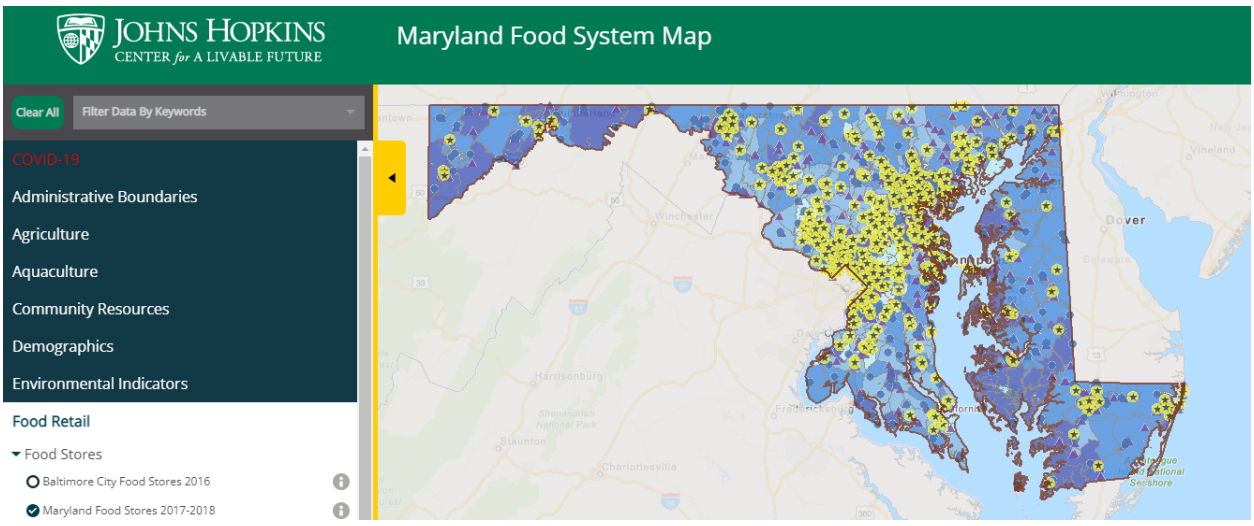
To address the food insecurity crisis in the State resulting from the COVID–19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis by:

- *Coordinating state and local level food insecurity services to support residents of the state*
- *Tracking and analyzing data to create a comprehensive map of food insecurity across the state and identify gaps in service*
- *Leveraging federal and private sector grants and other resources in order to address food insecurity needs*
- *Advising the state on how best to allocate resources and increase efficiency*
- *Exploring the role of and potential use for the federal community eligibility provision to ensure all students in the state are fed*
- *Making recommendations to the Maryland State Department of Education and the Maryland General Assembly to implement relevant findings*

<u>Recommendation 1.1</u>: Establish and maintain a statewide food system map incorporating data elements from existing maps to provide a holistic view of existing need, services, and gaps.

Various maps currently exist in Maryland and are run by government and non-governmental entities:

- Johns Hopkins University Center for a Livable Future (CLF) maintains the Maryland Food System Map
- Both Maryland Food Bank and Capital Area Food Bank have maps that reflect their service areas
- Department of Human Services (DHS) provided access to a map for emergency response entities during COVID-19 response
- Future Harvest, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, and the Maryland Farmers Market Association developed a Find-a-Farmer or Market Map
- Counties such as Montgomery and Anne Arundel have created their own maps



Each map has a specific audience and thus focuses on different areas. There is no single, holistic map that incorporates agricultural information, population/demographics information, program (e.g. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP] enrollment or utilization) information, and services information. Furthermore, the resources required to maintain each of these maps creates duplication of effort and lack of cohesive, systematic understanding of the Maryland food system during normal operations and emergency response. This gap results in duplication of effort or lack of services.

Creating a comprehensive public-facing data set for mapping will enable and support data-driven decision making to help understand where the food system needs improvement. One potential application of such a data set is to create a visual dashboard to assist stakeholders in understanding the overall food system health in terms of environmental factors, food waste, human health impact, infrastructure, and more. This will enable policy makers to see and understand a more complete picture of Maryland's food system resilience.

Because the food system map is important in both normal operating circumstances and in emergency response operations, the Council recommends the MDEM coordinate with both government and non-governmental organizations to coordinate a Maryland food system map. This may be achieved by working with an organization to update and expand an existing map or through additions to the Operational Situational Picture for Response to an Emergency (OSPREY), which is a public-facing Geographic Information System (GIS) application providing key Maryland-specific data and hazard-related information managed by MDEM today. The addition of layers that reflect current food insecurity and food system resources will be beneficial to food advocacy and policy experts during normal operations and to emergency managers during response and recovery operations.

The comprehensive food system map should include at minimum the following layers:

- Census tract, zip code, or county-level data
    - Federal census data (income, demographics, unemployment rates, etc.)
    - Federal poverty level from the American Community Survey analysis
    - Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) data
    - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) enrollment and utilization rates
    - The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) utilization
    - Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) enrollment
    - School-based nutrition programs like the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program, and Community Eligibility Provision enrollment
    - Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) enrollment and utilization rates
    - Food Assistance organizations and retailers (including "pop up" pantries, faith-based, and community pantries that may not be affiliated with the Maryland or Capital Area Food Banks)
- State agency data applicable to health disparities

    - Medicaid
    - Health outcomes
- Identified food desert areas
    - USDA Food Desert Map
- Agricultural data (including regional if available - DE, VA, WV, DC, PA, NY, NJ)
    - Farms
        - Maryland Certified Local Growers
    - Production facilities
    - Distribution centers
    - Farmers markets
        - Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) and Maryland Market Money (MMM) locations
    - Livestock processing facilities (could also be considered CI)
    - Composting and anaerobic digestion facilities
    - Food waste reduction programs
- Critical infrastructure
    - Cold storage facilities

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?
Establishing a food system map will not require legislation to implement. However, legislation or Executive Order requiring state agencies to share key data elements (Medicaid, SNAP, etc.) may be necessary. An Executive Order may provide more flexibility as data elements change regularly, new programs are added, etc. Additional federal permissions may be necessary for federal data sets.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?
Updating existing data sets and maintaining additional layers will require additional funding for staff to conduct data collection and management, respond to requests for data or analysis, and address emergency response needs. If the map is created using OSPREY, this will also require additional funding for services provided by the Department of Innovation and Technology (DoIT) in supporting/maintaining the OSPREY platform.

<u>Recommendation 1.2:</u> Local and state emergency management agencies should review and update emergency response plans to include non-congregate feeding capabilities.

Emergency feeding has traditionally been planned for at both the state and local level in the context of congregate housing and shelter operations. Each jurisdiction in Maryland, as well as the State government through the Department of Human Services, have plans for implementing a congregate feeding capability when shelters are opened in response to an emergency. However, the COVID-19 response left several jurisdictions scrambling to meet an acute increase in need for food support among diverse communities in Maryland unassociated with shelter operations.

While food insecurity is a daily problem for many Marylanders, the COVID-19 pandemic response conditions, including the closure of businesses and gatherings, increased risk to health posed by visiting stores for seniors and vulnerable populations, and supply chain breakdowns leaving local grocery store and market shelves bare, increased the number of Marylanders who needed support in accessing nutritious, culturally appropriate food[1].

Many local governments responded quickly and effectively, standing up task forces, coordinating with Community Organizations Active in Disasters (COADs), and in local food councils in some cases, organizing efforts across their jurisdictions. Through this effort, millions of pounds of food, both packaged and fresh, were distributed to meet the need.

The FSRC recommends that these efforts be documented and established as lasting partnerships and capabilities ready for implementation should the need arise in the future. Local governments should be given the flexibility to update or establish new plans, partnerships, and capabilities that both meet the projected emergency needs of residents and are reflective of the existing resources within the county. The FSRC recommends MDEM and DHS provide technical assistance and support to local jurisdictions seeking to establish or update non-congregate feeding plans and capabilities.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?
No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?
No. Updates to emergency operations plans are eligible costs under existing emergency management grant funding streams.

Recommendation 1.3: The state should coordinate statewide emergency contracts for widespread non-congregate feeding needs.

Local governments were largely responsible for procurement of food and supplemental supplies (e.g. silverware, paper products, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) during the COVID-19 response. While the influx of Coronavirus Aid, Relief, & Economic Security Act (CARES Act) funding enabled local governments to work with community organizations and nonprofits like the Maryland Food Bank, jurisdictions were left to compete for scarce resources against each other, making purchasing challenging particularly for smaller jurisdictions that lacked the

[1] For the purposes of this report, culturally appropriate food is food that meets people's dietary patterns based on of racial, ethnic, and religious groups.

significant demand of larger counties, and larger counties also lacked the purchasing power to compete with state contracts.

The FSRC recommends establishing both statewide and regional emergency contracts to support non-congregate feeding efforts. These contracts will enable coordination of purchases to increase buying power and competitive advantage. These contracts should not only be for food itself, but should also include cold storage access, supplemental supplies, and logistics support (including regional and/or direct point of distribution delivery).

Contracts should preference local businesses where possible and should incentivize the purchase of local goods and use of local labor.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?
No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?
No funding is required to establish the contract. Funding would be required if the contract was engaged due to an emergency response need.

<u>Recommendation 1.4</u>: Establish a Maryland Food and Agriculture Resilience Mechanism (FARM) program at the Maryland Department of Agriculture that is multifaceted and flexible in order to ensure maximum benefit to food insecure Marylanders, food business owners, and farmers. The FARM program will provide funding for direct purchase of food by food assistance organizations from local farmers and provide technical assistance to farmers and food business owners.

Access to culturally appropriate, locally grown, nutritious food is a systemic problem which was exacerbated during the COVID-19 response. Programs at the federal, state, and local levels were developed or expanded to meet the needs of communities in a multitude of ways: assembling and creating food boxes, arranging mutually beneficial contract growing, purchasing surplus product, and covering the costs of distribution and processing to account for gaps in service, infrastructure, or efficiency.

The USDA established the Farm-to-Families program in the wake of COVID-19 as a way to stabilize agricultural markets while meeting the need of a significant increase in food insecurity across the United States. Several FSRC Council members were directly engaged with the program. The Maryland Department of Agriculture reports that more than $87.1 million worth of food was distributed to Marylanders in 2020-21 through USDA food box contracts. The program successfully supported the state's produce farmers and dairy farmers by maintaining a market for them during COVID. For example, cheese prices collapsed during the beginning of COVID. The USDA food box program began including cheese and pushed up the price of cheese, thereby

supporting the dairy sector. Maryland produce distributors, whose sales were devastated by the closure of restaurants, were able to survive COVID due to the box program.

While there were benefits to the program, a number of Council members reported significant challenges with how the program was administered. Some of those challenges included shifting priorities, lack of focus on culturally appropriate and dietary needs of the community, and unpredictable deliveries with minimal communication and transparency.

Several states, including regional neighbors like Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New York, have established statewide agriculture and resilience programs to ensure locally grown products, services, infrastructure, and processing activities are leveraged to support those in need. Virginia recently passed the Virginia Agriculture Food Assistance Program legislation which provides funding to the food bank system to cover the costs associated with harvesting, processing, packaging, and transporting surplus products including fruits, vegetables, eggs, dairy, poultry, pork, beef, and grains. Each Virginia locality is assigned an allocation based on a formula that controls for unemployment, SNAP eligibility, and Medicaid eligibility. Program legislation which limits the program to donation of food to charitable food assistance organizations.[2]

New York's Nourish New York initiative was designed to, "allow New York's emergency food providers to continue purchase surplus products from New York farmers and dairy manufacturers and deliver it to New York families in need" through the end of 2021. New York has invested $85 million in the program so far.[3]
The Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System (PASS) was established as a pilot program in 2008 with a goal of securing surplus, Pennsylvania-grown products and distributing them to food banks and charitable organizations. The state used funding to cover farmers' costs to harvest, sort and package products. PASS was shifted from a pilot to a formal program in 2010 and has been funded between $1 and $1.5 million each year since. Feeding Pennsylvania contracts with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture to administer the program. Feeding PA then subcontracts out to 13 local, charitable food distributors to procure food from PA agricultural producers, packers, and processors (nine of these organizations are Feeding America food banks, and the remaining four are charitable organizations).

The Michigan Agricultural Surplus System (MASS) was established in 1990 and provides funds through the Food Bank Council of Michigan to ensure food banks can purchase or process Michigan-grown produce, dairy, and eggs. Each year, the Council administers funding of up to $2.5 million for the purchase or processing of products, and an additional $500,000 for transit related distributional activities.

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[2] Virginia Agriculture Food Assistance Program, Code of Virginia Ch. 47.1, §3.2-4783 (2021) https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?212+ful+HB2203ER
[3] "Nourish New York," New York Department of Agriculture, last accessed September 29, 2021. https://agriculture.ny.gov/NourishNY

Maryland should develop a Food and Agricultural Resilience Mechanism (FARM) program that is multifaceted and flexible in order to ensure maximum benefit to food insecure Marylanders, food business owners, and farmers. Learning from both the successes and the challenges of the USDA farm-to-families program, as well as other local and regional efforts, the program should:

- Utilize and expand existing infrastructure, storage, warehouse capacity, long standing local relationships and distribution networks locally and regionally.
    - For example, the two statewide food banks operating in Maryland, the Maryland Food Bank and the Capital Area Food Banks, work daily to continue to build out and develop contracts and MOUs with local farms, producers, and processors to enhance the reach and impact of local Maryland agriculture on food insecurity. The Maryland Food Bank, serving 21 Counties and Baltimore City, and the Capital Area Food Bank, serving the two largest counties in the state, Prince George's and Montgomery, partner with a combined 71 farms across the state to supply fresh, nutritious produce to food-insecure communities. MD FARM would allow the two food banks of the state to increase, enhance, and identify local agriculture opportunities to diversify produce offerings, contract growing, and process/distribute surplus products. The infrastructure of these organizations to purchase at scale is comparable to the role that other food banks have played in the state systems aforementioned. For example, the Maryland Food Bank and the Capital Area Food Bank distributed 9.5 million and 7.08 million pounds respectively of nutritious food statewide, including produce, milk, dairy, and meat, through the federal Farmers to Families Food Box program over the past 16 months.[4]
- Incentivize farmers to participate in the program by offering opportunities for guaranteed purchase at above wholesale prices by food banks or other charitable organizations. For example:
    - Montgomery County: The Montgomery County Food Security Task Force, Montgomery County Food Council, Manna Food Center, and the Montgomery County Office of Agriculture established the Montgomery County Farm to Food Bank Program in the wake of COVID-19. The program established a grant for Montgomery County table crop farms with a maximum award of $20,000 per farm. The grant was able to cover infrastructure and equipment or to contract growing specific crops. Preference was given to culturally appropriate crops, sustainable farming practices, and supporting diversity and equity in the local agricultural community. To date, over 100,000 pounds of product from

[4] Analyzing survey data from a representative sample in Vermont, the authors find that food-insecure residents who visited a pantry during the pandemic were consuming more fruits and vegetables than before COVID-19. Conversely, food-insecure respondents who did not use a food pantry were significantly more likely to report both a reduction in fruit consumption and a reduction in vegetable consumption. Source: Farryl Bertmann et al. "The Food Bank and Food Pantries Help Food Insecure Participants Maintain Fruit and Vegetable Intake During COVID-19." In: Frontiers in Nutrition. Vol. 8. August 6, 2021. https://www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fnut.2021.673158

33 County farms have been purchased and the food has been distributed to residents through a network of over 28 local food assistance providers.
    - Howard County: The Howard County Grow It Forward Campaign was established in 2020 to help meet the needs of food-insecure communities while simultaneously supporting the economic recovery of small, local farmers. The partnership includes the Howard County Farm Bureau, Howard County Food Bank, Maryland Food Bank, and Howard County 4-H Extension and the Howard County Government. The program included gleaning local fields of participating farmers, purchasing food directly from local farmers as well as contracting with local farmers to grow specific crops for the Food Bank.
    - Future Harvest's Feed the Need program gave small grants to 22 area farmers, 14 of whom were farmers of color, who then provided an equivalent portion of their harvest at retail value to families in need. The farmers in total delivered more than 66,000 pounds of produce to food access outlets of their choice. This flexibility allowed for small farmers to participate in farm-to-stomach initiatives.
- Leverage, when necessary, opportunities to purchase food directly from farmers for boxes that meet the needs of local communities, inclusive of culturally appropriate and dietary needs of the communities. For example:
    - Baltimore City relied on FEMA reimbursement funding to purchase produce and mixed product boxes throughout the pandemic and particularly in the wake of USDA's shifting of Farm to Families vendors and priorities. According to the City's Strategy to improve Nutritional Security and Minimize Hunger: City of Baltimore COVID-19 Emergency Food Response report (May 2021), "The City contracted with multiple vendors with slightly different product mixes. This ensured that if one vendor had supply chain or COVID-19 safety issues there would still be food flowing from other vendors." Transportation was included in the contracts with the vendors which reduced the logistics burden on the City and expanded the network of participating sites. Using larger organizations as hubs, smaller organizations were able to pick up the desired amounts and relay them to their service areas. Sites received between 100 and 400 produce boxes per week, which allowed residents to access fresh food without the need to travel significant distance or risk going to the grocery store. For mixed product boxes, sites received between 50 and 900 boxes per week.
- Create a position within the Maryland Department of Agriculture to support organizations utilizing MD FARM funding with the technical assistance needed to develop relationships, contracts, and arrangements with Maryland farmers, distributors, processors, and producers. This position is necessary as a key distinction is that Maryland (as juxtaposed to Michigan, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and New York) does not have an umbrella organization to serve as an intermediary between the Department of Agriculture and the food banks or emergency food charitable organizations such as the Food bank Council of Michigan, Feeding Pennsylvania, the Federation of Virginia Food Banks, or Feeding New York. Thus, to ensure MD FARM is fully supporting and building

out agricultural resilience for Maryland producers, emergency organizations, and food insecure populations, a full-time position is necessary.
- Ensure an emphasis is placed on investing in Black, Indigenous, and People of Color owned food businesses, farms, and organizations.
- Expand the capacity capabilities of farms, businesses, and organizations to be able to maximize their food assistance measures and respond in emergency situations.
- Ensure that the program includes support for necessary process logistics, such as, for example, the production capacity to clean, bag, and quickly freeze vegetables all year round. This should also include cold storage and distribution support, all of which are critical to allowing organizations to expand beyond current capacity. In addition, permanent capacity-building infrastructure, especially if regional or centralized, would allow more and possibly varied participation.
- Embed provisions for statewide, regional, or local emergency procurement of large quantities of food in response to a state of emergency or disaster declaration through the most efficient, established emergency food organizations.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?
Several states have established similar programs, some through legislation and others through state departments of agriculture. Specific program parameters and funding needs must be delineated to determine whether legislation would be required.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?
Yes, both start up and sustainment funding will be required to establish and implement a Maryland FARM program. In order to build and sustain a successful program, the Council estimates the cost of this program to be $10M.

2022 UPDATE: SB121 (HB147) passed and was signed by the Governor. Sponsored by Senator Hester and Delegate Charkoudian, both members of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council, the bill increases funding allocation to the Maryland Farms and Family Fund from $100,000 to $300,000 beginning in FY24, and establishes the Maryland Food and Agriculture Resiliency Mechanism (FARM) Grant Program within the Maryland Department of Agriculture for charitable food organizations and food banks to procure, process, and transportation of local food products. According to the bill text, “the purpose of the MD FARM is to build food system resiliency by leveraging Maryland agricultural products and services to support the State’s food banks and charitable emergency food providers to alleviate food insecurity.” The grant program will provide food banks and charitable emergency food providers funding for the procurement of surplus, seasonal, or contractual agricultural food products, processing and preparation of agricultural food products for distribution, and the transportation for agricultural food products.

These funds may only be used to procure food products and services from Maryland Certified Farms which adhere to Maryland Nutrient Management Plans and are recognized by the Department of Agriculture.

The first reading of the bill required an annual appropriation of $1,250,000 to support the fund, but the final signed version of the bill reduced the annual appropriation mandated to $200,000. The Council supported the original version of the bill with the full funding amount and will continue to encourage additional funding for the FARM Grant Program.

Recommendation 1.5: Fully fund the Office of Resilience and the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council.

Organizational structure and support are critical to the success of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council and its initiatives. The Council and its mission as defined by the legislation also dovetails with the larger effort to include resilience planning across local and State government sectors and initiatives.

The FSRC recommends establishing a Maryland Office of Resilience within the Department of Emergency Management, led by a Chief Resilience Officer. Under the Chief Resilience Officer, the FSRC recommends establishing a Director of Food Policy, supported by two program management staff and an accompanying budget to conduct the recommended research and assessments included in this report and anticipated in future reports. The Council must be fully funded to effectively coordinate and facilitate meetings, conduct research, assist with program development and implementation, and conduct additional outreach with stakeholders to ensure Council operations are informed by a broad range of perspectives.

Program management staff is also necessary to support Maryland's local and regional food councils. Food councils are critical to the success of communication and coordination about food security in their areas. Food councils also connect resident and organizational insight and expertise to inform policy and program development locally and at the State. However, several Maryland food councils noted that they did not have a primary point of contact at the State for advocacy, coordination, or communication of issues during the pandemic, or prior to the response. The ability to have a central point of contact at the state responsible for coordinating food system information for community organizations like food councils is critical in both daily operations and during emergencies.

Council members were quick to recognize the important work done by the Office of Emergency Response at the Department of Human Services, particularly on the coordination of weekly feeding calls during the pandemic response. However, DHS is just one State agency responsible for one area of the food system. Community organizations lack the bandwidth to seek out each State agency program independently for information and collaboration on such a variety of systems. Furthermore, organizations like the Maryland Food Bank serve multiple local governments as well as coordinate with the State, demonstrating that the lack of single point of coordination is even more challenging for regional and statewide entities.

The Council recommends that the State dedicate one of the program manager positions to supporting communication and coordination between the local food councils and other food-related community organizations, state and local government, private sector (supply chain, food businesses, etc.), and other entities to fill existing gaps.

In addition to functioning as a liaison between the food councils and state government, the program manager should also:

- Provide educational and networking sessions for councils on state operations and how to navigate the expertise available.
- Facilitate data agreements with state government agencies for councils, non-profits, and other organizations that rely on real-time data for decision-making.
- Identify a backbone organization(s) that could co-facilitate a network of Maryland county-level councils for capacity-building activities, including advocacy, networking, training, and aligning efforts across the state where possible.
- Collaborate as appropriate on policy efforts across the state.
- Work with Maryland higher education, non-profit, and government institutions to develop a research agenda that addresses gaps in our collective understanding of the issues and partner with educational institutions to fill those gaps.
- Serve as a liaison and advocate to integrate food across statewide resilience programs (such as the Resilience Hub program administered by the Maryland Energy Administration)
- Advise and assist coordinating emergency response efforts related to the food system.

Lastly, the Council recommends that the State establish a staff position responsible for providing technical assistance to food councils seeking private sector or Federal grants for food council operations or initiatives. The staff position should also work to identify and share federal funding opportunities to support programs and advocacy efforts related to food systems outside of ARPA and other pandemic-related sources (e.g., USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) Community food projects, USDA Agricultural Marketing Services (AMS's) Regional Food System Partnerships).

The Council emphasizes that state resources can be leveraged to support cost-sharing requirements for federal grants, which would be a significant benefit to communities across the State. The Council also notes that several Maryland higher education institutions like the University of Maryland Extension, Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, and Morgan State's newly launched Center of Health Equity have knowledge and expertise in federal programs and grant dollars; partnerships with these institutions will improve access to experts for food councils across the State.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?
No; however, either an Executive Order or legislation would provide the most legitimacy and clear direction for the State Office of Resilience and the Chief Resilience Officer.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?
Yes. The Council estimates approximately $276,000 for the Chief Resilience Officer based on 2021's Senate Bill 62 fiscal note; $550,000 for the Food Policy Director and three support personnel (State Food Council program manager; local Food Council liaison; grants specialist) and an additional $650,000 to fund research and assessment initiatives.

2022 UPDATE: SB630 (HB 706) was signed by the Governor in May 2022 establishes the Office of Resilience and Chief Resilience Officer within the Maryland Department of Emergency Management. The Food System Resiliency Council supported this legislation, including in the written testimony an interest in specifically including language to identify food resiliency as a part of the Office and Officer duties. While this language was not included in the final bill, the bill does specify that all hazards facing the State must be addressed by the Office in alignment with the State Hazard Mitigation Plan and other governing plans.

Recommendation 1.6: Encourage the State government to integrate social safety net programs to enable better access for Marylanders.

Food insecurity in Maryland is a complex issue where transportation, healthcare, housing, employment, education, historic injustices, on-going racial inequity, and a variety of other factors intersect to influence Marylanders' ability to be food secure. Recognizing the overlapping factors influencing food security, the Council recommends that the State integrate food security into a variety of agency/department initiatives. These include:

- Adding the following modules in the next iteration of the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS): The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) optional module on SNAP; USDA's U.S. Household Food Security Survey Model. The BRFSS is a federally designed survey intended to

capture data on the conditions and behaviors of Marylanders and to understand disparities within groups and communities. Each year, the state is allotted space for over 100 modules (i.e. sets of questions related to a specific subject), to pose to a sample size of more than 10,000 residents. In the recently concluded 2019 survey, only two questions were included pertaining to food insecurity. The Council believes the addition of the recommended modules would illuminate the issue of hunger within the target population.
- Adding food security metrics to the Maryland Community health Resources Commission Annual Report, Maryland State Plan on Aging, and the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs Annual Report.
- Adding the provision of nutrition services into the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services existing education, health, and training programs.

The Council would like to highlight the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) for exemplifying state government integration through its application to the USDA's NSLP and School Breakfast Program Demonstration Project to Evaluate Direct Certification with Medicaid (DCM) for the 2022-2023 School Year. MSDE recognized that the application requirements for enrollment into the free and reduced price meal program is a barrier to access much needed food for children across the country. As such, they have taken the opportunity to apply for the Direct Certification with Medicaid demonstration project to automatically certify children in the free and reduced-price meal program without completing an application.

According to the USDA's website, "direct certification using Medicaid data is limited to children who are members of households with income that does not exceed the following [National School Lunch Program] income standards:
- Free school meal eligibility, 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level for the family size used by Medicaid; and
- Reduced price school meal eligibility, 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Level for the family size used by Medicaid."[5]

The USDA reports that 19 states are already participating in the direct certification demonstration program: Illinois, Kentucky, New York, Pennsylvania, California, Florida, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia, Connecticut, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Nevada, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. The first pilot project began in the 2012-2013 school year. A demonstration project phase began in the 2016-2017 school year. Additional States were added to the demonstration project in the 2017-2018 school year.

According to the latest report submitted to the Food and Nutrition Service on the first year of the demonstration round (SY2016-2017), in the four states which joined

[5] USDA, "National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Demonstration Projects to Evaluate Direct Certification with Medicaid," 2021. https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/direct-certification-medicaid-demonstration-project

the third round of demonstration, more than 100,000 students were certified for free meals, an increase of between 2.5 and 8 percent in each state, and an additional 22,000 were identified for reduced price meals across five states, an increase between 0.2 and 4.1 percent in each state.[6]

This method does not supersede or reduce eligibility through other programs, including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, foster care, Head Start, or through being migrant or homeless. Direct Certification with Medicaid simply added an additional tool in the box for communities to ensure all students eligible for free and reduced meals have access to the program.[7]

According to the School Nutrition Association, "the process:

- Eliminates barriers to healthy school meals for at-risk students;
- Spares low-income parents a cumbersome, unnecessary application process;
- Reduces paperwork, processing and administrative costs for schools, allowing them to focus resources on serving students and improving menus; and
- Substantially reduced school meal certification errors."[8]

The burden on families is highlighted by a 2015 USDA report which reported that 75 percent of the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program underpayments were a result of reporting errors, "when households report their income or report their size incorrectly in ways that reduce their benefits..." The same report identified the majority of overpayments were from a combination of reporting (household) and administrative (school district) errors. Direct certification has been identified by the USDA Food Nutrition Service as a way to substantially reduce errors in the administration of both NSLP and Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP).[9]

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?
No.

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[6] Lara Hulsey, Andrew Grotho, Joshua Leftin, Brian Estes, Claire Smither Wulsin, Liana Washburn, Josephine Thomason, Daniela Golinelli. "Direct Certification with Medicaid for Free and Reduced-Priced Meals (DCM-F/RP) Demonstration, Year 1," Mathematica Policy Research, 2019.
[7] Food Research & Action Center, "Direct Certification Improves Low-Income Student Access to School Meals: An Updated Guide to Direct Certification," 2018. https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/direct-cert-improves-low-income-school-meal-access.pdf
[8] School Nutrition Association, "Expand Direct Certification with Medicaid for Free and Reduced-Price Meals (DCM-F/RP) to all states," 2020. http://schoolnutrition.org/uploadedFiles/Legislation_and_Policy/SNA_Policy_Resources/2020-Direct-Cert-Fact.pdf
[9] USDA Food Nutrition Service, "Measuring and Reducing Errors in the School Meal Programs: The APEC II Study and FNS Actions (summary)," May 2015. https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/ops/APECII-Summary.pdf

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?
The cost of this recommendation is currently being investigated by Council staff.

Recommendation 1.7: Conduct an assessment of existing Federal and State food system grants, programs, and resources and analyze gaps in Maryland's participation in the available opportunities.

The Council recognizes that the Federal complex of food system-related grants is extensive and, at times, confounding and inaccessible to both government and community organizations attempting to take advantage of Federal dollars to the benefit of Maryland. Education and awareness around programs can be limited, particularly for small offices, organizations, and entrepreneurs.

Therefore, the Council recommends the State undertake a full assessment of existing Federal programs related to the food system and analyze which opportunities Maryland is not currently maximizing. The results of the assessment should be shared across State and local governments, with community organizations, and the private sector.

The Council would like to collaborate closely with the State government to understand the existing funding and resource allocations for all food-related programming and resources within the State government. The Council acknowledges that understanding the existing state of food system funding is a necessary first step in making thoughtful recommendations in the future on the allocation of resources and increases in efficiency, a legislative requirement of this Council.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?
No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?
If the FSRC is fully funded with staff and consultation support, this could be undertaken by the Council staff. Otherwise, contractual support will be needed to support this project.

Recommendation 1.8: Evaluate food system metric best practices and collaborate with the State government to better understand existing performance metrics for food system-related spending.

Performance metrics are critical to understanding whether any program implementation and administration is succeeding. The FSRC recommends working closely with existing State programs administering food system-related programs to

understand the performance metrics and evaluative criteria being used for those programs.

The Council also recommends undertaking an evaluation of best practices of food system performance metrics from other systems around the country.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?
No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?
If the FSRC is fully funded, this could be undertaken by the Council staff. Otherwise, contractual support will likely be needed to support this project.

<u>Recommendation 1.9:</u> The Food System Resiliency Council will become a formal independent, established body within the Maryland Department of Emergency Management.

(This recommendation relates to Recommendation 1.5 initially developed in 2021)

The final recommendation of the FSRC is to change the current statute and establish the FSRC as a unit within MDEM. The Council will continue to refine the desired language to be reflective of their interest in autonomy while gaining the additional support that comes with being a unit within MDEM. This change in statute would indicate the FSRC resides under the Office of Resilience, thereby moving the current statute (§14–1101 – 1103) to the Office of Resilience statute section ((§14–1201-1203), which is designed to be an integrated, collaborative unit of State Government in line with the mission of FSRC.

Lastly, the role of the co-chair requires substantial time and attention, the Council acknowledges there may be challenges to fill the co-chair role in future years with current limitations. The allotment to other non-State members allows the significant inclusion among a larger group. Amendment to the statute is recommended, to remove the requirement for the co-chair to be a local food council member, instead the elected co-chair will only require that a representative of a State agency may not be considered for the role of co-chair.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

Yes, legislation is required to implement this recommendation, as the current statute indicates the Food System Resiliency Council as an independent entity.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

Yes, funding is not required to implement the change to statute per the recommendation; however, funding will be needed for staffing, contractor services, and to sustain Council activities.

Recommendation 1.10: Fully fund the Maryland Food and Agricultural Resilience Mechanism

(This recommendation relates to Recommendation 1.4 initially developed in 2021)

MD FARM, modeled after successful programs in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, New York, and Virginia, would help mitigate the economic hardships and supply chain issues of COVID-19 by supporting food assistance organizations to leverage Maryland agriculture long after the pandemic, per the statute passed in SB121. MD FARM would provide grant money to food banks and charitable emergency food providers to ensure that locally sourced produce, products, and services are utilized. The funding would enable these groups to purchase surplus products, cover costs of distribution and processing, arrange contract growing, or assemble and create food boxes. The Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) would administer the funds to support Maryland-based procurement, harvesting, contracting, distribution, or processing for hunger relief efforts throughout the state.

Project Needs: The legislature originally passed $200,000 but with food insecurity at the level we currently see, the full $1.25 million can better accommodate the need, so we are requesting the rest with this $1.05 million ask. The funds would provide grant money to food distribution sites for the procurement, processing and preparation, and transportation of food products and services sourced from Maryland.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

Yes, fully funding FARM with the remaining $1.05M would provide grant money to food distribution sites for the procurement, processing and preparation, and transportation of food products and services sourced from Maryland.

Recommendation 1.11: Online Resource Database for Local Maryland Agriculture

Maryland Department of Agriculture has developed and maintained the Maryland's Best Buy Local program over the past 22 years. The Maryland's Best website provides a searchable database of Maryland farmers and seafood operations. Used by more than 640,000 people, the web site features "What's In Season" and is designed to connect consumers and distributors with farmers and seafood companies. Maryland's Best could provide links to the University of Maryland and other academic websites with training, resources, and lectures, with additional information on food-related topics, feasibility studies on food hubs, innovative agricultural

production techniques and regenerative agriculture. MDA currently is receiving USDA funds to create a revamped website. Additionally, seafood promotions and lists are being fully integrated, including business to business functionality for seafood businesses.

Project Needs: Support MDA's Marketing Web site, Maryland's Best website (https://marylandsbest.maryland.gov/), with implementation of a Maryland's Best Advisory Group, to provide input for upgrading the website. The advisory group could ensure there is inclusive perspective regarding recommendations for content expansion, and a website maintenance plan. Advisory group members should include at a minimum a member of the FSRC Environment & Production subcommittee, University of Maryland Extension, Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, and Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, a Maryland producer, and a Maryland institutional buyer (i.e., public school system, University Dining, or prison system).

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

$50,000 to MDA to support additional development of the web site for non-specialty crops. Current federal funding (USDA) is directed to specialty crops. General funds would support further development of the website and advisory group recommendations.

Goal 2

To develop, on or before November 1, 2021, equity and sustainability policy recommendations to increase the long–term resiliency of the food system including:

- *Addressing and eliminating racial inequalities in the food system*
- *Addressing and eliminating diet-related public health disparities*
- *Addressing and eliminating food deserts*
- *Reducing food waste, increasing recycling, and encouraging other relevant environmental impacts*

<u>Recommendation 2.1</u>: Allocate funding to increase the cold storage capacity across the state to meet immediate needs. Complete an assessment of existing cold storage resources in the state to better understand current resources to address gaps in the future.

Storing fresh and fresh-frozen food in large quantities became a major problem during COVID-19 as cold storage facilities (refrigerated trucks, freezers, etc.) were in high demand and short supply. The FSRC identified increasing cold storage capacity at the local level (through food pantries, schools, etc.) as a significant area for improvement which helps fresh food keep longer and expands the availability of nutritious, fresh-frozen food beyond the standard growing season. Cold storage has been identified as an immediate need across the state.

Increasing day-to-day cold storage capacity improves the ability of local institutions to store fresh produce and proteins. As an emergency measure, the purchase of temporary cold storage (such as refrigerated trailers and other mobile equipment) should be prioritized to increase short-term capacity.

While shortages and gaps were anecdotally noted throughout the COVID-19 response across the State, there is no data set which clearly identifies current infrastructure gaps either locally or regionally. The FSRC recommends conducting an assessment using critical infrastructure data compiled for internal mapping and analyses of local and regional food distribution and storage capacity to assist in identifying food deserts and areas that lack sufficient access to refrigeration. Once identified, these areas and the facilities or organizations that serve them should be prioritized for permanent cold storage equipment receipt. The FSRC recommends establishing a grant program for one-time purchase of cold storage, either mobile or stationary, to fill gaps identified by the assessment. The FSRC recommends building in a requirement to verify future funding availability for maintenance of the infrastructure.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?
No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?
The FSRC recommends allocating $3 million to increase the cold storage capacity statewide. If the FSRC is not provided a research/assessment budget, funding will be required to conduct this assessment.

Recommendation 2.2: Expand and modernize use of food benefits, including Maryland Market Money and EBT.

Empowering Marylanders to make their own choices about the foods they purchase and consume is paramount to personal autonomy and treating shoppers with dignity and respect. Several aspects of social safety net program administration, both at the state and federal levels, are antiquated and reflect distrust in those individuals and households these programs intend to lift up and out of food insecurity.

The FSRC supports the modernization of WIC to allow online redemption of benefits. Due to federal restrictions on points-of-sale verification, WIC benefits cannot currently be redeemed online. The Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act, currently pending in Congress, includes provisions to modernize the use of WIC to include allowing use of online platforms to redeem benefits. The FSRC recommends Maryland's congressional delegation continue to advocate for expansion of these and other necessary federal programs that help Marylanders.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) is also in need of modernization. The program is generally a source of good-quality food and has enjoyed a significant funding expansion during the pandemic. However, inflexibilities in program compliance requirements prevent food from being distributed strategically, but rather based on set formulas that prevent the redistribution of food to areas of high or unmet need. Program requirements also exclude organizations that cannot offer dedicated TEFAP staff from participating, which similarly hampers targeted geographic program expansion efforts. Finally, restrictions in the types of food offered, limit variety and the inclusion of culturally appropriate food.

TEFAP, SNAP, WIC, and other food benefits programs need to be simplified or streamlined to facilitate the usage, application, redemption, and vendor payment processes (including electronic methods). For example, these programs rely on the individual vendor to choose to accept benefits, resulting in an overly burdensome process for both users and vendors, especially small farmers, and is frequently prohibitive to participation. State agencies that administer food benefits programs should work directly with farmers market management, rather than individual vendors, to increase use of food assistance benefits at farmers markets. This will also reduce the administrative burden on small farmers.

However, efforts to modernize food benefits should not come at the cost of alienating consumers. While the FSRC does support the increased use of technology to broaden access and improve end-user experience (as discussed in Recommendation 4.2 of this report), the FSRC emphasizes that those efforts should not move beyond the capabilities of the people served or exclude Marylanders, such

as a transition to online-only purchase or redemption options that further marginalize Marylanders without Internet access. The Council recommends placing more emphasis and investment on wraparound social services including engagement with nongovernmental partners. Individuals dealing with food insecurity are often identified in nontraditional settings, like doctors' offices or in barber shops[10]. These organizations can serve as a crucial link between Marylanders and the support they need.

The Council acknowledges that broadband access is not available consistently across the state due to both affordability and infrastructure-related barriers. The Food Council supports the investment into broadband access across the state as a method to improve food systems for food assistance recipients and vendors participating in local programs.

The Council supports expanding the Maryland Market Money (MMM) program by doubling its funding for the next fiscal year. This program allows individuals to make their own choices at farmers markets by doubling their purchasing power. Additionally, expanding local pools of customers incentivizes farmers to grow a variety of crops that are culturally appropriate to the communities and cultures served[11].

To complement the success of an increased program allocation, the FSRC recommends conducting focus groups to target, supply and demand for, and access to, goods. These focus groups should be designed to answer questions on supply and access to food items (including farmers markets in the MMM program) versus need, demand, and feasibility of production. The focus groups should include questions regarding supply, demand, and access to culturally appropriate and ethnic crops. This proposed research can likely be combined with other similar focus groups or surveys identified elsewhere in this report.

Another way to reach wider audiences of potentially food-insecure individuals and families is through increased marketing and education. Offering workshops or seminars (in person or virtual) at community centers, farmers markets, food pantries, schools, etc. on preparing the types of local food available in Maryland can help increase awareness of programs like MMM while working to educate Marylanders about new and potentially unfamiliar food items. Such events should offer free child

[10]Hilary Powell, "Charlotte barbers collect food to cut hunger," Spectrum Local News, August 22, 2018.
https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nc/charlotte/news/2018/08/22/charlotte-barbers-care-food-drive

[11] The University of Maryland Eastern Shore has been funded by the USDA to "expand and strengthen food science research, teaching and extension related to ethnic crops."
https://www.umes.edu/SANS/Content/SANS-News-Releases/UMES-study-addresses-increasing-demand-for-ethnic-crops-on-Delmarva/

care options and meals provided on-site in order to reduce participation barriers. To recruit presenter participation, incentives could be given to farmers and producers in the community.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?
Expanding the MMM program will require increasing the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) line item for the Farms and Families Grant Fund. Modernizing WIC/SNAP primarily relies on federal advocacy.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?
The FSRC requests a minimum of $200,000/year to fund the MMM program. Additional staff and consulting funding would be required to conduct the research and focus groups as described in earlier recommendations.

2022 UPDATE: HB456 (SB957) increases the amount of the supplemental benefit that the State must provide under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) from $30 to $40. The funding has been included in the Governor's FY23 budget and will be required to be included in budgets beginning in FY24. The FSRC supported this bill, and it aligns with Recommendation 2.2, *Expand and modernize use of food benefits, including Maryland Market Money and EBT*.

The original bill included a reduction of the age requirement for eligibility from 62 to 60 and called for an increase from $30 to $45/month. HB456, like several other bills this session, went to a Conference Committee and was passed in the final amended format without the age change and with a reduction in increase of the monthly stipend.

Recommendation 2.3: Establish and sustain Regional Agriculture Centers (RACs) in four MD regions (Eastern Shore, Western, North/Central and Southern)

Maryland's infrastructure (ARPA) funds can support the construction of three new and expanded Regional Agriculture Centers (RACs) and upgrading one center, which can provide the infrastructure needed for Maryland's small and medium-sized farms to expand the amount, access, and diversity of foods for consumption by Marylanders and others within our regional food-shed.

Currently, Maryland farms produce less than 10% of the vegetables consumed by Marylanders.[12] Two thirds of that 10% are starchy vegetables, such as corn and

[12] Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future's Report "Maryland Grown: How What We Grow Compares With What We Eat" April 2015 - https://mdfoodsystemmap.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Maryland-Grown-II.pdf

potatoes, and less than 6% (of the 10%) are green vegetables. Far less than the national average, only 2.5% of Maryland's cropland is devoted to vegetables, fruits, nuts, legumes, and grains for human consumption. Maryland's dairy, beef, fruit, turkey, and pork production have similar statistics. With more agricultural processing infrastructure, Maryland growers could improve in meeting the needs of Maryland consumers.

The economic advantage is that if Maryland commits to building agricultural infrastructure now, we could create an economic engine that provides rewarding career opportunities in our communities. In addition, production of biodiverse agricultural crops and animals (rotating families of crops, perennial crops, rotationally pastured animals, and implementation of protective vegetative buffers) could increase the regenerative nature of our agriculture.

Like the rest of the US a robust regional agricultural infrastructure is key to rebuilding food production in Maryland. It is a missing link that limits broad scale production of biodiverse agriculture, which can bring nutrient-dense foods to Marylanders. Without regional infrastructure that can aggregate, process, market, sell, and distribute Maryland farmers' output, farmers cannot bring many products to market. This type of infrastructure can include: small- and large-animal USDA processing, vegetable and meat aggregation, repacking, local and regional marketing, sales and distribution, commercial kitchens, and other value-added production assistance, such as bulk buying of inputs, consumables, packaging and other materials, storage and cold storage, equipment sharing and leasing, production technical assistance, and other ancillary services desired by the region's food producers.

This most important agricultural infrastructure is largely non-existent. The regional infrastructure that used to exist has long been dismantled, although many states are rapidly rebuilding "food hubs" with remarkable success. Notably, Vermont - although significantly smaller and with less land, less access to demographic markets, and a shorter growing season - has created 6,500 jobs and increased agricultural output by $3.8 Billion (a 48% increase) in only ten years by increasing local food consumption from 5% to 13%. [13]

A rebuilt local food infrastructure would strengthen Maryland's food system while achieving the following broad and independently significant goals:

(1) Improve the consumption of Maryland produced food, which would create a more resilient food system in the face of emergencies.
(2) Aid facilitates expansion and diversification of Maryland's farm and food sector, and creates jobs.
(3) Improve access to fresh, local food for Marylanders and for the surrounding region.
(4) Potentially lower processing and distribution costs of locally produced food,

[13] Vermont Farm to Plate Food Planning System - https://www.vsjf.org/programs/vermont-farm-to-plate-investment-program/

resulting in a mutual benefit of both producer and consumer.

The pandemic highlighted supply chain challenges that resulted in food shortages. It "led to massive disruption for growers, food workers, and consumers alike. It exposed a food system that was rigid, consolidated, and fragile," said US Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. Food system resilience is needed to combat disruptions of all kinds, including future pandemics and the imminent challenge of climate change. The keys to resilience are flexibility, redundancy, and the capacity to adapt. Maryland was precipitously vulnerable to food shortages during the pandemic, thanks in part to our reliance on other regions' food crops and the breaks in supply chains that originated far beyond our borders. Rebuilding regional agriculture centers is essential to ensure our supply chain is resilient.

This one-time request would fund a regional agriculture center market assessment, and four Regional Agriculture Centers (RAC's) across Maryland which include core aggregation, marketing, sales, and distribution services for locally produced foods.

The Regional Agriculture Center Market assessment (funding requirement of 800,000) would be implemented prior to the buildout of the four RAC. This would fund a market assessment for four Regional Agriculture Centers (RACs) across MD to assess existing efforts and needs in each region. This project will hire a project director to work under the direction of the Food Resiliency Council and bring stakeholders into each coalition, build the organizational structure, and establish protocols and essential food-chain relationships. The Coalition will also hire an expert consultant to conduct a market assessment.

The four RAC's would be located: on the Eastern Shore, in Western Maryland, in North/Central Maryland, and would build on the success of the one existing center, Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC), which would be expanded.

The facilities, services, programs, and product/market focus of each RAC would be responsive to the needs of the food producers and other interested stakeholders in each region based on a market assessment for four RACs across MD to assess existing efforts and needs for each region. Based on this market assessment, RACs could include aggregation, marketing, sales and distribution, bulk buying, storage, processing, shared equipment and equipment rentals, a commercial kitchen, and value-added production capabilities for producers and food entrepreneurs, technical assistance to producers, nutrition, and cooking education for the public, and other services. We recognize that SMADC already put some of this infrastructure in place, but is interested in expanding their services. Where needed, the RAC could also include animal processing facilities, including USDA-inspected processing, final cut butchering services, and mobile small- and large-animal processing units. Where needed, they could also include organic grain and pulse elevators and mills. RACs could not only substantially benefit the profitability of small and mid-sized farms, they could attract more adoption of regenerative practices, could potentially reduce production and distribution costs for Maryland's small and medium-sized producers,

and increase both healthy food availability and food system resiliency.

The Environment and Production subcommittee identified specific project needs for this to be successful, which include:

1. An expert consultant to conduct a market assessment for each region;
2. A Project Director to bring stakeholders into each coalition, build the organizational structure, and establish protocols and essential food-chain relationships;
3. Directors and administrative support for the three new RACs;
4. Contractual services to design, engineer, and build the three new RACs and upgrade SMADC;
5. New equipment for aggregation, distribution, storage, meat processing, cold storage, commercial kitchen, and other structures; and
6. Building infrastructure.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

Yes, $27,560M in funding is required for implementation of this recommendation, which includes a project director, expert consultant, administrative support, contractual services, equipment, and building infrastructure.

Recommendation 2.4: Establish a Distributed Network of Cold Storage for Food System Resiliency

(This recommendation relates to Recommendation 2.1 initially developed in 2021)

Cold storage units reduce food waste by extending the shelf life of rescued and donated food. This is particularly important with fresh produce that is nutrient-rich and often locally grown. In Maryland, local food distributors are forced to turn away donations or rescued foods because they do not have the cold storage capacity to keep it before the next distribution day. The pandemic exacerbated food insecurity in Maryland and has emphasized the need for increased cold storage. Cold storage that can accommodate larger equipment, such as pallet jacks, make it more possible for agencies, community centers, and local food distributors to store, sort, and distribute a variety of healthy, culturally appropriate items to their neighbors. This cold storage infrastructure would allow allocations at the state level to increase the opportunities for a range of agencies, from small choice pantries at places of worship to aggregators to make critical investments in cold storage infrastructure, as we work towards food security for all of Maryland's residents. The cold storage units could be used in events of emergency for food distribution networks, which could potentially be coordinated by MDEM if needed.

Project Needs: The total funding recommendation was calculated based on an average of one larger walk-in unit and two smaller walk-in units for each of the 23 counties and Baltimore City, with $60,000 for MDEM to administer and market the fund to receive proposals for building these units. A larger walk-in (24'x40') costs about $150k and a smaller (20'x20') walk-in costs about $55k to build and install, including the pad, electrical upgrades, equipment, and labor. MDEM would be responsible for marketing the grant funds, creating the cold storage request for proposals, and evaluating the applications based on locational need, maintenance plan with timeline, and collaboration plan, if short-term emergency coordination is needed.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

Yes, $6.3M funding required for implementation of this recommendation to accommodate cold storage infrastructure.

Recommendation 2.5: Fund the Grant Program to Reduce and Compost School Waste

(This recommendation relates to Recommendation 4.4 initially developed in 2021)

This grant program is designed to implement critical climate-protective efforts in schools throughout Maryland who wish to reach zero waste goals, compost organic materials, and place greater attention on fighting hunger with food recovery.

Funds will be used to start food and organic waste collection programs at schools that wish to play their part in diverting organic waste from incinerators and landfills and collecting uneaten foods that can be shared with hungry children. Currently food waste and edible foods are thrown into school trash at alarming rates. Approximately 50-60% of cafeteria waste are organic materials (foods and paper products) that can be recycled into soil. Yet, 100% of all organic materials can and should be composted. Alternatively, when food and organic waste is burned or placed in a landfill, it forms toxic incinerator ash that leaches into our water streams or methane that intensifies climate change (landfills are the 3rd largest source of methane in the U.S.). These unnecessary toxins can easily be diminished with composting and food recovery programs. The compost created from organic waste both captures carbon and is used as nutrient-rich soil for farms and landscaping. The amount of uneaten foods (whole apples, bags of carrots, whole yogurts) thrown away at school has increased significantly since Federal food insecurity programs have increased (*data available upon request).

Student leaders will be empowered through this program to help other students learn about the values of composting and food recovery efforts, and learn how to do it. Older students will mentor younger students - from High School Green Teams teaching Middle School Green Teams who then teach their Elementary School Green Team peers how to compost and share uneaten foods. Students inspire each other in this step to "save the earth, one banana peel at a time." When students learn more effective habits for organic waste-removal in schools, they inspire their families and homes to institute similar steps.

Through this funding approximately 55 schools, reaching more than 100,000 students plus staff, can begin compost removal and food recovery programs with current price structures. More schools can be supported when economies of scale can be applied.

Funds will be used to implement the grant program established in SB124 (2022) to support interested schools throughout Maryland and for an Administrator (part time). Supplies that would be funded by the grants would include green compost bins with wheels, compostable bags, weekly compost hauling services, a cart or mini refrigerator for recovered food items, and teacher stipends for green teams. This program will be modeled after the existing grant program instituted by Maryland's Coalition to Re-Imagine School Waste and Lunch out of Landfills.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

Yes, funding is required to implement this recommendation, amounting to $250,000 annually, to support interested schools throughout Maryland and for an Administrator. Supplies that would be funded by the grants would include green compost bins with wheels, compostable bags, weekly compost hauling services, a cart or mini refrigerator for recovered food items, and teacher stipends for green teams.

Goal 3

To expand the impact of existing food council organizations by:

- *Providing coordination and facilitation of knowledge exchange at the state level*
- *Supporting identification and application of grants to operating funds to support existing and new food council organizations as needed*

<u>Recommendation 3.1</u>: Established a state-grant funded program for food council start-up, sustainment, and expansion costs.

Not surprisingly, funding has been cited as a perennial problem since councils began forming in the 1980s. Advocacy and civic engagement are challenging to evaluate, and many private funders simply do not support advocacy efforts. Outside of in-kind contributions, councils most commonly received funding from private foundations (42% of councils); individuals (34%); and local, state, or government grants (27%) and budgets (27%).[14] Federal grants accounted for less than 20% of council funding in 2018.

Funding for council work remains scarce, even with their stepped-up roles during the pandemic. A national survey of food councils in 2018 by the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future found that 29% report having no funding; 34% $1-$10,000; 11% between $10,001-25,000; 15% between $25,001-100,000; and 11% over $100,000. Thirty-six percent have paid staff. In Maryland, four of the five councils are currently funded in some capacity but not necessarily funded at an appropriate level of effort. Furthermore, lack of diverse and consistent funding streams makes this critical network of food councils unstable, particularly during emergencies like COVID when costs increase and revenue to cover response-related expenses are uncertain.

The Council recommends the state initiate a grant program to assist new councils to form and existing councils to expand, in areas with interest and support for greater collaboration throughout the food system. The minimum grant amount should be $20,000. Applicants could be county governments, non-profits, or community-based organizations with a fiscal sponsor. Collaboration among local governments should be encouraged, such as the Western Maryland Food Council (WMFC). Applicants must demonstrate that the funding will support a collaborative, cross-sector body representing a diverse group of stakeholders that address food-related issues and needs within a city, county, state, tribal, or multi-jurisdictional region.

The Council also recommends establishing innovation grant funds to encourage local problem solving for food system resiliency at the community level that could be available to food councils, non-profits, or community-based organizations with a fiscal sponsor.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?
No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?
Yes. The FSRC recommends allocating $250,000 for the grant fund.

[14] Karen Bassarab, Raychel Santo, Anne Palmer (2019). Food Policy Council Report 2018. Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future.
https://assets.jhsph.edu/clf/mod_clfResource/doc/FPC%20Report%202018-FINAL-4-1-19.pdf

<u>Recommendation 3.2</u> : Establish a requirement and supportive funding for Maryland counties to identify a local food system coordination body, such as a local food council.

(This recommendation relates to Recommendation 3.1 initially developed in 2021)

The local food council may be county-based or regional, and it may be a government entity or a non-governmental organization. The local food system coordination body is responsible for organizing and convening local stakeholders to address systemic causes of food insecurity and malnutrition, including racial inequality within its locality. At minimum, the body should include local government and municipalities (including food security coordinators, health departments, school systems, social services, agriculture/extension, and emergency management), farmers, adult daycare, non-governmental organizations including food assistance organizations and advocacy organizations, and residents of the locality with lived experience from each jurisdiction represented by the body.

The local food council should be required to establish a continuous food system coordination security plan which obtains and uses data, existing resources for food security policy council start-up, and best practices to determine the needs of the jurisdiction and outlines strategies and tactics that are aligned with the Food System Resiliency Council (FSRC) goals. The local food councils should be required to make recommendations to the FSRC and local governments on matters pertaining to improving the resiliency of the local food system. Local food council leaders should be required to attend coordination meetings with other local food councils and the FSRC.

The State shall provide funding for the setup and ongoing activities of the local food system through the chosen local government coordinating body. Funding will be disseminated annually through the Maryland Department of Emergency Management to local food system coordinating bodies, up to $100,000 on a three-year sliding scale. (Note: overall funding request is $2.4 million annually). The funding should also provide stipends to allow residents with lived experience of food insecurity and food assistance recipients to participate in the local food council without exacerbating the burden of lost work time, childcare arrangements, or other hardships that participation in daytime or normal business hour meetings and activities might bring. The State should also consider providing competitive grant funding for discrete projects related to improving or expanding production, distribution, access, and waste management within the food system.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

Yes, legislation is required to implement this recommendation to mandate local food system coordination bodies.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

Yes, funding is required for implementation of this recommendation for the setup and ongoing activities of the local food system through the chosen local government coordinating body. Funding will be disseminated annually through the Maryland Department of Emergency Management to local food system coordinating bodies, up to $100,000 on a three-year sliding scale. Estimated overall funding request is $2.4M annually.

Goal 4

To develop, on or before November 1, 2021, a strategic plan to increase the production and procurement of Maryland certified food, including:

- *Increasing the quality and quantity of production as well as aggregation, marketing, and distribution of local food in urban, suburban, and rural settings*
- *Increasing procurement of local food through schools, universities and other institutions*
- *Creating additional market opportunities for Maryland food businesses*
- *Expanding access to small scale manufacturing and food production infrastructure*

Recommendation 4.1: Establish incentives to encourage Maryland school systems to purchase Maryland food.

As a state that values both its agricultural activity and its proximity to the great Chesapeake Bay, Maryland takes great pride in its watershed stewardship initiatives. For example, agricultural enterprises in Maryland that generate more than the set threshold of live animal weight or gross income per year are required to follow a nutrient management plan. The cost of implementing and monitoring soil and nutrient health is a cost that farmers must internalize; as a result, local (Maryland-grown) products are sometimes more expensive than their out-of-state equivalents.

The Maryland Certified Local Farm Enterprise Program provides a good starting framework for shifting state procurement practices to support local food production and agriculture. The FSRC supports the intentions behind this program and the legislation which created it. As this program is rolled out, the Council will monitor the implementation of this program to identify any changes or adjustments that may need to be made in the coming years. The FSRC looks forward to seeing this program expanded to continually raise the bar for state procurement by incorporating shared values like fair labor practices, environmental sustainability, and eliminating racial inequity.

Supporting publicly-funded institutions like school districts with financial incentives to purchase local food makes participating in optional local food purchasing initiatives more financially feasible. As a result, sales of local food increase and partnerships between schools and local farmers are formed and strengthened. In particular, providing school-age children with access to more fresh, local food plays a huge role in reducing food insecurity and promoting educational achievement. For students that rely on school meal programs, the opportunity to educate children and families about different types of local food can be attained through innovative programming that incentivizes schools to provide access to these partnerships

The FSRC recommends adopting legislation that incentivizes school districts purchasing locally grown or produced food. In conjunction with hands-on school programs such as gardening education or cafeteria food tastings to teach school-age children about healthy, local food choices, Maryland schools could serve as Mid-Atlantic models for sustainable, healthy food choice. The impact of a meal reimbursement program could be multiplied if programs like Backpack Buddies were eligible for funding as well.[15]

Indeed, there are many state procurement initiatives that aim to help K-12 school districts acquire local foods. Michigan has a very successful program where school districts can receive a $.10 per-meal reimbursement if the meal contains a certain quota of locally grown produce[16]. The program was recently expanded beyond its pilot phase and is now available to around 445,000 students in 146 school districts (an increase from 48,000 students in 16 districts in its pilot year 2016-17). Other states have their own versions of this initiative using different financial models; in New Mexico, for example, schools are given grants at the beginning of the school year to purchase produce from local farms.[17] Closer to home, the District of Columbia (DC) offers schools $.05 per meal when at least one component of either breakfast or lunch consists of a locally-grown, unprocessed food as part of DC's Healthy Schools Act[18].

State-funded support of food distribution programs need not be limited to public school districts. Institutions responsible for feeding Marylanders, such as prisons, adult care facilities, and hospitals, have an opportunity to reach a wide range of

[15] Anne Arundel County Food Bank, "Backpack Buddies," Last accessed October 19, 2021, https://aafoodbank.org/backpack-buddies
[16] "10 Cents a Meal for Michigan's Kids & Farms", Last accessed September 30, 2021, https://www.tencentsmichigan.org/
[17] New Mexico Public Education Department, "Farm to School," September 10, 2021, https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/student-success-wellness/nutrition/farm-to-school/
[18] DC Code §38-821.02. Retrieved from: https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/Healthy%20Schools%20Act%20Informational%20Guide%2012.13.19.pdf

individuals and families with the foods they serve, and the FSRC recognizes the importance of ensuring healthy food access to these populations. The FSRC will continue to discuss incentive program opportunities to make publicly-funded facilities eligible for grants or reimbursements to help more Marylanders gain access to fresh, local food.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?
Modeling procurement policy after what other states have done will likely require legislation. For example, following Michigan's program will require legislation, while other models may use other mechanisms for implementation.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?
A reimbursement program modeled after an example like Michigan's "10 Cents a Meal" program requires funding approval from the state legislature and Governor. Other potential models, such as direct grant programs to school districts, will require an identified funding source as well.

2022 UPDATE: SB121 (HB147) passed and was signed by the Governor. The law also establishes the Maryland Farm-to-School Meal Grant Pilot Program within the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to incentivize production, procurement, and provision of local foods, to be conducted between July 1, 2022 and June 30, 2026. The program allows $0.20 per meal to school districts for the purchase, processing, procurement, staffing, or infrastructure investments needed to meet the number of meals with a local food component. School districts will determine the number of meals they expect to serve with the local food component. School districts which demonstrate how meal reimbursements would support the development, cultivation, and longstanding commitment to the incorporation of local food components into school meals, and those that demonstrate arrangements that support minority or socially disadvantaged producers, processors, distributors, or businesses are required to be prioritized by MSDE. The first reading of this bill required an annual budget appropriation in FY24 and FY25 of at least $500,000. This requirement was removed in the final signed version of the bill.

Recommendation 4.2: Increase access to and use of technology to create and modify platforms to connect producers directly with consumers.

Increased physical distancing requirements, facility closures, and other public health-related restrictions which were implemented to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 highlighted the need for a virtual solution to traditionally in-person events

and transactions. Even in jurisdictions without stay-at-home orders during the height of the pandemic, restrictions on the sizes of events and outdoor gatherings made holding farmers markets impossible. This had a detrimental effect on farmers, many of whom rely on farmers market sales as their main income source.[19]

In Frederick County, the local food council created an online platform as a solution to in-person farmers' market restrictions. Their platform, Frederick Fresh Online, connects farmers with shoppers through weekly online farmers markets. It allows users to sort available products by item type or by producer and select products to purchase. Once an order has been completed, it is consolidated by volunteers and made available for pickup at one of four pre-designated locations in Frederick County. The system provides an opportunity for farmers to sell their products without the added burden of creating and maintaining their own online stores. This helps producers by expanding their markets beyond the traditional in-person weekly farmers market, and it reaches a younger audience who are more accustomed to online purchasing.

The Council recommends exploring a regional and/or statewide virtual platform to connect producers and individual consumers. While the MDA has a dedicated website that provides information about local agriculture, it does not currently offer an e-commerce feature.[20] MDA is surveying farmers to see if there is interest in a state-run or supported e-commerce platform. Once this survey is completed, the Council will have a better understanding of how best to connect consumers and producers in a productive manner. The FSRC maintains that any efforts to expand technology use should not limit participation in services for those without reliable access to the internet

Regardless of the final solution employed to help connect producers and consumers, FSRC recommends continued marketing and outreach to make sure the general public knows about the great products available for purchase directly from Maryland farmers. In a continued effort to increase access to local goods to all Marylanders, the platform must have the capability to accept EBT payments for food benefits redemption and should seek out ways to highlight availability of culturally diverse product choices. This could be facilitated by allowing small farms to connect with each other to aggregate their products in order to reach new markets which require larger supply volume, institutions connecting directly with farmers, or other innovative methods of using technology to increase access to local food sources.

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[19] Mary Carole McCauley, "'People need to eat': Making sense of why some Maryland farmers markets are open during the coronavirus pandemic," *Baltimore Sun,* April 4, 2021, https://www.baltimoresun.com/coronavirus/bs-fe-farmers-markets-covid-19-20200404-s6khw2pzvjbmrozdxt7pnfvrku-story.html)

[20] marylandsbest.maryland.gov

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?
No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?
MDA currently has funding to update Maryland's Best platform to include potential e-commerce options. Other technology expansions, including the integration of EBT, may require additional funding.

Recommendation 4.3: Diversify opportunities for small- and mid-scale producers.

Maryland livestock farmers were inundated by demand for their products when the COVID-19 pandemic began, and this strong demand for locally-produced meat continues to this day. Many Maryland livestock producers report wait times of year or more to schedule their animals for processing at area USDA-inspected and custom-exempt facilities. With help from federal economic recovery funds, Maryland Agricultural & Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) offered a pilot program in spring 2021 to help Maryland livestock processors scale up their production and processing capability. Through the Maryland Livestock Processing Equipment Relief Grants Program, MARBIDCO awarded grants to 22 small livestock processing businesses totaling nearly $580,946.[21]

In addition to setting local food procurement goals for State institutions, the Certified Local Farm Enterprise Program also established the Local Farm Enterprise Food Aggregation Grant Fund Pilot Program. This program intends to support the expansion of farm food aggregation by awarding grants to groups of small- and medium-sized farms to expand local processing or distribution of farm products.[22] Its main objective is to help facilitate the aggregation of foods produced by smaller farm operations so that they are able to be sold to State institutions and wholesale distribution companies.

The Council supports these programs as ways to provide more opportunities for more livestock farmers. These programs allow funds to be used for a variety of new projects, including expanding existing meat processing capabilities, purchasing cold storage to better consolidate meat products for wholesale production, and potentially covering the cost of new employee training courses.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?
No.

[21] https://www.marbidco.org/_pages/relief_act/program_relief_act.html
[22]https://www.marbidco.org/_pages/programs_grants/grant_programs_lfag.htm

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?
The Livestock Processing Equipment Grants Program funds have already been committed for FY2021. The FSRC recommends $750,000 per year for at least two additional years. If this program is successful, the Council would like to see it funded as a continuous and fully sustainable program.

The Local Food Aggregation Grant Fund pilot is currently funded through FY2025 and should be reevaluated before these funds expire.

<u>Recommendation 4.4</u>: Support statewide, regional, and local incentives or one-time grant programs to increase the number of food waste sites. Provide complementary technical assistance to local or regional entities to establish private sector or local government food waste programs.

The Council recognizes the work of the Maryland Department of the Environment and the Maryland General Assembly on increasing the number of food waste sites around the State. Notably, the 2021 passage of HB 264 (Organics Recycling and Waste Diversion - Food Residuals) requires many establishments that generate food waste to separate food residuals from other solid waste, as well as ensure those residuals are diverted to more sustainable uses (composting sites, animal feed, etc.); however, the requirement only applies to large-volume sites and those generators who have a processor capable of taking the waste within 30 miles.[23]

State, regional, and local incentive programs to establish processing facilities and other sites capable of taking this food waste or implementing other types of diversion programs (such as animal feed, composting, or anaerobic digestion) would increase the existing law's impact and efficacy. Alternatively, the State or local government could establish one-time capital grant programs or no-interest loans to assist in deferring the start-up costs, particularly for smaller systems that could be more sustainable long-term but have higher initial costs due to economies of scale.

The State should provide technical assistance to communities and private sector entities on establishing food waste sites and programs. For food waste site start up, the State should support local government, community organizations and companies in understanding and navigating the process of setting up sites, permits (environmental and power purchase agreements), community input mechanisms, and other steps for establishing anaerobic digestion or composting facilities. The

[23]Solid Waste Management - Organics Recycling and Waste Diversion - Food Residuals, Chapter 441 of 2021, Retrieved from https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2021RS/bills/hb/hb0264E.pdf

State should also provide technical assistance to businesses on how to divert organics from the waste stream.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?
No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?
Yes. The council recommends seeding this grant program with $500,000. The program will also require management costs, which are estimated at approximately $150,000. Additional resources for technical assistance may be needed, depending on demand.

Recommendation 4.5: Increase education on source separation of food waste and possibilities for on-farm composting/digestion.

The Council identified education as a key step in reducing food waste and increasing composting and anaerobic digestion across the state. It recommends a multi-pronged approach for education, from schools to consumers to business owners:

- The State should work with educational institutions to bring food waste programming to schools, including information about pre-consumer and post-consumer waste. The programming should include tool kits that provide supplies for composting at schools.
- Provide education for farmers on how to navigate taking food waste for composting or energy production (digestion). Expand education on manure to energy programs and options for farmers.
- Create a "one stop shop" for regulations, best practices, and education surrounding food waste, soil health, and water quality.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?
No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?
Yes. Based on comparable programs at the state level, $200,000 of startup and first year funding with $150,000 of sustainment funding would be sufficient.

Recommendation 4.6: Fund the Maryland Farm to School Grant Pilot

(This recommendation relates to Recommendation 4.1 initially developed in 2021)

Gleaning from the insights of successful programs, administrators, and advocates in Michigan, New York, and California, the Farm to School Pilot Grant program (per SB121) would allow Maryland school districts to apply for grants of 20 cents for every

meal that the school expects to offer that includes a Maryland food component. Farm-to-school initiatives in Maryland currently receive no state-allocated funding or staffing for this purpose. A local school district could use the grant money for processing, procurement, staffing, or infrastructure investments needed to incorporate a local food component in the needed number of meals. This request would allocate $500,000 to the pilot across applicant school districts to further provide local, healthy food for Maryland's school children.

Per SB121, to provide schools and school districts the opportunity to receive funds for serving foods with a Maryland food component through the Maryland Farm to School Grant Program ($0.20 for every meal).

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

Yes, $500,000 to provide schools and school districts the opportunity to receive funds for serving foods with a Maryland food component through the Maryland Farm to School Grant Program (estimated amount ranging $0.20 for every meal).

Recommendation 4.7: Conduct Comprehensive Statewide Food Supply Value Chain Studies

Comprehensive statewide value chain studies that have a regional context are needed, to identify food processing needs for selected food products (beef, poultry, fruit, dairy, vegetables, small grains, etc.), local food supply chain gaps, and value chain specific recommendations. A competitive contract/grant process can be conducted with expected applications from groups of researchers from local universities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and research groups to study gaps in the statewide value chain, and make recommendations to close these gaps. These studies could use the Chesapeake Foodshed Assessment conducted in 2019, prior to the pandemic, as a starting point for an updated assessment with COVID impacts, and environmental justice incorporated.[24]

The FSRC recommends establishing a competitive grant process administered by the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) or appropriate party, with funds for administrative support and the contract.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

[24] Chesapeake Foodshed Assessment - https://agnr.umd.edu/sites/agnr.umd.edu/files/files/documents/Hughes%20Center/2019__Chesapeake-Foodshed-Assessment_02.pdf

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

Yes, this recommendation requires funding for the completion of comprehensive statewide value chain studies with administrative support and contract. Funding request of $600,000.

Recommendation 4.8: Expand Technical Assistance to Farmers Market Managers and Organizers

Farmers' market groups have identified a need for a high quality technical assistance for current and future online markets, farm stands, traditional farmers' market managers, and organizers across the State to increase services, outreach, and innovation in this space. During listening sessions held by MARBIDCO and SMADC in Spring 2022, participants expressed a need for financial resources to create a full-time position to provide technical assistance to grow traditional, farm stand, and online farmers markets across the State. This position could be housed at the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA), or the University of Maryland Extension (UME).

The FSRC recommends providing funds for UME or MDA to hire one extension agent/state worker dedicated to farmers market assistance.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?

No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?

Yes, funding amounting to $165,000 annually, is needed for University of Maryland Extension or Maryland Department of Agriculture to hire support dedicated to farmers market assistance.

Recommendation 4.9: Baseline Assessment and Reduction of Maryland's Greenhouse Gas Emissions for Public Food Purchasing

Conduct a baseline assessment of the state's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions associated with state-funded food purchases and pledge to reduce those emissions by at least 25% by 2030. The state will establish best practices for achieving emissions reductions, such as reducing food waste or shifting to climate-friendly menus. This assessment would be integrated into the 2030 Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Act (GGRA) Plan.

Currently, Maryland does not have a strategy in place to address emissions associated with food purchasing or consumption, and the state's own food procurement is its most direct point of leverage to reduce these emissions. Maryland purchases a significant amount of food, namely for correctional facilities (25 million meals), 11 healthcare facilities, and 29 public universities. Shifting to more plant-forward menus in Maryland's public feeding programs would not only benefit climate but would also have major co-benefits for public health. According to the most recent Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA), three-quarters of Americans are meeting or exceeding the recommended maximum consumption of meat, poultry, and eggs, while most Americans do not meet the minimum recommended intakes for beans, peas, and lentils. An analysis of Maryland Department of Corrections menus found that people incarcerated in state prisons were served twice as much meat, poultry, and eggs than recommended by the DGA. Shifting to more plant-rich menus will better align these menus with public health recommendations. The same analysis found that the food served in Maryland's correctional facilities has an annual carbon footprint equivalent to the emissions from 10,416 passenger vehicles. The recommendations (25 % reduction) are similar to pledges made by Washington, DC, University of Maryland - College Park, and other institutions/jurisdictions to reduce GHG emissions associated with food waste, food procurement, and food production value chain.

Is legislation required to implement this recommendation?
No.

Is funding required to implement this recommendation?
Yes, an annual funding amount of $70,000 is needed for the Department of General Services (DGS), in consultation with Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), to develop the baseline assessment and subsequent annual assessments to track progress, establish best practices, and provide technical assistance to other food procuring agencies. DGS could provide purchasing information (quantity/cost/vendor), while MDE could consult relative to the GHG impacts/implications. The cost estimates are based on a similar proposal in previously introduced legislation, the Department of Legislative Services estimated DGS would require the salary and fringe benefits of a program manager as well as minimal consulting fees, one-time start-up costs, and ongoing operating expenses.

Summary of Subcommittee Work

Communications and Coordination Subcommittee

After an active legislative session, the Communications and Coordination subcommittee began examining potential structural options for the future of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council. Per statute, the specific deliverable is to report to the Maryland General Assembly with recommendations for a long term structure for a statewide food policy council including:

1. Appropriate policy and legislative changes
2. Potential ways to restructure the Council as such:
    1. Placing the Council within a different agency or organizations; or
    2. Enacting a sunset provision for the Council
3. Any other recommendations of the Council

This assignment was undertaken with the approval of the full FSRC membership, with the understanding the subcommittee would conduct research to narrow down existing structural options in order to present three thoroughly researched recommendations for the full Council to vote on during the September 1st workshop. *Note: The Communication and Coordination Subcommittee's proposed recommendation did not prohibit FSRC membership from considering other organizational options*.

MDEM staff gathered several options at the request of the Communication and Coordination subcommittee. The following structural options were presented for evaluation:

- **Remain an independent Executive Branch council** - While the Council is staffed by MDEM and co-chaired by the Secretary, the Council is considered an independent Executive Branch entity, as the current statute does not identify the Council as a body within the Department. Interagency committees, councils, boards, and task forces often are formed to coordinate the work of government agencies in a particular field. Other examples of these bodies include:Maryland Active Assailant Interagency Working Group, Commission on Aging, and Maryland Cybersecurity Coordinating Council. Perceived benefits regarding this option are the absence of changes to council organizational structure, and there are no changes required in the statute. Perceived challenges include a lack of guaranteed funding resources in the future, and potential impact on priorities and support for the Council due to changes in administration.
- **Become a formal, established body within Maryland Department of Emergency Management (MDEM)** - MDEM currently staffs the Council by statute; however, the Council is not considered an MDEM body. There are two existing structural options for the Council to move fully under MDEM: (1) remain a stand-alone group under the direction of the Secretary, such as the Maryland 9-1-1 Board. The 9-1-1 Board has an Executive Director and support staff that directs the strategic management of the 9-1-1 Trust Fund, and

development/implementation of statewide 9-1-1 policy. The 9-1-1 Board is governed by the Public Safety Article, §1-301-315. The board's 24 members are appointed to four-year terms by the governor with Senate advice and consent. MDEM is required to provide staffing for the Board, which is funded by the Trust Fund. (2) Align under the existing MDEM structure, and with the implementation of the Office of Resilience, and Chief Resilience Officer, which will be effective October 1. Identified benefits presented to the subcommittee include long-term responsibility assigned to a principal state department and the ability to request funding through the budget process. Associated challenges identified include subjecting the Council to changes in staffing and/or administrations, which could affect Council priorities.

- **Move to another state agency** - Current state agency members of the Council are Maryland Department of Agriculture, Department of Human Services, Commerce, and Maryland State Department of Education. Presented benefits associated with this option include the potential to lean on embedded subject matter experts for policy development and research support; a perceived barrier to transitioning to a state agency focused on one area within the food system could result in a redirection of Council work to focus on the home agency mission.
- **Transition to become an independent agency or commission** - A number of independent agencies and commissions exist in the state government. While the missions, staffing, and authorities vary, *generally* these agencies have independent staffing and some level of authority to direct policy or regulation in a particular area. Some examples of independent agencies include Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services Systems, and Commission on Civil Rights. This option would allow some level of authority or regulatory power to implement food system-related policies or programmatic work; accordingly, the Council's mission, values, and priorities are independent per council antimony. One identified challenge is the need to obtain significant funding for organizational needs (i.e. staffing, office space, equipment, etc.). Additionally, the Council's current mission intersects with several state agency areas of responsibility, which may result in unnecessary bureaucracy and confusion.
- **Transition to a non-governmental entity** - The Council could transition to a non-governmental entity like a 501(c)3, as there is no requirement for the Council to remain or exist in State government. Associated benefits are that the Council, as an independent organization, is not directly affected by changes in political administrations in State government. Additionally the council would have flexibility in advocacy, action taken by the council body, and funding independently with the ability to use private funding streams to support activities. Challenges indicated are (1) the amount of fundraising required (seed money for startup and sustainability), and (2) abstinence of the current supporting state agency (MDEM) from support duties, rendering a need to hire staff or volunteer services.

Further exploration was undertaken by the subcommittee with subject matter experts in a panel discussion with several state food policy councils, including Delaware Council Farm and Food Policy, Colorado Food System Advisory Council,

and Rhode Island Food Policy Council. Each panelist presented information on their organizational structure while determining benefits, challenges, funding, and resource availability. Other items indicated by each panelist included council membership, terms of membership, bylaws, how the council was established, mission, and vision which guide the council's programmatic work.

Ultimately the subcommittee determined two options were not beneficial for the organizational development of the Food System Resiliency Council. First, undertaking a move to another state agency was eliminated due to several state agencies (i.e. DHS (SNAP), MDA (agricultural programs), Maryland Department of Health (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children), MSDE (school meal programs)) that run silo programs, and do not work in conjunction with each other. There were also concerns regarding uncertainty of staffing support capacity at another agency, other agencies may not be able to replicate current standards. The subcommittee indicated the goal of the FSRC is to connect resources, share information, and facilitate a broad-based effort for Maryland's food system. The subcommittee acknowledged that MDEM is an agency with long-term experience in coordination of resources, pass-through funding, and connecting local and state agencies, private, and non-profit organizations for one common cause.

The second option eliminated was transitioning to a non-governmental entity, as the FSRC will need to compete with existing charters for funding in order to sustain itself (i.e. fund raise, provide direction, staffing). Non-profit organizations historically are subject to funding challenges and are somewhat sensitive to administrative priority changes (e.g. the Howard County Food Security Taskforce). As such, subcommittee members determined the FSRC should remain as part of the government with the ability to continue Council advocacy activities which are reflective of the views of the council membership, not a particular organization or governmental agency.

The final recommendation adopted by the subcommittee, which was presented at the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council workshop in September for further consideration is indicated below (note: the structural options below are ranked, from most favorable to less favorable, and were presented to the full FSRC membership as such).The FSRC ranked the three remaining structural options as follows:

1. Become a formal, established body with Maryland Department of Emergency Management
2. Remain an Independent Executive Branch Council
3. Transition to Independent Agency or Commission

The FSRC membership engaged in robust discussion related to future structural and organizational options during the FSRC September 1st workshop, during which council membership reviewed the current FSRC structure. As an independent executive branch council, the FSRC governs itself and it is not governed by MDEM; however, potential financial requests made to the Department of Budget Management (DBM) are submitted on behalf of the Council by MDEM.

The final recommendation of the FSRC is to change the current statute and establish the FSRC as a unit within MDEM. The Council will continue to refine the desired language to be reflective of their interest in balancing maintaining as much autonomy as possible with gaining the additional support that comes with being a unit within MDEM.

Distribution and Access Subcommittee

Distribution and Access Subcommittee members explored the recommendation made in the mid-year report, related to supporting the development of county-based food policy councils or food council-like management groups in a more in-depth way. Experts in food council implementation presented to the Subcommittee, providing further clarity on current food council practices, to facilitate meaningful recommendation development. The FSRC's food policy council expert Anne Palmer, Program Director for Food Communities and Public Health at Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future's Food Policy Networks, has provided support to the Subcommittee in setting its goals and objectives related to this topic. Sydney Daigle, Director for Prince George's County Food Equity Council, as well as Heather Bruskin, Executive Director for Montgomery County Food Council, presented additional pertinent information related to development of council organizational structure, funding, bylaws, and guiding principles.

Local management board (LMB) subject matter expert Pamela M. Brown, Ph.D., from Anne Arundel County Partnership for Children, Youth, and Families, presented the unique role LMBs play in each jurisdiction. LMBs were implemented in the 1990s, with each county creating its own LMB that responds to local needs based on an assessment developed by a diverse group including community members, LMB staff, social services, mental health services, and other key stakeholders within the jurisdiction. During the COVID-19 pandemic, LMBs were strategically placed within jurisdictions to provide assistance with food, transportation resources, coordination and distribution of personal protective equipment, mental health resources, and other community needs. Similarly, the Subcommittee examined the structure of Maryland's community mediation centers (CMC), since Maryland Judiciary provides stable operating support for CMCs that demonstrate several community-based efforts. These activities include training community members who reflect the community's diversity, providing mediation services, educating community members, and other community-based activities.

Finally, Distribution and Access subcommittee chair Diana Taylor, and co-chair Meg Kimmel explored options for collaborating with the State Partnerships Improving Nutrition and Equity (SPINE) grant program, after determining similarities in objectives and goals with the FSRC. SPINE is a year-long national grant program that addresses food and nutrition security through sustainable and equitable actions that tackle economic and social conditions which limit food and nutrition security. As part of this program, the Maryland Department of Health has convened a food and

nutrition security advisory working group to support SPINE efforts and guide program components. The SPINE team also sought individuals with lived experience of food and nutrition insecurity to participate in advisory working group meetings. These individuals will serve as a voice for persons and communities who have been impacted by food and nutrition insecurity, providing guidance and support to build and implement the SPINE state action plan.
Maryland SPINE program components include:

- Establish a food and nutrition security program within the Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Control at the Maryland Department of Health.
- Launch a food and nutrition security advisory working group to support all SPINE efforts.
- Identify existing and new partners to support SPINE efforts, including at least one person with lived experience.
- Partner with local health improvement coalitions (LHICs) to create food and nutrition security subcommittees.
- Partner with Moveable Feast to support the Food Access Support Services Team (FASST)'s development of a streamlined nutrition services referral system.

Specific areas of interest for the Distribution and Access subcommittee relate to SPINE's proposals for LHICs, the ongoing work with FASST, and strategic development for continuation of SPINE projects past the funding expiration date.

By combining the concept of local-based structures and the SPINE program components (specifically involving individuals within the community that have lived experience), the Subcommittee recommends creating a set of guidelines for state-supported local food system coordinating bodies within each county. Jurisdictions would either utilize current operating food policy councils (e.g. SPINE LHICs) or create a newly established coordinating body, depending on local resources available.

Environment and Production Subcommittee

Post the mid-year report, the Environment and Production subcommittee continued meeting every two weeks. During these meetings the subcommittee engaged in a panel discussion, regarding how to extend healthy soil practices to healthy food. While the first report consisted of "shovel ready" recommendations, there are several areas indicated that remained for consideration for the Nov 2022 report. As such the subcommittee began examining several items, including, "Fully Fund the Maryland Healthy Soils Initiative." This item was later revised, to state "Integrate recommendations from the Maryland Healthy Soils Initiative into considerations to Food Resiliency and regenerative agriculture practices", due to the completion of the Maryland Healthy Soils Program Final Report, in January 2022. This prompted the Environment and Production subcommittee to focus on climate changes, and resiliency using regenerative agriculture practices, food hubs, and increasing incentives for production of table crops, while supporting commodity foods.

The subcommittee began drafting recommendations, by categorizing information into the following:

- Regional production and identifying areas to concentrate on to increase food resiliency, including supply chain gaps
- Climate change, regenerative agriculture, and food waste, and
- Food Hubs, Farmers Market Associations, Internet marketplaces implementation, and processing

Several meeting with subject matter experts including:

- Engaging in Maryland Agricultural & Resource Based-Industry Development Corporation (MARBIDCO) listening sessions for farmers' market engagement
- Formation of sub-subcommittees to examine methods of adaptation and climate change and
- Facilitated discussion with agriculture economists from University of Maryland, members of the Soil Health Advisory Committee, and a study by Soil Carbon Partners on regenerative agriculture and soil amendments.

In addition to the recommendations in this report, the committee will look for ways to support new programs, such as the 'Small Acreage Cover Crop Program to Support Urban Agriculture,' 'Healthy Soils Competitive Fund,' 'Cover Crop+ Program,' and 'Urban Agriculture Water and Power Infrastructure Grant Program and Fund. Furthermore, the committee supports the creation of the Task force to make recommendations on the feasibility of returning to State meat processing inspection, as well as efforts underway at MARBIDCO to identify new financial resources to support the enhancement of livestock processing capacity in Maryland. Finally, there is support for the effort at MDA, to enhance the statewide and county level marketing support for farmers and seafood producers, through the new Certified Local Farm Enterprise.

Summary of Council Activities

The Council continued participating in activities outside of monthly meetings and Subcommittee meetings. This section will provide an update from the June 2022 mid-year report, highlighting the activities of the Council between June and November 2022.

Equity Presentation with Dr. Keshia Pollack Porter (JHU)

On June 7th FSRC members and interested parties attended a virtual presentation, led by Dr. Pollack Porter (PhD, Chair for Department of Health, Policy and

Management at John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health). Dr. Pollack Porter is a leading health equity scholar whose research and practice addresses the determinants of health, spending considerable time directly engaging with policymakers to inform the development and implementation of policies that advance health equity at all levels of government. This presentation showcased Dr. Pollack Porter's student equity analysis of bills that the Communications and Coordination Subcommittee considered supporting during this year's legislative session. Bills analyzed included:

- HB 1352 Health and Wellness Standards: Correctional Facilities
- HB 147 MD Farms and Families Fund

Council members engaged in a robust conversation related to recommendations introduced by Dr. Pollack Porter and her team, debating the positive and negative attributes of each bill accordingly. Regarding HB 1352 Health and Wellness Standards: Correctional Facilities, overall consideration was expressed for updating minimum mandatory standards for incarcerated individual's food service by implementing various initiatives, such as creating a cultural competency panel to review dietician-recommended meals, and facilitating a group discussion to identify the least resistant pathway to notate an incarcerated individual's dietary preference. Other well-noted strategies included converting open space to inmate-run gardens within jails to reduce cost and provide activities for incarcerated individuals, and creating an interdisciplinary task force with professional stakeholders and incarcerated individuals to determine effective ways to transform nourishment at prison to ensure racial equity.

While discussing HB 147 MD Farms and Families Fund, positive and negative features were identified related to both the Food and Agricultural Resiliency Mechanism Grant Program and the Farm to School Meal Grant Program. Notable concerns related to the Farm and Families Fund included a failure to state the objective for addressing racial discrimination among food-insecure buyers and sellers at farmers' markets, and a 10% reduction of funds used to match Farmers' Market Nutrition Progam, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and Woman, Infants, and Child (WIC) benefits. It was noted that 60% of SNAP beneficiaries are persons of color; it is therefore recommended that policymakers examine how budget cuts disproportionately affect communities based on race and ethnicity.

The Food and Agricultural Resiliency Mechanism Grant Program indicated no assurance to farmers of color that they will receive preference when surplus farm produce is procured. Furthermore, the bill fails to elaborate how food banks and emergency food providers will operate during emergencies as their actions or inactions may impact racial equity. Some broad-based recommendations discussed included: embedding a formal racial equity framework in HB 147 for the three programs (Maryland Farms and Families Fund, Maryland Food and Agricultural Resilience Mechanism, and Maryland Farm-to-School Meal Grant Program) ; requiring funding for program development, outreach training, and capacity building to address transportation access to farmers market, as it relates to neighborhoods of racial minorities and/or low-income neighborhoods; and requiring

grant-funded non-profits to report on what efforts they make to support farmers market transportation access to and from these identified neighborhoods.

Maryland Food System Resiliency Council Workshop

On September 1, 2022 the Council participated in a scheduled workshop to facilitate discussion regarding the FSRC future structural recommendations, funding considerations, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training.

DEI training was undertaken at the request of the FRSC membership. While drafting the 2021 report, members identified a need to discuss DEI fundamentals and how DEI intersects with the work of the council. During the training, Council members participated in a facilitated group discussion and group activities in order to begin conceptualizing how DEI principles could influence recommendation development and other council work. The Council engaged further in conversations on unconscious bias and several elements of racism (e.g. institutional, systematic, structural, individual and interpersonal). The FSRC determined several viable strategies moving forward:

- Define the Council's commitment to DEI
- Designate funding for ongoing education and support
- Encourage personal assessments to determine how individual and interpersonal racism impacts Council work
- Implement a systematic analysis to assess gaps within the food system
- Implement a equity analysis of existing and proposed legislation, Council recommendations, and policies within the food system
- Continue to invite members, organizations, and community residents to participate in discussions to gain insight from a variety of key stakeholders
- Determine a Council work plan with clearly defined benchmarks to measure success

FSRC members identified the need to seek guidance regarding appropriate language to ensure unconscious bias and racism are not leading policy recommendations. Acknowledgement was permitted by FSRC members, when indicating each members' different perspectives, and the importance for each member to voice their independent perspective, in order to ensure inclusive, diverse, and equity within council products. Finally, continued training, commitment, and ongoing work is needed over a long-term period to maintain focus on DEI during council product development, budgetary considerations, equity analysis during the legislative session and recommendation development, and FSRC organizational functions.

Lunch and Learns

The Council also prioritized holding monthly learning sessions for Council members and wider audiences to learn about different aspects of Maryland's food system.

The Council began holding interactive "Lunch & Learn" sessions to provide learning and discussion opportunities on different topics of interest and to engage with subject matter experts in a more targeted yet casual setting. Typically, sessions are structured first with a presentation, then followed by a Q&A or facilitated discussion. These sessions have rendered gains in a deeper understanding of complex issues regarding our food system.

To date, eightLunch & Learn events have been scheduled. Monthly topics are based on council and Subcommittee members' requests, with an initial list prioritized by the Council and additional ideas added for future scheduling. Since June, the Council has sponsored the following topics:

- (June) Giant Food's "Food as Medicine" and food equity initiatives
- (August) Regional Food System Resiliency Efforts in the Mid-Shore
- (September) State Partnerships Improving Nutrition and Equity (SPINE) grant program
- (October) Maryland Food Bank Update

June: Leslie Jefferson, Community Health Program Manager with Giant Food's Healthy Living team, led June's Lunch and Learn session. The presentation honed in on Giant's community health programs offered to improve access to medically and culturally appropriate foods. Giant's Healthy Living team provides several services including online classes, store tours, community events, and workplace wellness programs, develops podcasts and blogs, and manages a Facebook Group. Giant's nutrition incentive programs implemented in Ward 8 Washington DC, Produce Rx, provides a monetary amount for medical and culturally appropriate produce, with a valid voucher from a healthcare provider. Vouchers are processed at the pharmacy and participants are allowed to select produce of their choice, thus improving access while maintaining food integrity and cultural acceptance. A similar program newly established with Prince George County, Prince George's FRESH, is also facilitated byGiant. FSRC members engaged in a productive conversation regarding culturally-appropriate foods, defining "healthy" from an individual perspective, food as medicine initiatives, and facilitation of meaningful access to food. Food system retail partnerships were a vital overarching topic, as members honed in on retailers' role in the food system and markedGiant as one of the first retailers to enter food system resiliency efforts for Marylanders.

August: Chrissy Bartz, Director of Choptank's Community Based Program, and Beth Brewster, Supervisor of Food Services from Caroline County Public Schools, led the first shared presentation on ongoing work in local food system resilience from a rural county perspective. Attendees engaged in conversation related to several ongoing initiatives for rural food distribution efforts, including mobile food pantries, the blue catfish initiative, Caroline County Public School Service, and spirulina production, which involves repurposing of vacant poultry houses. Programmatic work at the Caroline School House Culinary Arts Center involves a wide array of services available

to the community, such as a culinary arts program for high school students, community venue space, and a test kitchen for production (currently processing locally-produced spirulina), community classes, and catering. ChrissyBartz introduced ongoing community efforts provided by Choptank Community Health Center, including school-based health centers and school-based dental service sites in five counties, as well as the shore gourmet mobile market. Other topics discussed included the Food as Medicine grant and Choptank's work on program implementation through partnerships developed with Carroll County Public Schools and Carroll County Health Department.

September: Miranda Ouellette is the Inclusion Coordinator at the Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Control, at the Maryland Department of Health. In this role, Miranda oversees the Disability Health Inclusion Program, supports the efforts of the Maryland State Partnerships Improving Nutrition and Equity (SPINE) program, and leads other health equity focused initiatives. During the September lunch and learn session Miranda introduced the SPINE grant program and current programmatic work undergone during Maryland's participation in the 1 year term grant program. The State Partnerships Improving Nutrition and Equity (SPINE) Program is a national grant program that addresses food and nutrition security through sustainable and equitable actions that tackle economic and social conditions limiting food and nutrition security across the lifespan. As part of this program, the Maryland Department of Health has convened a food and nutrition security advisory working group to support SPINE efforts and guide program components, including involving persons with lived experience of food insecurity.
Maryland SPINE program components reviewed with FSRC members
Include:

- Establish a food and nutrition security program within the Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Control at the Maryland Department of Health.
- Launch a food and nutrition security advisory working group to support all SPINE efforts.
- Identify existing and new partners to support SPINE efforts, including at least one person with lived experience.
- Partner with Local Health Improvement Coalitions (LHICs) to create food and nutrition security subcommittees in the following areas (Baltimore County, Charles County, Howard County, Garrett County, and St. Mary's County)

FSRC members were encouraged to engage in a facilitated discussion, where recommendations were considered including (1) incorporation of existing public assistance programs into LHICs implementation, and (2) to improve SPINE outreach by approaching other organizations (e.g. civil right organizations, and immigrant assistance organizations) to expand programmatic work in areas where work is not being implemented. Ultimately, there was an agreed understanding for the need to develop a strategic plan, to ensure sustainability of SPINE implemented programmatic work, after the one year grant term has concluded.

October: The Maryland Food Bank's (MFB) mission to feed people, strengthen communities, and end hunger for Marylanders has manifested numerous

partnerships and a significant amount of programmatic work. Improving Marylanders' access to food since 1970, as the east coast's first food bank, MFB leads the way in implementing ongoing awareness campaigns, community hunger programs, and endless amounts of research and reports. FSRC members and interested parties will be provided a deeper look into various MFB programs that align with FSRC priorities, objectives, and goals.

Next Steps

The Maryland Food Resiliency Council is excited to continue its work towards a more resilient food system. The FSRC will be continuing to meet regularly over the course of the next year to tackle these areas as indicated below, as well as expand on ideas included in this report. While the FSRC was not able to fully discuss all of the ideas from members and stakeholders, staff did capture many of the key conversations that will be placed on next year's agenda. Several ideas discussed by the subcommittees were recognized by the Council as important for future considerations; the following areas have been identified as areas for future research, investigation, and discussion:

- Implement an equity analysis of existing and proposed legislation, Council recommendations, and policies within the food system
- Implement a systematic analysis to assess gaps within the food system
- Establish guidelines and best practices for feeding programs, including:
    - establishing additional requirements and incentives for improved nutrition standards across state-funded and state-managed food programs;
    - increasing and incentivizing client choice programs; conducting focus groups to understand availability of food items versus need, demand, and feasibility; and
    - workshops or seminars (in person or virtual) at community centers, farmers markets, food pantries, schools, etc. on preparing the types of local food available in Maryland.
- Examine potential opportunities to mitigate or prepare for disruption to public food assistance benefits.
- Examine potential areas of The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) to strengthen and streamline program areas including but not limited to:
    - the eligibility determination process to bring more equity
    - potentially examining income eligibility guidelines
    - incentivize usage of electronic reporting platforms and streamline reporting requirements
- Improve state carceral food systems, including engaging formerly incarcerated individuals to provide lived experience input.

- Better define the terms “local” and “regional” for the purposes of state food policy.
- Mitigate the carbon footprint of Maryland’s food system and address climate change impacts on farmers, regional and local food systems, and how to plan for adaptation.
- Investigate opportunities to collaborate regionally, particularly with neighboring states, to better understand external influences on Maryland’s food system resiliency.
- Evaluate the regional and local markets prospects and evaluate who are the buyers in the state, and then create a targeted brand to Maryland primarily and also the regional or national market demand.
- Support the development of Resilience Hubs to include food assistance mechanisms.
- Ensure that Maryland’s food and farmworkers have safe and fair working conditions, and explore the labor needs, challenges, and opportunities related to the food system in Maryland.
- Create a pilot Farm Conservation Program to mitigate climate change, including determining the climate-friendly agricultural practices should be eligible for funding under the pilot program (such as increasing soil organic matter, prescribed grazing, or commodity transitions), establishing metrics for greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reductions, and then verifying the GHG emission reductions achieved for the agricultural practices funded in the pilot program.
- Understand the extent of the need for additional enforcement and technical assistance around existing state environmental protection laws for agriculture, including water pollution control permits, nutrient management plans, and the phosphorus management tool.
- Understand if there is a need for incentives, decreased policy barriers, or technical assistance for food waste composting, manure composting, anaerobic digestion, biochar, and other organics re-utilization, and how these carbon-based fertilizers could be incorporated into nutrient management plans or other programs to provide incentives for increasing organic matter in soil, such as outcome-based payments to farmers for implementing effective healthy soils/carbon sequestration practices by measuring organic carbon or organic matter.
- Support a statewide food waste reduction campaign and determine how new and existing efforts are integrated and what new initiatives that might bridge efforts across the food waste landscape.
- Promote climate-resilient agriculture in Maryland through data-driven, demonstration projects at the Maryland Agricultural Experiment Stations located throughout the state (operated by the University of Maryland College of Agriculture and Natural Resources) for collecting quantifiable data and creating Extension and outreach materials that help farmers adapt to climate

change and enable climate change adaptation and mitigation (through carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas emission reduction) policy development.

- Determine how to best support the development of Food Resilience Hubs, including food assistance mechanisms, what is needed for long-term viability of food hubs, integration with cold chain infrastructure, and development of community distribution channels to connect local farmers with local consumers.
- Investigate how to create or leverage opportunities to collaborate regionally, particularly with neighboring states, to better understand external influences on Maryland's food system resiliency.
- Understand barriers to small producers expanding, including contradictory regulations (zoning barriers), economies of scale for equipment (shared resources and joint services), and risks associated with non-commodity/non-traditional crops, and legislative initiates to overcome these barriers. Additional barriers could include access to land, access to seasonal workers at small farms, as well as access to affordable housing for workers, including zoning and easement barriers for housing
- Explore opportunities for connecting affordable housing efforts with food access efforts by evaluating national best practices. Affordable housing, fair and safe working conditions, and food security are inextricably linked issues, with thousands of Maryland households choosing between nutritious food and rent. While ensuring that wraparound services are being provided to those in need of housing assistance, there are other innovative methods of providing food insecure individuals agency over food choices. Some specific examples of some national best practices include: 1) Combined Application Projects, 2) Elderly Simplified Application Project (already in place in Maryland), 3) Standard Medical Deduction, 4) Elderly and Disabled Recertification Interview Waiver, 4) Continued expansions /waiver requests regarding Broad Based Categorical Eligibility, and 5) Equity in the Food system.
- Establish a pilot program with a handful of Area Aging Agencies in Maryland, facilitated by the Department of Aging, to increase procurement of fresh, local produce through grants and technical assistance.
- Replicate the Baltimore City Urban Grocery Fund throughout the state of MD to retain our most "critical grocery store" locations, i.e., those locations that if closed would create a healthy food priority area, previously known as a food desert). Replicate the Baltimore City Urban Grocery Improvement Fund throughout the state of MD, which provides 50% matching funds (up to $25,000 per location) to complete capital improvements to "critical grocery stores" that may include exterior and interior improvements.

Conclusion

To date, the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council has identified 27 recommendations to improve food system resilience. Some of these recommendations will take meaningful investment, while others will take action by local and state governments, businesses, and community organizations. Every positive action taken will have an impact on Maryland's ability to mitigate food insecurity for our family, neighbors, and friends. Every positive change will help us prepare for, respond to, and recover from food system interruptions large and small, ensuring Maryland is ready for whatever comes our way next. The FSRC looks forward to continuing its work in the coming year, establishing council structure, focusing on equity within the products created by the council, and ensuring inclusion of diverse voices across the food system landscape.

Appendix A: Maryland Food System Resiliency Council Statute

Public Safety Article
§14-1101-1103

§14–1101.

(a) In this subtitle the following words have the meanings indicated.

(b) "Council" means the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council.

(c) "Director" means the Director of the Maryland Emergency Management Agency.

(d) "Food council organization" means a local food council organization that is established in the State.

§14–1102.

(a) There is a Maryland Food System Resiliency Council.

(b) The Council consists of the following members:

(1) one member of the Senate of Maryland, appointed by the President of the Senate;

(2) one member of the House of Delegates, appointed by the Speaker of the House;

(3) the Director, or the Director's designee;

(4) the Secretary of Human Services, or the Secretary's designee;

(5) the Secretary of Agriculture, or the Secretary's designee;

(6) the Secretary of Commerce, or the Secretary's designee;

(7) the Executive Director of the Maryland Farm Bureau, or the Executive Director's designee;

(8) the Executive Director of the Maryland Agricultural and Resource–Based Industry Development Corporation, or the Executive Director's designee;

(9) the Dean of the University of Maryland College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, or the Dean's designee; and

(10) the following members appointed by the Director:

(i) five representatives of five different food council organizations who are recommended by members of food council organizations;

(ii) one representative of the University of Maryland Extension;

(iii) one representative of the University of Maryland Eastern Shore Small Farm Program;

(iv) one representative of the Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro–Ecology;

(v) one representative of a public school system in the State who has experience in food security and local food procurement;

(vi) one representative of a statewide food security advocacy organization;

(vii) one farmer in the State;

(viii) one owner of a food business in the State;

(ix) one expert in food system policy;

(x) one expert on racial equity in the food system;

(xi) one expert on food system impacts on climate and the environment;

(xii) one expert on food nutrition and public health; and

(xiii) any other individual that the Director deems appropriate.

(c) The Director shall:

(1) ensure that all five geographic areas of the State are represented by the appointed members of the Council; and

(2) appoint a successor in the event of a vacancy on the Council.

(d) (1) (i) The term of a member of the Council appointed by the Director is 3 years.

(ii) An appointed member may not serve for more than two consecutive 3–year terms.

(2) At the end of a term, a member continues to serve until a successor is appointed and qualifies.

(3) A member who is appointed after a term has begun shall serve for the rest of the term or until a successor is appointed and qualifies.

(e) A member of the Council:

(1) may not receive compensation as a member of the Council; but

(2) is entitled to reimbursement for expenses under the Standard State Travel Regulations, as provided in the State Budget.

(f) A majority of the members then serving on the Council is a quorum.

(g) (1) (i) The Director, or the Director's designee, and one member representing a food council organization who is elected in accordance with subparagraph (ii) of this paragraph shall cochair the Council.

(ii) At the first meeting of each year, the Council shall elect a cochair from among the five Council members representing food council organizations for a term of 1 year.

(2) The Secretary of Agriculture, or the Secretary's designee, the Secretary of Human Services, or the Secretary's designee, and the Dean of the University of Maryland College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, or the Dean's designee shall co–vice chair the Council.

(h) (1) The Council may establish subcommittees to provide technical assistance to the Council.

(2) The Council may establish subcommittee topics and membership as the Council deems appropriate.

(i) The Maryland Emergency Management Agency and the University of Maryland College of Agriculture and Natural Resources shall provide staff for the Council, as deemed necessary by the cochairs.

§14–1103.

(a) The Council shall:

(1) meet regularly for a period of at least 2 years to address food insecurity in the State; and

(2) work toward the following goals:

(i) to address the food insecurity crisis in the State resulting from the COVID–19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis by:

1. coordinating State and local level food insecurity services to support residents of the State;

2. tracking and analyzing data to create a comprehensive map of food insecurity across the State and identify the gaps in service;

3. leveraging federal and private sector grants and other resources in order to address food insecurity needs;

4. advising the State on how best to allocate resources and increase efficiency; and

5. A. exploring the role of and potential for the federal Community Eligibility Provision to ensure all students in the State are fed; and

B. making recommendations to the Maryland State Department of Education and the Maryland General Assembly to implement relevant findings under item A. of this item;

(ii) to develop, on or before November 1, 2021, equity and sustainability policy recommendations to increase the long–term resiliency of the food system, including:

1. addressing and eliminating racial inequities in the food system;

2. addressing and eliminating diet–related public health disparities;

3. addressing and eliminating food deserts; and

4. reducing food waste, increasing recycling, and encouraging other relevant environmental impacts;

(iii) to expand the impact of existing food council organizations by:

1. providing coordination and facilitation of knowledge exchange at the State level; and

2. supporting identification and application of grants to operating funds to support existing and new food council organizations as needed; and

(iv) to develop, on or before November 1, 2021, a strategic plan to increase the production and procurement of Maryland certified food, including:

1. increasing the quality and quantity of production, as well as aggregation, marketing, and distribution of local food in urban, suburban, and rural settings;

2. increasing procurement of local food through schools, universities, and other institutions;

3. creating additional market opportunities for Maryland food businesses; and

4. expanding access to small scale manufacturing and food production infrastructure.

(b) To advance the goals of the Council, the Council shall engage and collaborate with interested stakeholders, including:

(1) residents of the State with lived experience of food insecurity; and

(2) food council organizations and similar local level food system convening organizations.

(c) (1) On or before November 1, 2021, the Council shall submit an interim report to the General Assembly, in accordance with § 2–1257 of the State Government Article, on key findings and activities undertaken by the Council.

(2) On or before November 1, 2022, the Council shall submit a report to the General Assembly, in accordance with § 2–1257 of the State Government Article, on the Council's recommendations for a long term structure for a statewide food policy council including providing recommendations on:

(i) appropriate policy and legislative changes;

(ii) potential ways to restructure the Council such as:

1. placing the Council within a different agency or organization; and

2. enacting a sunset provision for the Council; and

(iii) any other recommendations of the Council.

(3) On or before November 1, 2023, and each year thereafter, the Council shall submit a report to the General Assembly, in accordance with § 2–1257 of the State Government Article, on key findings and activities undertaken by the Council