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Maryland Food System Resiliency Council 2025 Report

Public Safety Article 14-1103(c)
Maryland Department of Emergency Management

19 August 2025



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Executive Summary

The Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (FSRC), housed within the Maryland Department of Emergency Management's Maryland Office of Resilience (MOR), recognizes the importance of strengthening resilience during "blue sky" times to ensure the stability of Maryland's food system and communities during periods of disruption. The FSRC's thirty-two appointees include members representing both chambers of the Maryland General Assembly, several state agencies and their secretaries, nonprofit and private sector organizations, community partners, academic institutions, and independent local food businesses. Together, these individuals work collaboratively to achieve the four goals mandated by the Maryland General Assembly ([MD. Code Ann., Pub. Safety § 14-1102, 2024](#)):

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.¹

The FSRC recognizes that the root causes of food system vulnerability and food insecurity are deeply interconnected and multifaceted, involving economic, social, environmental, and political factors. Effectively addressing these systemic issues will require sustained effort, robust collaboration across sectors, and a long-term commitment of time and resources. Achieving the goals outlined in the statute will not only require thoughtful planning and evaluation, but also flexibility to adapt to emerging challenges and evolving community needs.

The Capital Area Food Bank's [2024 Annual Hunger Report](#) underscores the urgency of the FSRC's ongoing work, revealing that food insecurity affects 50% of residents in Prince George's County and 34% in Montgomery County—a significant rise compared to findings from 2022 and 2023.² Similarly, the [Maryland Food Bank](#) reports that 1 in 3 Marylanders experienced food insecurity in 2024.³ [Financial hardship, diet-related health conditions](#), and [exposure to environmental hazards](#) continue to

¹ Maryland Food System Resiliency Council, §14 (2024).

<https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Laws/StatuteText?article=gps§ion=14-1101&enactments=false>

² CAFB. (2024). *Hunger Report 2024*. Capital Area Food Bank (CAFB).

<https://hunger-report.capitalareafoodbank.org/report-2024/>

³ Hunger in Maryland. (2025). *Maryland Food Bank*. <https://mdfoodbank.org/hunger-in-maryland/>



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disproportionately impact Black and Hispanic Marylanders.^{4,5,6} As such, with the publication of their 2025 Annual Report, the FSRC continues to center their work in equity and to prioritize underserved, overburdened, and underresourced communities in Maryland who have been most significantly impacted by injustices in our food system.

Recent reductions in the federal workforce and programs, and their impact on Maryland's residents, further illustrate the urgency of the current situation. A recent release by the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics noted that Maryland's workforce decreased by 8,500 total jobs in June 2025. The data reported further indicates a decrease of 3,500 federal jobs. This figure represents the largest single-month loss of federal jobs in Maryland in over twenty-five years.⁷ Maryland is simultaneously experiencing an increase in need for services and a notable reduction of those services. The elimination of federal funding for SNAP-Ed, a program designed to address communities' access to healthy food statewide, will impact over 424K Marylanders who benefit from a variety of multi-level educational programs.⁸ Local jurisdictions will lose this important asset at a time when their resources are already being stretched, resulting in a greater strain on state agencies and local partners to meet the needs of the state's residents. The FSRC recognizes the challenges posed by this situation and recommends solutions in this report.

The FSRC's three subcommittees (Communication and Coordination, Distribution and Access, and Environment and Production) serve as working groups gathering information, tracking state legislation, and coordinating with state agencies and stakeholders to develop evidence-based recommendations for policymakers. The FSRC and Committees met regularly over the past year to develop this legislatively mandated report. While MDEM staff assisted in drafting the content of this document, this report reflects the expertise and efforts of the Council's members. As such, this document and the recommendations included are not a MDEM product, but a product of the FSRC.

⁴ United for ALICE. (2024). *Maryland Overview*. United For ALICE.

<https://www.unitedforalice.org/state-overview/Maryland>

⁵ MDH. (2020, June 1). *Diabetes Action Plan*. Maryland Department of Health (MDH).

<https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/ccdpc/Pages/default.aspx>

⁶ MDEnviroScreen Tool. (2025). Maryland Department of the Environment.

https://mde.maryland.gov/Environmental_Justice/Pages/default.aspx

⁷ Winnick, D. (2025, July 18). Maryland's June 2025 jobs report indicates continued federal job losses, new losses in private sector. *Maryland Department of Labor*. <https://labor.maryland.gov/whatsnews/mlriun2025.shtml>

⁸ SNAP-Ed Reach and Impact. (2025). Maryland SNAP-Ed.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/18cXN7I5fhpMU6LXTMVB2KWuzxU6u1Sgd/view?usp=embed_facebook



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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.*

Recommendation 1.1: Expand the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and Universal School Meals

Abstract: The FSRC proposes the expansion of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and implementation of universal school meals in Maryland to ensure all public school students receive free breakfast and lunch. School meals are linked to improved nutrition, academic performance, and reduced food insecurity and stigma. With Maryland's high cost of living, many families fall outside eligibility for free meals but still face food hardship. This recommendation proposes dedicated state funding to supplement federal reimbursements, beginning with full CEP participation and expansion to all schools by school year 2030–2031. This initiative will promote equity, reduce administrative burdens, and support healthier, more resilient communities.

Funding Required? Based on the fiscal analysis of previously introduced legislation and a 2024 analysis completed by MSDE, the estimated cost to implement a statewide universal school meals program could range from approximately \$149M to \$169M annually.

Legislation Required? Legislation is needed to establish sustainable funding and eliminate student meal charges.

Recommendation 1.2: Establish and Maintain a Statewide Food Insecurity Map



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Abstract: This recommendation supports the development and maintenance of a comprehensive Maryland Food Insecurity Map to visualize drivers of food insecurity and gaps in food access across the state. A beta version created by the FSRC and the Department of Information Technology (DoIT) demonstrates the potential of this tool to support coordination, planning, and resource allocation. The map will integrate data on demographics, services, and social determinants of health, and support the creation of two indices: a Food Security Index and a Food System Risk and Vulnerability Index. To advance this work, one full-time position at DoIT is needed to lead methodology development, stakeholder engagement, and long-term oversight. The map will serve as a critical tool for state agencies, the legislature, and local partners to understand and respond to food insecurity statewide.

Funding Required? Funding is required for the FTE housed within DoIT.

Legislation Required? Legislation is not required to create a Food Insecurity Map.

Recommendation 1.3: Clarifying the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act

Abstract: This recommendation seeks to clarify state-level protections for organizations with onsite food production gardens—such as community gardens, schools, libraries, and faith-based groups—under the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act. Current interpretations assume separation between food producers and distributors, leaving integrated models without clear liability protection. As a result, many institutions hesitate to share the food they grow directly with their communities, missing opportunities to expand local food access. The recommendation includes adopting a Maryland-specific definition of a “qualified direct donor” and identifying a lead agency to provide legal guidance and technical support. This would empower more organizations to distribute fresh, locally grown food safely and confidently within their networks, improving access for Marylanders and reducing wasted food.

Funding Required? Funding is not required.

Legislation Required? An addition to state-level policy would provide the clarity required for the federal Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act.

Goal 2

Develop equity and sustainability policy recommendations to increase the long-term resiliency of the food system:

- *Addressing and eliminating racial inequities in the food system.*
- *Addressing and eliminating diet-related public health disparities.*



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- *Addressing and eliminating healthy food priority areas.*
- *Reducing wasted food, increasing recycling, and encouraging other relevant environmental impacts.*

Recommendation 2.1: Establish a Distributed Network of Cold Storage for Food System Resiliency

Abstract: The FSRC recommends establishing a statewide pilot grant program to fund strategically located cold storage units, enhancing Maryland's food aggregation, distribution, and emergency preparedness capacities. Community-based cold storage—at food pantries, farms, schools, and other organizations—reduces wasted food, preserves fresh and culturally relevant food, and supports local agriculture. The grant program would prioritize solar-powered cold storage units to promote climate resilience and reduce operating costs. The Maryland Department of Agriculture would administer the pilot grant program, which would fund up to 60 walk-in units.

Funding Required? Funding of \$6.4M is required to pilot the cold storage grant program. This would cover all installation and maintenance costs, as well as program administration costs.

Legislation Required? No legislation is required.

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.*

Recommendation 3.1: Strengthening Capacity for Local Food Councils

Abstract: This recommendation proposes the creation of three Regional Food Council Coordinator positions to strengthen Maryland's local food councils through improved coordination, capacity-building, and knowledge sharing. With dedicated annual state funding of \$325K, the coordinators would support existing councils, facilitate regional collaboration, and help secure funding to advance food security and equity across jurisdictions. By fostering partnerships, offering technical assistance, and producing annual impact reports, this initiative would amplify the role of local councils in building resilient, community-based food systems.

Funding Required? Funding is required to create regional food council coordinator positions.



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Legislation Required? Legislation is required to fund the positions and establish reporting structures that align local efforts with state food resiliency goals.

Goal 4

Develop 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 a Statewide Position to Coordinate Points of Sale for Local Food and Enhance Nutrition Benefits Programs

Abstract: This recommendation proposes creating a dedicated, statewide coordinator position to strengthen local food points of sale (e.g., farmers markets, community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, and farm stands) and streamline the use of public nutrition benefit programs such as SNAP, WIC, Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), and Maryland Market Money. The coordinator position would support interagency collaboration, expand technical assistance, and improve benefit redemption and market participation across the state. The coordinator would also facilitate food recovery efforts through distribution networks and assist in implementing statewide food access legislation. With an annual estimated cost of \$150K, this role would fill a key gap left by the dissolution of the Maryland Farmers Market Association and defunding of the SNAP-Ed program by ensuring that nutrition benefits directly support local farmers and food-insecure Marylanders across all jurisdictions.

Funding Required? Sustained funding of \$150K per year is required to cover the salary and benefits of the full-time coordinator position.

Legislation Required? Legislation is not required.



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Recommendation 4.2: Attract and Retain Resilience for Grocery Retailers in Healthy Food Priority Areas

Abstract: This recommendation proposes revitalizing and expanding support for small grocery retailers in Maryland's Healthy Food Priority Areas (HFPAs) by providing targeted funding and technical assistance. The Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) would adapt its previous Fresh Food Financing Initiative (FFFI) to offer one-time grants to corner stores and small grocers in HFPAs to improve cold storage and inventory of perishable foods. With support from the Maryland Department of Health (MDH), DHCD would receive staffing resources to provide direct technical assistance to current and aspiring WIC vendors, as well as other healthy food retailers in HFPAs. This technical assistance would help small stores navigate inventory and merchandising challenges, while increasing participation in nutrition benefits programs. This dual strategy builds on past lessons from Maryland and other states, with a focus on improving access to healthy, affordable foods in both urban and rural HFPAs.

Funding Required? A proposed \$1M investment would fund thirty-six retailer grants and personnel support at DHCD.

Legislation Required? Legislation is recommended to allocate funds for the DHCD grants; however, increased staffing at DHCD can proceed through the state budget without legislative action.

Recommendation 4.3: Address Barriers and Create Incentives for Temporary Local Farm Product Sales in Healthy Food Priority Areas

Abstract: This recommendation aims to expand access to fresh, locally grown foods in Maryland's Healthy Food Priority Areas (HFPAs) by encouraging local jurisdictions to identify and designate sites for mobile and pop-up farm markets. These locations would provide opportunities for local food vendors, including farmers, to sell in underserved areas, thereby mitigating transportation barriers and improving local healthy food access. State agencies would work with local partners to develop guidance for identifying sites and offer incentives—such as grant prioritization or technical assistance—for jurisdictions that participate. Publicizing designated locations and clarifying permitting processes would further support implementation.

Funding Required? No funding is required.

Legislation Required? Legislation may be needed to align local policies and enable statewide implementation.



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Recommendation 4.4: Commission on Agricultural Labor Workforce Development to Enhance Food Production Resiliency

Abstract: The FSRC proposes establishing a Commission on Agricultural Labor Workforce Development, led by the Maryland Department of Labor, to address workforce challenges unique to Maryland's agricultural sector. The Commission will develop strategies to integrate agricultural workforce needs into existing Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, create a Registered Apprenticeship program tailored to agriculture, and explore innovative labor solutions such as year-round employment and partnerships with community organizations. With representatives from state agencies, agricultural groups, and educational institutions, the Commission will deliver a comprehensive report by December 2026 with actionable recommendations to strengthen Maryland's food system through a skilled and sustainable agricultural workforce.

Funding Required? Funding is not required for this recommendation.

Legislation Required? A legislative mandate is recommended to direct and support the Commission's formation and work. This initiative responds to critical labor shortages and aims to foster workforce development, particularly for small and medium farms facing an aging farmer population.

Recommendation 4.5: Creation and Maintenance of an Early Warning Weather System to Provide Farmers With a Planning Tool and Local Weather Alert

Abstract: Maryland's farming community requires more localized weather data to adapt operations and plan for changing climate conditions. The Maryland Department of Emergency Management (MDEM), in partnership with the University of Maryland, administers the Mesonet system—a statewide network of over 70 weather monitoring stations—providing timely, local-level weather information to farmers and communities. This system supports sustainable agricultural practices, improves resilience against extreme weather, and informs emergency planning across the state. Ongoing collaboration among state agencies will maximize the use of Mesonet data for agricultural and public safety needs, as through the establishment of Mesonet's push notification system.

Funding Required? Continued funding is necessary to maintain and expand the Mesonet system as well as to conduct outreach that enhances awareness and utilization by Maryland's agricultural community.

Legislation Required? Legislation is not required to implement this recommendation.



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Recommendation 4.6: A Collaborative Approach to Resource Sharing

Abstract: Climate change poses increasing risks to Maryland's agricultural sector, threatening the stability of the state's food supply. In response, this recommendation calls for the creation of a centralized, web-based "one-stop shop" to provide farmers and stakeholders with up-to-date climate research, weather data, funding opportunities, and relevant resources tailored to Maryland's diverse agricultural sectors. Developed and maintained by a trusted source, this platform will improve access to vital information, reduce duplication of efforts, and support farmers in adapting to evolving climate challenges. Additionally, pilot projects demonstrating practical climate adaptation strategies will be encouraged to provide hands-on learning opportunities. This collaborative approach, informed by extensive stakeholder engagement, aims to strengthen Maryland's agricultural resilience, benefiting farmers, service providers, and ultimately all Maryland residents.

Funding Required? Funding will be required for development, maintenance, staffing, and pilot projects, though existing models show potential for leveraging federal, state, local, and private support.

Legislation Required? Legislation is not required to implement this recommendation.

Recommendation 4.7: Create a Statewide Local Food Procurement Guidance Document for Institutional Buyers and Maryland Producers

Abstract: The FSRC proposes developing a Maryland-specific food procurement guidance document to address barriers limiting institutional local food purchasing. Led by the Maryland Department of General Services (DGS) in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) and other stakeholders, this guidance will educate institutional buyers and producers about procurement processes, regulatory requirements, and best practices tailored to Maryland's local food system. It aims to increase participation from both buyers and small and beginning farmers by clarifying challenges such as cold storage and processing constraints. With only a small fraction of state and local food budgets currently spent on Certified Local Farm and Fish Program products, this document will support increased participation from both buyers and small and beginning farmers.

Funding Required? No additional funding is required, as existing state staff would lead the effort.



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Legislation Required? A legislative mandate directing DGS to develop the guide by December 2026 is recommended.

Recommendation 4.8: Establish Scalable and Specific Standards for Farm Processing and Production of Value-Added Agriculture

Abstract: This recommendation calls for a comprehensive review and modernization of Maryland's regulatory framework governing farm-based value-added processing operations. The Maryland Department of Health (MDH), Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), and Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) will collaborate to reassess existing licenses and environmental health regulations to better track, scale, and support these operations. Current regulations, such as the On-Farm Home Processing License, impose limits that hinder farm businesses from expanding processing activities despite maintaining public health and safety standards. Clear thresholds and standards tailored to agricultural realities—such as seasonal production and specific infrastructure needs—are necessary to provide consistent guidance and reduce regulatory uncertainty. This effort aims to simplify compliance, incentivize farm-based processing, and promote business growth in Maryland's agricultural sector.

Funding Required? Funding is not required to implement this recommendation.

Legislation Required? Legislation is required to make necessary adjustments to existing regulations.

Recommendation 4.9: Create a Statewide Streamlined Permitting Process for Food Sampling in Community-Based Food Sales and Distribution Settings

Abstract: This recommendation proposes establishing a statewide, annual certification process for offering food tastings and cooking demonstrations at community-based local food access points, such as farmers markets, mobile markets, pop-ups, and farm stands. Currently, inconsistent county-level regulations create barriers for farmers and organizations operating across multiple jurisdictions, hindering efforts to increase consumer exposure to and confidence in local farm products. A standardized, state-recognized permit would simplify compliance, ensure adherence to food safety standards, and encourage broader participation in food sampling activities. This approach aims to boost purchases of local foods, increase the use of nutrition benefits, and support healthy eating by allowing consumers to sample local products and learn preparation methods. The Maryland Department of Health (MDH), working with local health departments, Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA), and food system partners, would develop the



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certification process, including tiered permits for different levels of sampling activities.

Funding Required? Temporary funding for MDH and MDA would support development and oversight, supplemented by permit fees. This initiative aligns with successful models in other states and would help Maryland demonstrate national leadership in expanding local food access through safe and accessible food sampling programs.

Legislation Required? Legislation would be necessary to harmonize regulations statewide and enable this streamlined approach.

Introduction

The Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (FSRC), established in 2021 and codified under the Code of Maryland Regulations, Public Safety, §§ 14-1101-1103, currently comprises thirty-one members working collaboratively to address challenges in producing, procuring, distributing, and accessing healthy, locally sourced foods throughout Maryland. The Council is committed to achieving the goals outlined in its founding legislation:

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.

Over the past year, the FSRC met regularly to work on the issues important to the resilience of Maryland's food system. These issues include those outlined in the [Next Steps](#) section of the Council's 2024 Annual Report:

- Gathering data from across the state to assess the facilitators and barriers to food system resilience and their distribution throughout Maryland's local jurisdictions.
- Addressing barriers to the institutional procurement of food that is locally-produced in Maryland.
- Increasing the production of table crops in Maryland by building capacity among agricultural businesses through access to technical support, equipment, infrastructure, and a skilled labor force.
- Minimizing food loss through diversion of surplus perishable foods to emergency food distribution programs, enhancement of food preservation infrastructure, and expansion of value-added resources for Maryland's producers.
- Developing a strategic vision and systems-based approach to information sharing and coordination with the local food councils across Maryland (Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City, Caroline County, Frederick County, Howard County, Kent County, Lower Shore, Mid-Shore, Montgomery County, Prince George's County, Upper Shore, and Western Maryland).

The Maryland Food System Resiliency Council's 2025 Annual Report reflects the thoughtful work and inspiring dedication of its members, who achieved new levels of collaboration and stakeholder engagement in the development of the following fourteen recommendations.



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2025 Recommendations

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.*

Recommendation 1.1: Expand the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and Universal School Meals

Overview: Child Nutrition Programs play a crucial role in academic success, reducing childhood hunger, promoting good nutrition, and ensuring that students are well-nourished and ready to learn and play. Multiple studies have linked participation in school meals to beneficial outcomes for students, including reduced food insecurity, decreased rates of obesity, and improved overall nutrition and wellness. Beyond reducing hunger, research also links participation in school meals to positive educational outcomes, including enhanced child development and school readiness, as well as improved academic achievement, attendance, and classroom behavior.

Research conducted in Maryland highlights the benefits of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), including increased school meal participation, reduced budget strain at home, and a decrease in school meal debt for both families and school systems. Additionally, a [2020 study conducted by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health](#) on the implementation of the CEP in Maryland shows that students who attend CEP schools are almost three times less likely to experience food



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insecurity than those attending CEP-eligible schools that do not participate in the program.⁹ CEP was also associated with improved attendance, test scores, and behavior.

Currently, eight of Maryland's twenty-four public Local Education Authorities (LEAs) participate in the CEP district-wide (i.e., all schools in the county school district offer free school meals based on a district-wide ISP). However, an additional twelve public LEAs meet the minimum district-wide ISP to participate in CEP, bringing an additional 522 schools serving nearly 365K students into the program. Alternatively, working with districts to enroll the 392 individually-eligible schools to CEP would serve an additional 271,497 students. This includes 161 schools with an ISP of 62.5% or above, which are currently eligible to receive maximum reimbursement for every meal served. A full summary of CEP participation in Maryland by county can be accessed online:

<https://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/SchoolandCommunityNutrition/Pages/CEPData.aspx>

Universal school meals, as provided through CEP, reduce the stigma associated with participating in school breakfast or lunch. In non-CEP schools, participation in meal programs tends to be driven by students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals, which can lead to the labeling of those students as "poor." In contrast, when free meals are offered universally, taking a school meal is a neutral act, and as such, both free and paid students are more likely to participate.¹⁰

This was a [notable trend during COVID-19-related school closures](#), when free school meals were available to all students. Universal free school meals continued to be available through emergency waivers when most schools reopened for in-person instruction in the 2021-2022 school year. During this period, Maryland experienced an 8.2% increase in National School Lunch Program (NSLP) participation and a 9.4% increase in the number of meals served compared to the 2018-2019 school year. Once federal waivers enabling universal free school meals were discontinued in the 2022-2023 school year, participation fell by 12.5%, and the number of NSLP meals served fell by 14.4%.¹¹

Students in all schools are eligible for free meals if they live in a household with an income at or below 130% of the federal poverty level.¹² Children in families with incomes between 130% and 185% of the poverty level are in the reduced-price

⁹ Hecht, A. (2020). Universal Free School Meals: Implementation of the Community Eligibility Provision and Impacts on Student Nutrition, Behavior and Academic Performance. Johns Hopkins University. <https://is Scholarship.library.jhu.edu/items/6d5b19f8-5787-4c6f-9fc9-b7d8ed73aea7>

¹⁰ Perez, A., & FitzSimons, C. (2021). *The Case for Healthy School Meals for All*. Food Research & Action Center. <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/SchoolMealsForAll.pdf>

¹¹ *Child Nutrition Dashboard*. (2025, January 21). USDA Food and Nutrition Service. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/data-research/data-visualization/child-nutrition-dashboard>

¹² School Meal Statistics. (2025). School Nutrition Association. <https://schoolnutrition.org/about-school-meals/school-meal-statistics/#production-costs>



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category, although Maryland has subsidized the \$0.40 student cost for lunch and \$0.30 for breakfast since 2018. For reference, in the 2024-2025 school year, a child in a four-person household with an annual income of only \$57,720 would not qualify for free meals. Maryland has one of the highest costs of living in the nation, with significant variability within the state in terms of housing, transportation, and other essential expenses.

Finally, the requirement of charging students who are ineligible for free meals creates a dilemma for school food service programs. Students arriving in the cafeteria with neither a packed lunch or the ability to pay for the school lunch are often given a standard meal, incurring [debt to the school system](#) that must be collected.¹³ The USDA requires schools to work with families who often cannot or do not repay their debt, and prohibits school food services from using USDA funds to pay off unpaid meal debt. Maryland school food service programs had an estimated \$118,789,770 in unpaid meal debt in late 2024. Unpaid meal debt is cited as a challenge to consistently offering high-quality, nutritious meals. Universal school meals ensure that school meal programs are reimbursed for every meal they serve without stigmatizing students or burdening food service programs with reconciling debt.

The intended recommendation outcomes aim to broaden access to nutritious school meals by providing breakfast and lunch to all students at no cost. This approach will reduce food insecurity and improve academic performance. The recommendation is expected to foster healthier learning environments, enhance student well-being, and contribute to stronger, more resilient communities by reducing administrative barriers for schools and promoting equitable access to nutrition.

Objectives:

- During the 2026 Maryland General Assembly, introduce and pass state legislation to establish dedicated state funding for a phased implementation of universal school meals, beginning with schools eligible for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), and include a mandate for statewide guidance on maintaining poverty data collection for student support programs.
- By December 1, 2027, MSDE will publish comprehensive statewide guidance for local education agencies (LEAs) on the collection and use of poverty data not collected through the [Free and Reduced Price Meals \(FARMs\)](#) applications to support student programs.¹⁴
- Beginning July 1, 2027 (fiscal year 2028), Maryland state funding will become

¹³ *School Lunch Debt Statistics*. (2024, November 23). Education Data Initiative. <https://educationdata.org/school-lunch-debt>

¹⁴ *Free and Reduced-Price School Meals*. (2022). Maryland Hunger Solutions. <https://www.mdhungersolutions.org/federal-nutrition-programs/national-school-lunch-program-nsfp/free-reduced-price-school-meals/>



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available to supplement reimbursements to CEP schools.

- By June 30, 2028, all eligible schools will opt into CEP with 100% participation in CEP reached in the 2028-2029 school year.
- Starting in the 2029–2030 school year, Maryland will begin phasing in universal school meal funding for non-CEP schools, with a goal of full implementation by the 2030–2031 school year.
- By the 2030–2031 school year, 100% of Maryland public schools participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) will provide free breakfast and lunch to all students, regardless of income, funded through state and federal resources.

Implementation: The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) are administered at the state level by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). Local implementation is carried out by school food and nutrition offices within each Local Education Agency (LEA).

To establish a statewide universal school meals program, state funding would be required to supplement existing federal and state reimbursements. This funding would be administered by the MSDE and distributed to LEAs. LEAs would remain responsible for operating the meal programs, including collecting Free and Reduced-Price Meals (FARMS) applications in non-CEP schools, tracking meal service, and submitting reimbursement claims to MSDE. MSDE would develop a plan for distributing state-funded supplemental reimbursements based on the submitted claims and the school's reimbursement structure, similar to models used [in states with Healthy School Meals for All](#) policies in place.¹⁵ For CEP schools, a formula-based reimbursement model would be applied, while non-CEP schools would follow the standard per-meal reimbursement claim structure.

LEAs would assess the operational feasibility of universal school meals at the local level. Increased participation associated with serving meals at no cost may require investment in kitchen equipment, infrastructure, staffing, and training. A statewide survey could help evaluate cafeteria capacity, equipment needs, and staffing readiness. At the state level, feasibility would be determined by the annual state budget. A per-meal cost estimate would be necessary to determine the required state contribution, accounting and adjusting for existing funding sources, such as federal reimbursements, Maryland Meals for Achievement (MMFA), and [MD Cares for Kids](#).¹⁶ Projections should also consider current meal participation rates and potential increases in participation, as well as annual increases in reimbursement levels.

MSDE has already conducted an initial feasibility analysis, which is available in the

¹⁵ Bylander, A., FitzSimons, C., & Hayes, C. (2024). *The State of Healthy School Meals for All* (p. 7). Food Research & Action Center. <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/HSMFA-Report-2024.pdf#page=7>

¹⁶ State Department of Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Funding (Maryland Cares for Kids Act), No. HB0315. Retrieved July 7, 2025, from <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Legislation/Details/HB0315?ys=2018rs>



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report: [Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion Report](#).¹⁷ To support program implementation, MSDE would require additional funding to enhance software systems and hire the necessary staff for program administration.

One additional challenge associated with CEP participation is the impact on poverty data collection. CEP schools use direct certification data in place of FARMs applications, which eliminates the need for CEP schools to collect FARMs applications. The transition from FARMs data to direct certification data can impact education funding programs and established processes to connect students to additional resources, such as testing fee waivers. To address this, it is recommended that MSDE work internally to develop cross-departmental guidance, ensuring the continued collection of poverty-related data and maintaining access to essential support for students.

It is recommended that MSDE conduct ongoing evaluations of the universal school meals program as it is implemented, focusing on metrics such as participation rates and financial sustainability at both the district and state levels. Additional qualitative analysis incorporating feedback from teachers, school administrators, nutrition staff, students, parents, and community members will help evaluate the impact.

Target Audience: The intended outcomes of this recommendation aim to broaden access to nutritious school meals for all public school students. This will ensure that all students have equitable access to meals. While the Free and Reduced Price Meals program exists to provide free meals based on economic need, those systems do not account for factors such as families unable or unwilling to complete eligibility forms, student reluctance to participate based on stigma, or the gap between income eligibility and the realized cost of living in many areas of the state. For example, a [self-sufficiency](#) wage for a family of four with two school-age children in Allegany County is estimated at \$73,186, which is over \$15K higher than the maximum income allowed to qualify for free school meals. In Montgomery County, self-sufficiency for the same family is \$111,536 per year.¹⁸ Providing universal school meals ensures that all students receive free meals during the school day, reducing food insecurity and improving academic performance. This recommendation is expected to foster healthier learning environments, enhance student well-being, and contribute to stronger, more resilient communities by reducing administrative barriers for schools and promoting equitable access to nutrition.

The proposed initial step toward free school meals for all is expanding participation in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). CEP is an existing USDA program that

¹⁷ Ashley, K., Gale, C., Duque, M., Sessom Parks, L., Schenkel, B., Fettweis, C., & Fletcher, J. (2024). Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion Report. Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) Office of School and Community Nutrition Programs. [https://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/Exec/MSDE/SB579Ch191\(2024\).pdf](https://dlslibrary.state.md.us/publications/Exec/MSDE/SB579Ch191(2024).pdf)

¹⁸ *The Maryland 2023 Self-Sufficiency Standard Calculator*. (2023, January 4). Maryland Community Action Partnership. <https://maryland-cap.org/the-maryland-2023-self-sufficiency-standard-calculator/>



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provides universal free meals at eligible schools. School districts must apply to the program for individual schools or whole districts to participate. Currently, schools with an Identified Student Percentage (ISP) of 25% or higher may participate in CEP. ISP includes students who would automatically qualify for free school meals, including students from households receiving federal assistance (i.e. [SNAP](#) or [TANF](#)), as well as foster children, or children identified as homeless. CEP schools are reimbursed for meals at a rate based on their ISP, with higher need schools receiving up to the maximum reimbursement per meal. Prioritizing the expansion of CEP maximizes the input of federal funds toward universal free school meals in Maryland, prioritizing higher-need schools while identifying pathways and funds for school meals for all.

Is Funding Required? Yes. Under the traditional school meal operations, LEAs receive state and federal reimbursements to cover the cost of meals served to students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals. Federal reimbursements are administered by USDA and are passed through MSDE. MSDE administers state funding as outlined in the Maryland Cares For Kids Act of 2018 to cover the reduced-price cost and includes free breakfasts through the [Maryland Meals for Achievement \(MMFA\) program](#).¹⁹ Students who do not qualify for free or reduced-price meals are required to pay the full price charged by the LEA unless they attend a CEP school (where all students are offered breakfast and lunch at no charge through USDA administered federal funds), or a school that operated Maryland Meals for Achievement (where breakfast is served at no charge to all students through MSDE administered state funds).

Schools operating CEP do not charge students for school meals and instead receive federal reimbursements for meals served using a formula based on the percentage of children who are eligible to be directly certified for free meals without an application. This percentage is multiplied by 1.6 to calculate the percentage of meals reimbursed at the federal free rate (the highest federal reimbursement rate), and the remainder is reimbursed at the paid rate (the lowest federal reimbursement rate). For example, a school with 50% directly certified students would be reimbursed for 80% of the meals eaten at the free reimbursement rate ($50\% \times 1.6 = 80\%$), and the remaining 20% would be reimbursed at the paid rate. Under this formula, schools on the lower end of the eligibility spectrum often do not receive enough funding to cover the cost of their operations, making CEP financially unsustainable for these schools. To fully transition to a statewide universal school meals system through the [National School Lunch Program \(NSLP\)](#) and [School Breakfast Program \(SBP\)](#), additional state funding will be required to allow LEAs to eliminate meal charges for

¹⁹ *School Breakfast Program*. (2025). Maryland State Department of Education. <https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/programs/SchoolandCommunityNutrition/Pages/sbp-1.aspx>



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all students or sustainably operate CEP if eligible.^{20,21}

Based on the fiscal analysis of previously introduced legislation and an analysis completed by MSDE in a 2024 report, the estimated cost to implement a statewide universal school meals program could range from approximately \$149M to \$169M annually and would include the following:

Meal Reimbursements:

- Calculations account for current federal reimbursements and state subsidies from the [Maryland Cares for Kids Act](#) and Maryland Meals for Achievement.
- Federal reimbursement rates can be found on the [USDA website](#).²² The needed state funding can be calculated to cover the cost between any “paid” level reimbursements LEAs receive and the current federal “free” rate, which is updated annually.

Program Administration:

- A one-time investment of \$150K to upgrade the statewide software system used for meal claiming and reporting, with an estimated implementation timeline of ten weeks.
- Maintenance costs for this system, which is projected to cost \$20K annually.
- One new full-time MSDE employee to oversee program administration and provide technical assistance to public LEAs. The estimated salary and benefits for this FTE are projected at \$107,845 for fiscal year 2026.

Is Legislation Required? Yes. While funding for universal meals could be allocated in the state budget by the Governor, legislation would be required to ensure permanent and uninterrupted funding. Additionally, legislation would be needed to establish a requirement that students can no longer be charged for their first breakfast and lunch each school day.

Maryland has passed several previous pieces of legislation that could be expanded to create a statewide universal school meal program.

- [Hunger-Free Schools Act](#) – this bill removed barriers to CEP implementation by providing additional flexibility around poverty measures related to qualifying for state education funding. Expansions to this bill could include additional guidance around collecting school-level poverty data and replacing FARMs data as a measurement for connecting students with additional

²⁰ *National School Lunch Program*. (2025, May 1). USDA Food and Nutrition Service. School Breakfast Program. (2025). Maryland State Department of Education.

<https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/programs/SchoolandCommunityNutrition/Pages/sbp-1.aspx>

²¹ *School Breakfast Program*. (2025, March 10). USDA Food and Nutrition Service.

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/sbp/school-breakfast-program>

²² *School Meal Reimbursement Rates*. (2025, January 13). USDA Food and Nutrition Service.

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/reimbursement-rates>



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education-related resources.²³

- **[Maryland Cares for Kids Act](#)** – this bill established state funding to cover the reduced-price cost for school breakfast and lunch, allowing all students in the reduced-price category to receive free meals at school. This bill could be expanded to cover the cost of meals being reimbursed federally at the “paid” rate, effectively establishing a universal school meals program statewide.
- **[Maryland Meals for Achievement](#)** – this program was established by legislation and provides state funding to allow high poverty schools to serve free breakfast after the bell. This program could be expanded to all schools to establish a universal breakfast program statewide, and/or be expanded to include lunch reimbursements.²⁴

Additional legislation could be drafted to create new funding programs, much like legislation introduced in the 2025 Maryland General Assembly session, which aimed to create a new state CEP supplement fund. Previous legislation aiming to expand access to universal school meals has been widely supported:

- 2023: [HB 628](#) - Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion
- 2024: [HB 696](#) - Primary and Secondary Education - Breakfast and Lunch Programs - Universal Expansion Report
- 2025: [HB 1254](#) - Community Eligibility Provision Expansion Program - Establishment

Additional Resource: [Strategic Plan to End Childhood Hunger](#) from Montgomery County (2023)²⁵

Recommendation 1.2: Establish and Maintain a Statewide Food Insecurity Map

Overview: Maryland lacks a map that visualizes food insecurity statewide and, for that reason, a Food Insecurity Map was mandated in the [statute](#) establishing the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (FSRC). This year, a significant step forward occurred when the FSRC’s Distribution & Access Committee and the Maryland Department of Information Technology (DoIT) created a beta version of a Food

²³ The Hunger-Free Schools Act of 2015, No. HB0965 (2015).

<https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Legislation/Details/HB0965?ys=2015RS&search=True>

²⁴ Education - Maryland Meals for Achievement Pilot In-Classroom Breakfast Program, No. HB868 (1999).

<https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/1999rs/bills/hb/hb0868e.pdf>

²⁵ *Strategic Plan to End Childhood Hunger*. (2023). Montgomery County Government.

https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ofsr/Resources/Files/StrategicPlan2023_rev9signed.pdf



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Insecurity Map²⁶. DoIT collected data layers identified by the FSRC that, when properly presented and interpreted, can visualize drivers of food insecurity (needs) and available services (infrastructure). The beta version of the map demonstrates how an ArcGIS map can visualize areas of high need and service gaps. The beta version of the map also showcases that there are still resource gaps that must be filled to fully achieve the statute's stated objective of serving as a visual dashboard to assist stakeholders in understanding a more complete picture of food insecurity in Maryland.

Objectives:

- Create and maintain a holistic, statewide map that incorporates population and demographic information, program information (e.g. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP] enrollment or utilization), and service information.
- Provide a reliable resource that offers a cohesive, systematic understanding of food insecurity in Maryland during normal operations and emergency response.
- Enable coordination and collaboration between governmental and non-governmental entities that provide resources and support to Marylanders experiencing food insecurity.
- Serve as a visual dashboard to visualize the depth and breadth of food insecurity in Maryland in terms of social determinants of health, changing population demographics, infrastructure, and more.

The creation and resourcing of a Maryland Food Insecurity Map will allow for the development and implementation of two food systems-related indices, building on the data compiled in the map itself. The goal is to create indices that help monitor food insecurity and identify areas vulnerable to food system disruptions:

- **Food Security Index** – capturing social determinants of hunger such as transportation access, food assistance availability, proximity to retail food, and other research-driven variables.
- **Food System Risk and Vulnerability Index** – incorporating data on farm locations, crop distribution, flooding and soil conditions, storage facilities, wholesale infrastructure, food industry employment, and retail/wholesale sales, among other relevant factors.

These data layers would be intended for public use, enabling practitioners and non-expert audiences to easily identify local areas of need and vulnerability.

Achieving the goals stated above will require one FTE (housed within DoIT) with a

²⁶ To view the beta-version of the map, please fill out this form: <https://imap.maryland.gov/pages/md-geo-share-account-request-form> to get a MD GeoShare AGOL account. If you have an AGOL account select the option "I want to join MD GeoShare with an existing ArcGIS Online account".



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background in social science and, ideally, familiarity with food systems literature. The FTE would lead the methodological design, coordinate stakeholder engagement, and identify and manage relevant data sources. The first-year focus would be on methodology development and stakeholder outreach, ending in a white paper documenting the creation and maintenance of these indices. The role would emphasize subject matter expertise, research, and stakeholder coordination more than technical skills, as this individual could collaborate with DoIT to publish the map. After the first year, the position could continue to support the map's use, refinement, and promotion over time.

The Maryland Food Insecurity Map would support DoIT, the FSRC, the Maryland General Assembly, local jurisdictions, and state agencies in several ways which may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Data Management:** Collecting, managing, and maintaining geospatial data, ensuring data accuracy and adherence to company standards.
- **Administrative Data Research:** Developing a research calendar to track relevant administrative data releases (Feeding America; Census; United for ALICE; Urban Institute; USDA, etc.) and updating on a regular annual basis (one annual update).
- **Mapping and Analysis:** Designing and editing GIS data, using ArcGIS Online for data visualization, and identifying patterns and trends in spatial data.
- **Web App Development:** Developing and supporting web GIS applications using tools like ArcGIS Hub Sites, Experience Builder, Story Maps, Field Maps, and ArcGIS Dashboards.
- **Collaboration and Support:** Providing training and technical support to end-users, collaborating with cross-functional teams, and serving as a subject matter expert in GIS.
- **Reporting and Technical Tasks:** Generating geographic data reports, performing data cleaning, and developing mapping applications.
- **Accessibility:** Ensuring web maps and applications comply with accessibility best practices.
- **System Maintenance:** Monitoring and upgrading ArcGIS Online workflows and updating the map each year.
- **Documentation:** Developing documentation for new workflows and methodologies.
- **Training:** Creating and updating training materials for staff.

Justification: While there are existing ArcGIS data visualizations that contribute to the knowledge base around food insecurity, there is not a statewide map that tells the full story of food access and hardship faced by Maryland families. There is also not one unified source for food insecurity information for state agencies that leverages current state data to inform decisions.



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Implementation: The proposed FTE will be housed within the DoIT. Accessing and maintaining data sets, keeping information up-to-date, and managing privacy issues with other state agencies will be managed by DoIT. The website where the Map is housed will include feedback mechanisms as well as an annual user survey to measure effectiveness and impact.

Is funding required? Yes. Funding is required for the FTE housed within DoIT.

Is legislation required? No. Legislation is not necessary to create the Food Insecurity Map.

Recommendation 1.3: Clarifying the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act

Overview: Many schools, libraries, faith-based organizations, or others that have onsite production gardens do not feel they have coverage under the [Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act](#) to freely distribute the food produced on-site to people within their organization.²⁷ Bill Emerson assumes that the producer and distributor are different entities, but this is not the reality for many food access programs, as they are now developing in a more integrated model. At this point, it appears that food must be donated to another entity before the Bill Emerson protections would apply.

Entities with onsite production gardens need clarity on the ways they can make the food they have produced, on whatever scale that might be, freely available to students, pantry visitors, etc. Clarification could be provided at the state level that food produced in gardens can be used in cafeterias, donated to individuals, and used for tasting and cooking demonstrations.

The [2023 update](#) to the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act added new language allowing farmer-producers to donate their produce directly to individuals, so this seems in line with allowing other types of producers (community gardens, schools, libraries, etc.) to donate directly to individuals involved in their programs.²⁸ Clarifying this update and the criteria defining which organizations are qualified as “donors” will enable sites with production gardens to be more effective in increasing food access within their own community networks and organizational constituents.

Objectives:

- Adoption of a definition for “qualified direct donor” for the state of Maryland to

²⁷ Information on the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Act. (2019, June 18). USDA Food and Nutrition Service. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tefap/information-bill-emerson-good-samaritan-food-act>

²⁸ Frequently Asked Questions about the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act. (2023). USDA. <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/FAQs-GoodSamaritanAct.pdf>



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be used across the state for produce growing/gardens in public spaces, institutions, and organizations, where typically the produce is donated/consumed/provided to youth/families at that site (such as school children, library patrons, pantry patrons).

- Identify the appropriate agency and/or personnel to lead all efforts related to the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act to ensure that messaging is consistent and up-to-date, and technical assistance can be provided efficiently.

Justification: We know that hyper-local production and distribution have significant advantages in helping “mitigate potential storage and spoilage issues” and encouraging eating healthy food through a more direct connection with how and where that food was grown.²⁹ There is a groundswell movement, accelerated by the pandemic, to utilize hyper-local spaces and resources to provide access to healthy, fresh foods. Many organizations are seeking to establish production gardens with the intent to directly distribute what is grown within their own constituencies. However, because this method of combined institutional production *and* distribution is not directly referenced in existing laws regarding produce donation liability protection, many organizations are hesitant to engage in these practices.

Prior to recent federal budget reductions, Maryland SNAP-Ed educators have shouldered the responsibility of assisting communities in understanding the complexities of the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act in an informal capacity.^{30,31} The elimination of funding for the SNAP-Ed program will leave a technical assistance and educational void in the state’s local jurisdictions at a time when guidance is most needed. The result is missed opportunities, laborious workarounds, or hampered implementation of these projects due to the need to limit risk.

Implementation:

- Consult with legal experts to clarify the existing federal-level coverage for these producer-distributor spaces and identify any loopholes in that coverage.
- Create/update state legislation on food donations to include an expanded discussion of the federal law protections as they apply to non-traditional food production and donation spaces within the state of Maryland.

Target Audience:

- Marylanders with limited access to local, fresh produce.

²⁹ Gibson, S., Metcalfe, J. J., McCaffrey, J., Allison, T., & Prescott, M. P. (2022). Nutrition Environment at Food Pantries Improves After Fresh Produce Donation Program. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 54(5), 432–441. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2021.09.005>

³⁰ One Big Beautiful Bill Act, No. H.R.1 (2025). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/1>

³¹ *SNAP-Ed Reach and Impact*. (2025). University of Maryland Extension. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/18cXN7I5fhpMU6LXTMVB2KWuzxU6u1Sgd/view>



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- Families and children in schools with gardens, patrons of libraries with gardens, and food pantry visitors.
- Entities that wish to grow fresh produce to increase the availability of fresh produce within their communities.
- School administrators, pantry managers, and cafeteria managers who would receive the needed support to clarify policy and logistical concerns.

Is Funding Required? No. Funding is not required to clarify the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act in Maryland.

Is Legislation Required? Yes, an addition to state-level policy would resolve this issue. The requested legislation would not exceed the bounds of current federal law, but would offer clarity to the specific context of Maryland and ways that food donation programs are being developed within the state.

Goal 2

Develop equity and sustainability policy recommendations to increase the long-term resiliency of the food system:

- *Addressing and eliminating racial inequities in the food system.*
- *Addressing and eliminating diet-related public health disparities.*
- *Addressing and eliminating healthy food priority areas.*
- *Reducing wasted food, increasing recycling, and encouraging other relevant environmental impacts.*

Recommendation 2.1: Establish a Distributed Network of Cold Storage for Food System Resiliency

The FSRC recommends strategically locating cold storage facilities within communities to expand food aggregation and distribution capacities in Maryland. Leveraging existing infrastructure and markets to identify and establish strategic cold storage locations for community organizations will help them reduce food loss by effectively aggregating and distributing perishable food products, including produce.

Increasing cold storage capacity at the local level, such as in food pantries, schools, community centers, and farms, was identified by the FSRC in its previous reports as an essential component in improving Maryland's food system resiliency. Cold storage helps to expand the availability of nutritious, fresh, healthy food for distribution to



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communities. Cold storage units help reduce unnecessary food waste by extending the shelf life of produce, including locally grown, rescued, and donated food. In Maryland, small food distributors are often forced to turn away donated or rescued foods due to limited or a lack of cold storage capacity.

Cold storage is a statewide issue that needs community-based solutions. To aid with food storage and distribution, the [Institute for Public Health Innovation](#) supplied three cold storage trailers in Prince George's County, which can store and distribute 32,100 pounds each week.³² In Charles County, the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission (SMADC) spearheaded the [SoMD Community Fridges program](#) to increase food rescue by matching donors with farmers and providing fridge and freezer space while aiding in coordinating transportation.³³ Community fridges can be accessed at Charles County public schools for county residents. There is a need for funding to expand these programs into regional and statewide efforts.

Cold storage tailored to the local community's needs minimizes food loss and maximizes food distribution throughout a community's food system. Cold storage that can accommodate larger equipment (e.g. pallet jacks) can enhance the ability of organizations, pantries, school districts, or community centers to accept and distribute a wider variety of foods, including fresh produce and culturally relevant items. This would additionally ensure local agricultural products are consumed rather than being wasted.

One way to increase cold storage efficiency while working toward [state climate goals](#) is to pair cold storage with solar panels and battery energy storage systems.³⁴ In addition to reducing environmental impacts, solar-powered cold storage units can be utilized in emergencies, such as power outages, periods of grid instability, natural disasters, or delays in supply chain deliveries for food distribution networks. [A 2020 study of farmers in India](#) who used solar-powered cold storage units saw a payback of their investment in 2 years while saving \$7,449 annually.³⁵ [A 2022 study on cold storage](#) indicated that adding solar panels reduces overall operation costs by 15% and decreases energy usage by 87%.³⁶ There is a need to provide funding mechanisms for strategic solar-powered cold storage units to enhance resiliency during disasters and reduce greenhouse gas emissions throughout their lifetime.

³² Institute for Public Health Innovation. (2023, February 2). *Cold Storage Infrastructure Improvement*. Institute for Public Health Innovation. <https://www.institutephi.org/services/capacity-building/coldstorage/>

³³ Southern Maryland Agriculture Development Commission (SMADC). (2024). *SMADC Farm to Community Fridge Guide*. Southern Maryland Agriculture Development Commission (SMADC). <https://smadc.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/SMADC-Farm-to-Fridge-Guide-for-Farmers-5-6-24-updated.pdf>

³⁴ Maryland's Climate Pollution Reduction Plan. (2023). Maryland Department of the Environment. <https://mde.maryland.gov/programs/air/ClimateChange/Maryland%20Climate%20Reduction%20Plan/Maryland%27s%20Climate%20Pollution%20Reduction%20Plan%20-%20Final%20-%20Dec%2028%202023.pdf>

³⁵ Mishra, R., Chaulya, S. K., Prasad, G. M., Mandal, S. K., & Banerjee, G. (2020). Design of a Low Cost, Smart and Stand-Alone PV Cold Storage System Using a Domestic Split Air Conditioner. *Journal of Stored Products Research*, 89, 101720. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jspr.2020.101720>

³⁶ Xiao, X., Fu, Y., Yang, Y., & Zhang, X. (2022). Sustainable Solar Powered Battery-Free Wireless Sensing for Food Cold Chain Management. *Sensors International*, 3, 100157. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sintl.2022.100157>



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Piloting a cold storage grant fund would enable more units to be placed within communities, thereby reducing unnecessary food waste, promoting food recovery, and increasing food security and resiliency within these communities. Grant awardees would be responsible for reporting metrics on the impact of food saved (including pounds of food stored and preserved annually), the estimated annual financial impact of the cold storage investment, and maintenance costs for five years following receipt of grant funding.

Justification: The proposed grant program would minimize food loss and maximize food distribution at any point in a community's food system. Cold storage can improve the ability of organizations, pantries, school districts, or community centers to accept and distribute a larger variety of foods, including fresh produce and culturally appropriate items. This would help ensure local agricultural products are consumed and not wasted.

Implementation: The Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) would lead the administration of the pilot cold storage grant program. Program administration would support marketing the grant funds, creating a cold storage request for proposals, and evaluating the applications based on locational need, maintenance plans with timelines, and collaboration plans for short-term emergency coordination, if needed.

MDA may consider several recent programs in the Mid-Atlantic as models, taking into account MDA's capacity and objectives. For instance, Pennsylvania's [Food Recovery Infrastructure Grant](#) has funded community-based projects to preserve and distribute locally-produced food to communities facing food insecurity.³⁷ Recipients of this grant have indicated that additional costs, such as materials delivery fees, maintenance and repair expenses, and energy expenditures, were factored into the total project budget. As of June 2025, the Western Maryland Food Council is in the process of administering a regional cold storage grant program, through which six community-based organizations have been selected to receive funding for cold storage infrastructure. Additionally, the [cold storage infrastructure grant program](#) implemented by the Montgomery County Office of Food Systems Resilience may serve as a model demonstrating the FSRC's vision of community resilience for a statewide cold storage grant program.³⁸

Target Audience: Food pantries, food banks, and farmers. This will have a statewide impact.

³⁷ Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection. (2024). *Recycling Financial Assistance*. Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection. <https://www.dep.pa.gov/443/Business/Land/Waste/Recycling/Municipal-Resources/FinancialAssistance/Pages/default.aspx>

³⁸ Montgomery County Government. (2024, June 7). *Fourteen Nonprofit Food Assistance Organizations and Farm Partners Receive Grants to Build Food System Capacity and Strengthen Community Resilience*. Montgomery County Government. https://www2.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgpportalapps/Press_Detail.aspx?Item_ID=45365



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Is Funding Required? Yes. A minimum of \$6.4M is required to implement this recommendation, which includes cold storage infrastructure for agriculture, food distribution, food donation, and other needs to increase food system resiliency. This level of funding could support a grant program for cold storage needs, including freezers, refrigerators, cold storage lockers, cold storage trucks, and other related equipment.

While the cost will vary for each proposal based on installation and maintenance plans submitted to the grant fund, the \$6.4M requested would be enough to cover \$100K for the administration of the pilot grant program for one fiscal year, as well as to fund approximately twenty large (24'x40' estimated at \$170K) and forty small (20'x20' estimated at \$71K) walk-in cold storage units that are solar-powered with battery back-up. The cost estimates are based on building and installation costs that include a pad, electrical upgrades, equipment, and labor. An additional \$1K per cold storage unit will be required to cover any maintenance costs during the first operational year. \$100K in administrative funding would enable MDA to obtain the staffing and resources required for marketing the grant funds, creating the cold storage request for proposals, and evaluating the applications based on locational need, maintenance plans with timelines, and collaboration plans for short-term emergency coordination, if needed.

Quantity	Description	Unit Cost	Subtotal
20	Large Walk-In Cold Storage Unit	\$170,000	\$3,400,000
40	Small Walk-In Cold Storage Unit	\$71,000	\$2,840,000
60	Cold Storage Unit Maintenance	\$1,000	\$60,000
1	Pilot Grant Program Administration	\$100,000	\$100,000
		Total	\$6,400,000

Is Legislation Required? No. Legislation is not needed to implement the pilot cold storage grant program, though legislation may be necessary to allocate funds to MDA for program administration.

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.*

Recommendation 3.1: Strengthening Capacity for Local Food Councils

Overview: This recommendation aims to strengthen the capacity of local food councils by improving coordination and facilitating knowledge exchange at the state level. By creating an aligned network across jurisdictions with the support of state-funded Regional Food Council Coordinators, local councils will be better equipped to share resources, coordinate efforts, and develop sustainable solutions that benefit residents throughout Maryland. This initiative will encourage community engagement, expand food system infrastructure, and increase access to technical assistance and funding opportunities. The expected outcomes include stronger collaboration among councils, enhanced organizational capacity, and a more inclusive approach to addressing food security and equity. Ultimately, this will lead to a more resilient and community-driven food system that empowers local stakeholders, improves food access, and promotes economic and environmental sustainability.

Local food councils should engage in capacity-building efforts to enhance food security, improve coordination, and facilitate knowledge exchange at the state level. These efforts are vital in supporting residents across jurisdictions, strengthening organizational capacity, and addressing racial inequalities in the food system.

Objectives:

- **Community-Driven Action:** Gather feedback and best practices from local food councils to effectively coordinate efforts in addressing food insecurity and promoting racial equity.
- **State-Level Coordination:** Establish a structured network to connect local food councils, promoting collaboration and resource sharing.
- **Enhance Local Council Impact through Knowledge Exchange:** Create training programs and peer-learning opportunities to share best practices and foster knowledge exchange.



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- Create partnerships among food councils, Local Health Improvement Coalitions (LHICs), local health departments, local non-governmental organizations, and the private sector to coordinate food donations, food safety, 'Food is Medicine' initiatives, and other nutrition programs.
- **Support for Residents:** Ensure equitable access to knowledge of food systems, advocacy tools, and policy engagement to empower communities with enhanced coordination between state and local entities.
- **Organizational Capacity Building:** Provide funding, technical assistance, proposal writing aid, and governance support to enhance councils' sustainability and impact.
 - Prepare an annual report for the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (FSRC) to document best practices and activities, identify current and future needs of local jurisdictions, and enhance communication and information sharing regarding local food councils, their achievements, and critical needs.
 - Create strategic suggestions to form partnerships with local land-grant (University of Maryland College Park and University of Maryland Eastern Shore) extension initiatives and other universities/academic institutions, which could include fellowship programs, research, and internships.

These key actions and strategies enable local food councils to operate more efficiently, drive food security initiatives, and create resilient, community-driven food systems that are coordinated and meet the critical needs of food-insecure individuals. These new partnerships should involve the twelve existing local food councils and the five Local Health Improvement Coalition (LHIC) Food Security Subcommittees, and support the emergence of new councils.

Local Food Policy Councils:

- [Anne Arundel Food Council](#)
- [Baltimore City Food Policy Action Coalition \(Food PAC\)](#)
- Caroline County Food Stability Workgroup
- [Frederick County Food Council](#)
- [Howard County Food Council](#)
- [Kent County Food Council](#)
- Lower Shore Food Council (Somerset, Wicimico, Worcester)
- Mid-Shore Food Council (Caroline, Dorchester, Talbot)
- [Montgomery County Food Council](#)
- [Prince George's Food Equity Council](#)
- Upper Shore Food Council (Cecil, Kent, Queen Anne's)
- [Western MD Food Council](#) (Allegany, Garrett, Washington)

Local Health Improvement Coalition (LHIC) Food Security Subcommittees:

- Baltimore County
- Charles County



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- Garrett County
- Howard County
- St. Mary's County

Justification: This recommendation is justified in local food councils' essential role in building resilient, community-based food systems and addressing food insecurity across Maryland. Despite their impact, many councils face significant barriers, including limited staffing, fragmented communication, and a lack of technical and financial support. To address these challenges, dedicated funding is necessary to establish three full-time Regional Food Council Coordinators who will directly support local food councils and facilitate regional coordination. The coordinators' responsibilities include supporting food council operations, facilitating communication across jurisdictions, identifying regional food system needs, and developing grant proposals and funding strategies to support statewide food system resiliency efforts. The coordinators would also be responsible for reporting findings to help guide policy and funding priorities at the state level.

The Maryland SNAP-Ed program, like food councils, has historically supported resilience and connectivity across our food system, from producers to consumers, at both local and state levels. With the pending loss of over seventy SNAP-Ed positions across the state dedicated to community-centered food system resilience, the need for additional support for local food council coordination is amplified. Collaborative efforts by the food councils can assist in filling this void at a time when these efforts are most needed.

Though a state agency has not yet been identified to house these positions, an annual investment of \$325K would fund three full-time staff positions with state benefits. This targeted investment will help build the organizational capacity of local food councils, strengthen regional collaboration, reduce food insecurity, and ensure that Maryland's food systems are more equitable, resilient, and responsive to community needs.

Implementation: The proposed initiative would begin by allocating \$325K in state funding to support the hiring of three full-time Regional Food Council Coordinators. These positions may work collaboratively with the Maryland Office of Resilience (MOR) within the Maryland Department of Emergency Management (MDEM) to support alignment with Maryland's broader emergency preparedness and ongoing food resiliency efforts. Coordinators would be strategically placed to serve defined geographic regions, ensuring equitable coverage across the state. Their work would include collaborating with existing local food councils, supporting the establishment of new councils where needed, facilitating regional meetings, coordinating technical assistance, and working with the FSRC to identify needs, report on emerging challenges, and pursue funding opportunities.



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Feasibility and Measurement: The feasibility of this recommendation is high due to existing infrastructure and partnerships through the FSRC. Success would be measured by key performance indicators (KPIs), such as:

- Number of food councils supported
- Number of regional meetings and trainings held
- Amount of grant funding secured for local councils
- Improved communication and alignment between councils and state-level bodies
- Reports produced on regional food system needs and gaps

Anticipated Challenges: Challenges may include recruiting and retaining qualified staff, ensuring equitable support across regions with varying levels of food council development, and coordinating across multiple jurisdictions and agencies. Resistance to new structures or unclear roles among stakeholders could also create barriers.

Evaluation: The recommendation will be evaluated through both quantitative and qualitative methods, including annual performance reports, surveys of local food council leaders, and feedback from community stakeholders. Data collected by the Regional Coordinators will be used to produce an annual impact report, which will be shared with the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council and relevant state agencies. This report will guide adjustments and improvements to ensure the model is responsive, effective, and sustainable.

Is Funding Required? Yes, funding is needed to create three regional food council coordinator positions who work with the food councils to provide staff support for this needed coordination. The regional coordinators would work in conjunction with the Maryland Office of Resilience within the Maryland Department of Emergency Management, collaborating with the FSRC to report findings on the state's most significant needs for reducing food insecurity, help identify grant opportunities, and prepare proposals for food councils and statewide food system resiliency efforts. The funding would be \$325K annually, covering the salaries of three full-time staff members with state benefits.

Is Legislation Required? Yes, legislation is needed to fund the positions, require annual reports, and establish the necessary infrastructure to address food insecurity in Maryland.



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Goal 4

Develop 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 a Statewide Position to Coordinate Points of Sale for Local Food and Enhance Nutrition Benefits Programs

Overview: Local food points of sale – such as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, farmers markets, mobile markets, and farm stands – play a critical role in supporting local economies, promoting healthy eating, and increasing access to fresh, local produce for Maryland families. However, the administration and coordination of these local food points of sale and the use of food benefit programs, such as [WIC](#), [SNAP](#), the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program ([FMNP](#)), and Maryland Market Money ([MMM](#)) are currently handled by separate agencies, which can create inefficiencies and barriers for both vendors and participants.^{39, 40, 41, 42}

To support Maryland's goals of improving food access, supporting local agriculture, increasing the utilization of food assistance benefits and reducing food that is wasted that could be made available for people, we recommend creating a dedicated position at the state level to coordinate the development of local food points of sale and to facilitate interagency collaboration to improve access to healthy

³⁹ WIC: USDA's Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children. (2025, July 7). USDA Food and Nutrition Service. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic>

⁴⁰ Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). (2025). Maryland Department of Human Services. <https://dhs.maryland.gov/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program/>

⁴¹ WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program. (2025, May 20). USDA Food and Nutrition Service. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/fmnp/wic-farmers-market-nutrition-program>

⁴² Maryland Department of Agriculture. (2025). Maryland Market Money. Maryland Market Money. <https://www.marylandmarketmoney.org>



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foods among participants in WIC, SNAP, FMNP, MMM, and other food access programs. Though it may be a small part of this position's charge to provide holistic technical assistance on local food systems issues, this role could also serve as a point of contact for food rescue and recovery for persons who are required to divert foods under Environmental Article 9-1724.1 and support the coordination of edible foods to food banks and rescue programs.⁴³

The creation of the coordinator position would enhance Maryland's ability to connect residents with fresh, nutritious foods while supporting the economic sustainability of local farmers. This role would strengthen coordination among key food assistance programs and advance statewide goals for public health, food equity, and agricultural development.

Objectives:

- Enhance Maryland's ability to connect residents with fresh, nutritious foods.
- Support the economic sustainability of local farmers.
- Coordinate with public nutrition benefit programs across government and organizational entities to facilitate their use in local food spaces.
- Increase marketing, training, and technical assistance efforts.
- Increase redemption of benefits in SNAP, WIC, FMNP, MMM, and other access programs.
- Convene stakeholders to develop materials, systems, policies, and best practices to increase nutrition benefit program efficiency across agencies (i.e. higher farmer participation and higher customer redemption).
- Facilitate data sharing and evaluation activities to monitor reach, impact, and opportunities across public benefit programs from various state agencies.
- Assist in grant writing and funding strategies to enhance market infrastructure and outreach beyond traditional marketing channels and promotion strategies.
- Promote equity in food access by focusing on underserved and rural communities.

Justification: Since the dissolution of the Maryland Farmers Market Association in 2019, there have been gaps in strategic support. At the same time, interest and opportunities for local food points of sale have expanded. There is significant potential to increase the economic activity in support of Maryland's number one industry, and to do this in an equitable way that capitalizes on the nutrition benefits currently going unredeemed.

The recent elimination of funding for the SNAP-Ed program will result in the loss of another key partner in Maryland food access and technical assistance. SNAP-Ed has

⁴³ Article - Environment, 9-1724.1, Code of Maryland.

https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/laws/StatuteText?article=gen§ion=9-1724.1&enactments=False&archive_d=False



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operated offices in each county in the state and employed over seventy representatives statewide. These individuals were specifically trained and tasked with developing food systems and policy solutions to local and state issues. They provided individualized training and assistance to farmers, markets, and food assistance sites on how to help low-income Marylanders access healthy food. SNAP-Ed staff members have trained 5,430 local and state partners to deliver food access and nutrition programs and policies, and, in fiscal year 2024 alone, assisted twenty-four local farmers and markets in becoming authorized to accept SNAP as a form of payment. SNAP-Ed staff have directly supported the implementation of farm-to-school and farm-to-pantry policies and programs, including through food tastings, healthy food procurement trainings, tax incentives, and food loss prevention.

Without SNAP-Ed, there are questions about how these topics will be covered and how the materials and training resources produced by SNAP-Ed will remain available to these audiences. While the single food access coordinator position proposed in this recommendation would be insufficient to replace the repository of knowledge and expertise of seventy SNAP-Ed employees, the coordinator could help sustain SNAP-Ed's impact by maintaining and distributing the materials created through the program to local-level food access partners.

Nutrition benefits represent a significant investment of purchasing power that can be harnessed to power local food purchases. In 2024, with the launch of the annual [SUN Bucks](#) program, Maryland issued over \$70M dollars of federal funding to over 600K schoolchildren dispersed across each county in the state.⁴⁴ Even the county with the smallest participation received roughly \$200K in new nutritional benefits funding, which coincided with the local farm season (June-August). Investment in strategic leadership is needed to help low-income Marylanders use those funds to support local food producers in realizing potential economic and health benefits.

In 2024, Maryland WIC issued \$597,840 in FMNP benefits to 19,928 participants. Of that amount, \$300,474 was redeemed, resulting in a 50.3% redemption rate, while \$297,366 remained unspent. Some of this amount would have additionally been eligible for MMM matching. In 2024, \$442,850 in Senior FMNP was distributed to 8,857 individuals across the State. 75% of these benefits were redeemed, resulting in \$331,829 spent with farmers and leaving \$111,021 of unspent funds.

Farmers and/or farmers' markets currently accept nutrition benefits in every county in the state. As of April 2025, 145 farmers and farmers' markets in Maryland are authorized to accept SNAP nutrition benefits, including the new SUN Bucks program. 163 farmers accept FMNP benefits, which are distributed to WIC participants and Seniors. The WIC program has authorized fourteen of those farmers

⁴⁴ *Maryland SUN Bucks*. (2025). Maryland Department of Human Services. Retrieved July 8, 2025, from <https://dhs.maryland.gov/sunbucks/>



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to accept the year-round [WIC Fruit and Vegetable Benefit](#), which is distributed monthly. MMM is used at sixty-one locations across the state to match the purchasing power of all of these benefits programs.⁴⁵ While the 2022 Maryland Department of Planning reports that there were 12.5K farms in Maryland, many are not eligible to participate in nutrition benefits programs due to not being direct-to-consumer businesses or due to producing commodity crops or other items not suitable for purchase with nutrition benefits.⁴⁶ According to the 2022 Maryland Agriculture Census, there were 1,290 farms with direct-to-consumer sales, a necessary marketing channel for participation in these programs.⁴⁷ Since the proportion of farms is both a significant and very specific subset of the total farms across the states, there is a need for consistent and targeted technical assistance for those farms.

An increase in redemption of benefits provided by the programs will also contribute to the economic viability of Maryland's farmers by providing an additional revenue stream. A current research project conducted by ALEI, the Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology, and SNAP-Ed has shown that farmers are willing to enroll in the programs, but often find the enrollment process difficult to navigate. The project has proven successful in increasing farmer enrollment by providing opportunities for farmers to meet directly with agencies and enroll on-site. Enrollment could be increased by providing a permanent coordinator for this collaborative approach.

The coordinator position would provide vital support for recent legislation regarding increasing local food purchasing in the state, such as [HB0056/SB0177 Procurement - State Department of Education - Local Food Purchasing Program](#) (vetoed by the Governor). Intentional statewide coordination will be critical for effectively implementing the aims of these bills.

The other recommendations under [Goal 4](#), if adopted, would all greatly benefit from the coordinated guidance that this position would provide, drastically increasing their chances for success. Changes in the food system must be developed in concert with each other to produce the most effective solutions. With the absence of a statewide authority to convene and align these efforts, gaps and inefficiencies could persist or develop.

Implementation: The Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA), Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS), Maryland Department of Aging (MDOA), and Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) were consulted in the drafting

⁴⁵ WIC's Fruit and Vegetable Benefit. (2024). National WIC Association. <https://media.nwica.org/wic-benefit-bump.pdf>

⁴⁶ Maryland Department of Planning. (2024). Number of Farms in Maryland and Its Jurisdictions. https://planning.maryland.gov/MSDC/Documents/census_agriculture/farms_farmlands/Table_1_farms_22.pdf

⁴⁷ USDA - National Agricultural Statistics Service - 2022 Census of Agriculture - Volume 1, Chapter 1: State Level Data. (n.d.). Retrieved July 7, 2025, from https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AqCensus/2022/Full_Report/Volume_1_Chapter_1_State_Level/Maryland/



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process of this recommendation. The FSRC has not yet identified a single state agency to house the new coordinator position, but suggests locating it within the agency best poised for maximum effectiveness and broadest impact.

Target Audience: This recommendation will have a statewide impact and prioritize benefits-eligible Maryland residents. Nutrition benefits shoppers in local food programs (local markets and CSAs, etc) as well as farmers, market managers, and community-based growers will benefit directly from the establishment of this position. State agencies will also benefit from increased capacity to coordinate.

Is Funding Required? Yes, funding for this statewide position would need to be allocated. Since this is a statewide role whose success will be based on strong relationship building, the funding needs to be sufficient to encourage retention. Continued discussion with state-level partners is required to determine whether this would be created as a cross-agency contractual position or one housed permanently with a specific agency.

The estimated total package needed for salary, benefits/fringe, etc. is \$150K annually, which will be adjusted based on the [appropriate salary schedule](#) from the Maryland Department of Budget and Management.⁴⁸

Is Legislation Required? No.

Recommendation 4.2: Attract and Retain Resilience for Grocery Retailers in Healthy Food Priority Areas

Overview: During the 2025 Maryland General Assembly legislative session, [HB1434/SB0353](#) Maryland Food System Resiliency Council - Healthy Food Priority Area Study was introduced, requiring the FSRC to “conduct an assessment of strategies to attract and retain grocery stores and supermarket retailers in healthy food priority areas, including a review of existing incentives and available financing programs in this State and other states; and prepare a report on the Council's findings and recommendations regarding strategies to attract and retain grocery stores in healthy food priority areas.”⁴⁹ While this legislation did not pass, the FSRC has developed the following recommendation in alignment with the bill sponsors' intent.

To attract and retain resilience for grocery retailers in Maryland's healthy food priority

⁴⁸ *Salary Information.* (2025). Department of Budget & Management. <https://dbm.maryland.gov/employees/Pages/default.aspx>

⁴⁹ Maryland Food System Resiliency Council - Healthy Food Priority Area Study, No. HB1434 (2025). <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Legislation/Details/hb1434?ys=2025RS>



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areas (HFPAs), the FSRC advocates for adaptation and expansion of the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development's (DHCD) past funding program for food retailers in HFPAs (Maryland's Fresh Food Financing Initiative) including provisions that support purchase of cold storage units to better preserve and market perishable food options (e.g. fresh produce and dairy products). Further, the FSRC proposes that DHCD receive additional staff support to provide technical assistance for aspiring and current healthy food vendors in HFPAs.

Objectives: Multiple existing resources demonstrate the prevalence of Healthy Food Priority Areas (HFPAs) in Maryland. The USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) [Food Access Atlas](#) showcases that low-income and low food access areas in Maryland are concentrated in Western Maryland, Southern Maryland, as well as Baltimore City and the Capital area.⁵⁰ This underscores that HFPAs contribute to food insecurity in both urban and rural areas in Maryland. Reflecting this data, the Maryland Food Bank's [Maryland Hunger Map](#) uses available ALICE and census-tract data to identify Maryland's "hunger hotspots" by "assessing the existing need for food assistance services, quantifying current food distribution impact, and identifying underserved communities".⁵¹ Implementation of [Recommendation 1.2 Establish and Maintain a Statewide Food Insecurity Map](#) would better enable a targeted approach to identifying and addressing HFPAs in the state.

Attracting supermarkets and healthy food retailers to HFPAs is a complex issue, which Maryland's lawmakers and state agencies have attempted to address through legislation and programming. There are numerous reasons big box stores and supermarkets are reluctant to establish locations in HFPAs, including limited physical space for store infrastructure and sufficient parking for customers in dense, urban areas, as well as perceived increased financial risk and reduced profitability in lower-income areas. As such, the FSRC has reviewed relevant past and ongoing efforts to propose a strategic approach for increasing the presence and resilience of smaller-scale healthy food retailers in HFPAs.

Justification: Modeled after Pennsylvania's Fresh Food Financing Initiative, [Maryland's Fresh Food Financing Initiative](#) (FFFI) was established during the 2014 legislative session. Maryland's FFFI enabled DHCD to provide "flexible financing" for food businesses in underserved communities within designated "Food Desert Areas" and "Sustainable Communities". "Food Desert Areas" would be identified by local governments, which would apply for "Food Desert" designation with DHCD. Local governments, quasi-public agencies, and Community Development Financial Institutions were eligible to serve as intermediaries for this program, and businesses

⁵⁰ USDA ERS. (2024, April 17). *Food Access Research Atlas* [Federal Government]. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Service (ERS). <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/>

⁵¹ MFB. (2023). *Welcome to the Maryland Hunger Map* [ArcGIS]. Maryland Food Bank (MFB). <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/fe4fdacfd20b46c08dac240ca8dd6192>



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and nonprofits were additionally eligible to apply directly for Fresh Food Financing.⁵²

Per the Director of Business Lending Programs at DHCD, no local jurisdictions ever pursued a "Food Desert" designation between 2014 and 2021. As such, no businesses were made eligible to receive funds through Maryland's FFFI. In response to this lack of traction, the program was updated in 2016 alongside the legislation pertaining to DHCD's [Neighborhood BusinessWorks \(NBW\)](#) program. This update stated that any type of business, including food-related businesses, would be eligible for financing under the NBW program. Additionally, eligible areas were expanded from "Food Desert Areas" and "Sustainable Communities" to "Priority Funding Areas".⁵³ While food businesses may still be eligible to apply for a loan through the NBW program, small businesses in HFPAs may be deterred by the [\\$250 application fee and additional \\$250 closing fee](#) in conjunction with the real or perceived financial risk of launching a business in an underserved and under-resourced area.⁵⁴

In 2021, the [Network for Public Health Law](#) published an issue brief comparing the successes of Pennsylvania's FFFI with the outcomes in Maryland. Among the setbacks to Maryland's FFFI program, the lack of clear criteria for a designated "food desert" in the state was cited as a source of confusion as to whether only urban jurisdictions would be eligible to apply. The issue brief highlighted other legislative attempts to entice grocers into "priority funding areas", including through the sale of alcoholic beverages in grocery stores, noting that the proposed legislation focused on store profitability rather than on addressing public health outcomes for Marylanders living in HFPAs.⁵⁵ The most notable difference was identified in the overarching structure of the states' FFFI programs. While Pennsylvania's FFFI program offered both loans of up to \$5M and grants up to \$1M, Maryland's FFFI provided loans up to \$100K and did not offer grants. The Network for Public Health Law emphasizes that while loans are unlikely to be sufficient funding mechanisms for business sustainability, "grants, tax breaks, and other government subsidies are also key to making fresh food retail in food deserts a more desirable business proposition" (p. 6).

In addition, the Network for Public Health Law underscores that it is essential for programs designed to positively impact HFPAs to promote the acceptance of SNAP and WIC benefits. Doing so will ensure that consumers residing in HFPAs can both

⁵² *Maryland's Fresh Food Financing Initiative*. (n.d.). Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development. Retrieved July 8, 2025, from <https://dhcd.maryland.gov/Communities/Pages/default.aspx>

⁵³ *Neighborhood BusinessWorks Factsheet*. (2025). Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development. https://dhcd.maryland.gov/Business/Documents/NBW/NBWFact_Sheet.pdf

⁵⁴ *Neighborhood BusinessWorks*. (2025). Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development. <https://dhcd.maryland.gov/Business/Pages/default.aspx>

⁵⁵ LaFree, A., & Soloway, M. (2021). *Incentivizing Fresh Food Retail in Food Deserts: Lessons Learned from Pennsylvania and Maryland*. The Network for Public Health Law. <https://www.networkforphl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Incentivizing-Fresh-Food-Retail-in-Food-Deserts-Lesson-Learned-from-Pennsylvania-and-Maryland-FINAL.pdf>



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physically access and afford to purchase food in their communities. Taking this into consideration, the FSRC has reviewed the key barriers that prevent small food retailers from participating in nutrition assistance benefits programs. Maryland WIC provided services to 195,243 participants in the 2024 fiscal year. Maryland's WIC enrollment is above the national average, with approximately 78.56% of eligible individuals actively enrolled.⁵⁶ Increasing the number of WIC vendors in HFPAs would ensure that more healthy food options are available to all Marylanders living in underserved and under-resourced areas, not just those participating in the WIC program.

States have significant flexibility in implementing WIC retail vendor requirements within the parameters of the [USDA's Food and Nutrition Service \(FNS\) regulations](#).⁵⁷ States have the ability to authorize any retail outlet (e.g. corner stores, convenience stores, and pharmacies) as long as they meet federal and state stocking, licensing, and sanitation criteria. Maryland may have the ability to further leverage this flexibility to expand vendor participation in the WIC program and address the specific needs of food retailers operating in HFPAs. However, per MDH, while there is some flexibility in WIC vendor criteria, federal regulations also require competitive pricing and business integrity measures. Small stores often have higher prices, and WIC must ensure cost containment to serve the maximum number of eligible clients. WIC must also monitor price changes post-authorization to maintain program integrity.

Smaller-scale food retailers, including corner stores, convenience stores, and independent grocers, often have limited cold storage capacity as well as an inability to shoulder the financial liability of stocking a large quantity of perishable foods with a short shelf life. States have the ability to set the stocking requirements for participating vendors, including the quantity of types, sizes, and brands of WIC foods that must be available. MDH already has a lower minimum stocking requirement for stores with fewer than three registers. The purpose of minimum stock requirements is to ensure that WIC families have a reasonable variety of items to choose from, which is important for equitable access.

MDH has previously partnered with other organizations to increase corner store offerings of fresh fruits and vegetables, but found that these smaller food retailers struggled to maintain an inventory of healthier, WIC-approved options unless they were shelf-stable (not requiring refrigeration) due to declining quality and lack of sufficient customer demand. Per MDH, small stores struggle to consistently maintain the freshness of perishable food items, including both WIC and non-WIC foods. MDH has received WIC client feedback that small stores do not adequately meet their

⁵⁶ *Maryland Hunger Profiles*. (2025). Maryland Hunger Solutions. <https://www.mdhungersolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/2025-Maryland-Hunger-Profiles.pdf>

⁵⁷ *WIC and Retail Grocery Stores*. (2024, October 4). USDA Food and Nutrition Service. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/wic/partner/retailer>



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needs due to a limited selection, preventing them from maximizing the redemption of all their nutrition assistance benefits, including SNAP. Small food retailers, too, have reported a decline in business and WIC traffic.

Recent projects promoting healthier food retail in corner and convenience stores like Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health's [Baltimore Urban foods Distribution \(BUD\)](#) and D.C. Central Kitchen's [Healthy Corners](#) have aimed to address barriers for both consumers and business owners through tech-based supply chain solutions.^{58, 59} These projects highlight the additional hurdles smaller grocery retailers face in supplying healthy, perishable options, including constraints in working with wholesale produce distributors due to their limited purchasing power. Both projects showcased that increased technical assistance for corner stores to source and sell healthy food options can be highly effective in supporting market outlets for local agricultural producers, as well as consumer demand for healthy food items in corner stores.

Implementation: Maryland's FFFI could be reinvigorated to promote equitable food access and stimulate economic growth in HFPAs with additional funds and a program overhaul. A revamped funding program may be enhanced to more specifically address the needs of urban, peri-urban, and rural HFPAs in Maryland, incorporating the original intent of Maryland's FFFI. Rather than a state-led loan program, DHCD could allocate funds to local jurisdictions to administer one-time grants to food businesses seeking to open or expand within HFPAs. Priority would be given to those providing job opportunities and supplying healthy food options, including fresh fruits and vegetables. DHCD's funding program for food retailers in HFPAs could additionally be adapted to prioritize expansion of cold storage capacity for small and independent stores seeking to become WIC-approved vendors. The criteria and funding required for the appropriate scale of cold storage funds would differ from those presented in [Recommendation 2.1: Establish a Distributed Network of Cold Storage for Food System Resiliency](#). The cold storage units for small stores would be compact and intended to help preserve customer-facing inventories of perishable foods, thereby improving longevity and marketability.

With support from MDH, DHCD could further support this initiative by providing direct technical assistance to small food retailers in HFPAs with regard to inventory management and merchandising to encourage WIC traffic and minimize financial risk, as modeled through the BUD and Healthy Corners projects. Continuation of this technical assistance beyond the pilot year would help ensure the longevity of businesses receiving funds from DHCD's grant program for food retailers in HFPAs.

Is Funding Required? Yes. Funds will be required to expand DHCD's funding

⁵⁸ Powder, J. (2022). Corner Stores, Healthy Foods. *Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health*. <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2022/corner-stores-healthy-foods>

⁵⁹ *Healthy Corners*. (2025). DC Central Kitchen. <https://dcentralkitchen.org/healthy-corners/>



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program(s) to better support the needs of small grocery retailers in HFPAs, with additional funds made available to those who wish to become WIC vendors. One-time grants of up to \$25K per business would be sufficient for the purchase of front-of-house cold storage units as well as for marketing purposes. DHCD may require additional funds to administer the grant program. While MDH has sufficient staffing resources to provide direct support to food retailers participating in the WIC program, DHCD may require additional staff support to provide needed technical assistance for small grocery retailers to enhance the quality and variety of healthy food options available to both WIC and non-WIC customers. As such, the FSRC recommends an initial budget of \$1M for fiscal year 2028, which includes one-time grant funds for thirty-six HFWA food retailers as well as an additional \$100K for DHCD to ensure sufficient personnel capacity.

Quantity	Description	Unit Cost	Subtotal
36	FY28 One-Time Grants for Businesses in HFPAs	\$25,000	\$900,000
1	FY28 DHCD Grant Program Administration	\$50,000	\$50,000
1	FY28 DHCD WIC Technical Service Provision	\$50,000	\$50,000
		Total	\$1,000,000

Is Legislation Required? Yes, legislation is recommended to allocate the funds necessary for DHCD to expand existing programs for healthy food retailers. However, legislation is not necessary for DHCD to increase staffing capacity for food retailer technical assistance, provided that they are allocated the funds to assign a staff member appropriately in the state’s budget for fiscal year 2028.

Recommendation 4.3: Address Barriers and Create Incentives for Temporary Local Farm Product Sales in Healthy Food Priority Areas

Overview: Mobile markets, pop-up markets, and other temporary farm sales channels are highly effective in increasing access to healthy, locally produced food in low food access areas. A major barrier in the development and expansion of these opportunities is the challenge of securing appropriate host locations. To facilitate this process, this recommendation seeks to incentivize local jurisdictions to identify and designate places for temporary farm sales in or adjacent to their healthy food priority areas (HFPAs). [Per recent legislation](#), the Council defines HFPAs as predominantly



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lower-income areas that have limited access to retail outlets that sell affordable, healthy foods.⁶⁰

Some local jurisdictions, such as Prince George's County, have used demographic and other data to map areas with limited resources and limited access to fresh and healthy foods. There are several other resources, such as the [USDA Food Access Research Atlas](#), which could be used as the basis for determining HPFAs for the basis of the recommendation in areas that have not yet set their own criteria. The Maryland Food Bank has a map charting the gap of unmet needs relating to the meals per person in need across the state that jurisdictions may use to identify areas of low food access.

Local jurisdictions should make information about designated locations in HFPAs for temporary farm sales public and offer guidance on a streamlined permitting process to use those locations. This will be most effectively implemented if state agencies work with existing incentives and/or create new mechanisms for local jurisdictions to engage in this work. Possible incentive options for local jurisdictions include establishing new funding opportunities and offering priority consideration for existing grants related to local food purchasing, cold storage, and infrastructure development related to local farm sales.

Objectives:

- Using available data from sources such as the USDA Food Access Research Atlas, the Maryland Food Bank, and the United States Census, each county will identify one or more sites within HFPAs to safely and effectively host mobile/pop-up farm markets. Local food sales opportunities would not be limited to these designated sites if other arrangements that meet the needs of the local community and authorities can be made. These designated sites are not meant to restrict or replace other effective opportunities. However, designated sites would provide an accessible starting place and a streamlined process for identifying a host site.
- Farmers, market managers, and other relevant parties will be able to easily identify designated locations and schedule their use to increase food access through sales of local food.
- Local organizers receive resources (incentives) from state agencies to further support the creation of local farm sales opportunities.

Justification: The purpose of this recommendation is to increase the availability of local, healthy farm products in areas with limited access. A lack of transportation is often cited as a major barrier to accessing fresh, local foods. In response, there is a growing trend to develop flexible, mobile access points to reach underserved communities. However, one significant obstacle in expanding these access

⁶⁰ Public Safety - Food System Resiliency Council - Definitions and Reports, HB0009, Ch. 496 (2025).
https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2025RS/chapters_noln/Ch_496_hb0009E.pdf



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opportunities is the challenge of identifying and obtaining permission to use suitable locations. Market operators and farmers require guidance and support to streamline the process of securing host sites that are accessible to their intended customers.

Additional key barriers include a lack of clarity on the process and requirements of local health departments and other permitting authorities for these types of sales, and annual renewal periods for regular route vendor licenses in some counties. When mobile/pop-up markets are located in HFPA, licenses valid for longer periods or other ways of streamlining use of identified pop-up sites would go far towards increasing the opportunities offered to local residents to access healthy local food. [City Place](#) in Frostburg, MD, may serve as an in-state proof of concept model. Though not located in a designated HFPA, City Place serves as a publicly available location designated for local agricultural producers and vendors to engage with consumers.

When Connecticut established a statewide licensing program for food truck vendors, the City of New Haven created designated zones equipped with the necessary infrastructure to support these vendors.^{61, 62} This initiative encouraged growth in the food truck sector and established a more equitable and transparent pathway for aspiring business owners to enter the market. When this concept is applied to opportunities for local farm product sales, it is more likely that single vendor opportunities would be sought rather than sites to host multiple vendors. Additionally, the role of nutrition assistance benefits and matching funds through Maryland Market Money will benefit the success of agricultural producers using designated locations serving populations with limited purchasing power and limited access to fresh food.

The Maryland SNAP-Ed program has played an integral role in facilitating the launch of pop-up markets across the state, providing direct technical assistance to organizations and vendors in accessing funds and community support, as well as guidance on how to leverage nutrition benefits programs to support healthy food access for low-income Marylanders.⁶³ Local government partners can reference SNAP-Ed's program materials in establishing locations for temporary farm product sales, including guidance on physical and cultural accessibility for consumers in both urban and rural settings, as well as operational considerations for both vendors and community members.

Implementation:

- Convene state and local planning departments and other relevant partners to develop common terminology and a method to calculate and identify suitable

⁶¹ *Itinerant Food Vendors.* (2025). CT.Gov - Connecticut's Official State Website.

<https://portal.ct.gov/dph/food-protection-program/itinerant-food-vendors>

⁶² *Street Food NHV.* (2025). Street Food NHV. <https://www.streetfoodnhv.com>

⁶³ Forlifer, R. (2025). *How to Launch a Farmer's Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) Pop-up Market.* University of Maryland Extension, SNAP-Ed. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JqY4t8iRvhw_Y9RmgHMI5ra6sEUqPdjE/view



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locations for the mobile/pop-up market of one or more vendors.

- Local jurisdictions, in consultation with local food system partners and property owners, analyze areas with low access to healthy foods and identify locations with suitable characteristics to host mobile or pop-up market events. If the Food Access Coordinator position requested under [Recommendation 4.1](#) were to be funded, that position would provide critical support to convene and develop this process and aid local jurisdictions in this work.
- State agencies will develop or work with existing policies and programs to incentivize local jurisdictions to identify opportunities for pop-up markets, mobile markets, etc. While no existing incentives have been pinpointed at this time, identifying potential points of crossover between existing programs, grants, and incentives is an important step in the implementation of this recommendation.
- Issue clear guidance on how to use those designated spaces for mobile/pop-up markets and, where necessary, create streamlined processes and fee structures for use of these locations for this specific purpose. For example, one point of guidance might be to clarify any relevant local zoning caps or restrictions on holding concurrent events.
- Articulate a strategy to make this information publicly available statewide.
- Institute annual or bi-annual review procedures and updates to the designated locations.

Target Audience: By requiring that the identified sites are aligned with healthy food priority areas, this recommendation seeks to ensure these communities are served by any market opportunities this designation creates.

Is Funding Required? Funding is not immediately required to initiate this recommendation. As the effort to identify incentive opportunities progresses, new funding opportunities for supporting local farm sales may be sought from various state and nongovernmental sources. Some level of technical support would be needed to administer and work with local jurisdictions to undertake this process.

Is Legislation Required? Legislation may be required to clarify and incentivize local jurisdictions to accomplish this task, such as adjustments to state programs to give priority to localities with designated spaces and a process to facilitate their use. There may be a need for a statewide statute to align and supersede any county or local codes with provisions that contradict or impede the designation of sites for this intended use.



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Recommendation 4.4: Commission on Agricultural Labor Workforce Development to Enhance Food Production Resiliency

Overview: This recommendation proposes the formation of a *Commission on Agricultural Labor Workforce Development* to address the unique workforce challenges facing Maryland's agricultural sector. The Commission will produce a report that outlines strategies to incorporate the workforce needs of the agricultural sector into existing Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs. The Commission will also explore other opportunities and challenges faced by Maryland's agricultural workforce and will develop actionable recommendations to engage existing resources, agency programs, and stakeholder relationships to provide a stronger food system. The Commission will be headed by the Maryland Department of Labor (MDOL) with support from other state agencies and stakeholders. This recommendation also proposes a legislative mandate to direct MDOL to assemble and spearhead the Commission.

Objectives: Form a *Commission on Agricultural Labor Workforce Development* to enhance food production resiliency. The *Commission on Agricultural Labor Workforce Development* will address labor gaps and barriers unique to agriculture. The Commission will include members/representatives from the Maryland high school Career and Technical Education (CTE) program, NGOs that provide agricultural workforce development, Maryland Farm Bureau, agricultural commodity groups, University of Maryland Extension, and state agencies, such as the Maryland Department of Labor, Maryland Department of Commerce, and Maryland Department of Agriculture.

The Commission should create a report by December 2026 that details work towards the following objectives:

- Determine pathways from CTE programs to a viable Maryland Department of Labor Apprenticeship Program, including structuring the apprenticeship program based on the Maryland Department of Labor's compensation policy.
- Create guidelines for public, non-profit, and state partnerships to run a successful Maryland apprenticeship program for agricultural workforce development.
- Investigate the feasibility of combined labor programs to provide year-round employment opportunities for agriculture workers that bridge in-season agricultural work with off-season partnership opportunities.
- Consider how to replicate or model Perkins formula grants to bridge the labor gap in the farming community and address barriers unique to agriculture.
- Explore creating direct connections between the [United States Farmer Apprenticeship Program](#) with state and non-profit agricultural workforce



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development programs.⁶⁴

- Explore opportunities for better linkages between inmate-based gleaning and produce/livestock production programs with agricultural workforce development programs and local agricultural resilience. Explore opportunities for agricultural labor programs for former inmates who participated in these programs and are now transitioning into the workforce.
- Coordinate with the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to detail the legislative process needed for creating agricultural exemptions for K-12 students to earn service learning (SSL) for work on for-profit farm enterprises, especially small and medium farms and/or new and beginning farms that increase food system resiliency and local agricultural production.
- Explore the mechanisms needed to provide state-based platforms that include more small and medium farms in federal employment programs, such as the creation of cooperatives that share agricultural workers across different agricultural sectors with asynchronous harvest cycles.

Justification: There are existing CTE programs, but there is not an agricultural-based Maryland Department of Labor apprenticeship program. To create such a program, a dedicated group of commissioners will need to work together to strategize and create the groundwork for more agricultural labor opportunities. Expected outcomes are not only a formal MDOL agricultural apprenticeship program, but additional coordinated agricultural labor opportunities to address this large need in Maryland.

Labor has been cited as the leading barrier to agricultural production in Maryland, especially for small and medium farms. There is a lack of skilled labor as well as transition programs to provide managerial positions and upper mobility for skilled agricultural workers. The average age of a Maryland farmer is 57.8 years old ([USDA NASS CoA 2022](#)) compared to the average age of the Maryland population at 39.8 years.⁶⁵ There is a great need to bring more workers into this aging workforce to ensure that local agricultural production can be sustained in Maryland.

This builds upon the FSRC 2024 Recommendation 4.1: Agricultural Apprenticeship Program, but shifts the focus from MDA to MDOL to lead a Commission to address the challenges in setting up labor and apprenticeship programs directly for agriculture.

The goal is to create Registered Apprenticeship opportunities for agricultural jobs on farms, including small farms with diversified production models. The US Department of Labor has previously approved apprenticeship frameworks

⁶⁴ United States Department of Labor. (2025). *Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers*. Apprenticeship USA. <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/apprenticeship-occupations/listings>

⁶⁵ *Selected Producer Characteristics: 2022 and 2017*. (2022). USDA National Agriculture Statistics Service. https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AqCensus/2022/Full_Report/Volume_1_Chapter_1_State_Level/Maryland/st24_1_052_052.pdf



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for farmers and agricultural workers, many of which could be adapted to establish Registered Apprenticeship opportunities in Maryland.

MDOL is Maryland's State Apprenticeship Agency and has authority from the US Department of Labor to develop and approve Registered Apprenticeship programs in Maryland. Presently, there are no direct agricultural apprenticeship programs active in Maryland. The Public Sector Innovation Fund has \$3M available in total, capped at \$600K per state or local public agency, to cover administrative costs required to implement apprenticeship programs through 2026. Eligible costs include staffing, curriculum design, training materials, and supportive services to address employment barriers.

Incentives for employers to participate include assistance in obtaining labor and a \$3K per apprentice per year [tax credit](#) (up to five apprentices).⁶⁶ Additionally, employers may be eligible to receive grant funding through MDOL to [cover the costs of training](#) apprentices.⁶⁷

A potential barrier for agricultural employers lies in the existing compensation policy, which guides employers to pay apprentices an unspecified percentage of their supervisors' salaries ([see item F](#)).⁶⁸ In agriculture, this percentage may result in wages below the minimum wage. Unlike the Fair Labor Standards Act ([FLSA](#)), the Registered Apprenticeship Program does not have agricultural carve-outs in its compensation policy.⁶⁹ Therefore, supplemental funding may be required to ensure fair compensation for apprentices working for employers who earn less than minimum wage or can demonstrate financial need on a case-by-case basis.

MDA may coordinate with organizations such as local food councils, [Future Harvest](#), [Maryland Farm Bureau](#), and [Cooperative Extension](#) offices to promote the Registered Apprenticeship Program to farm employers, including small and mid-sized operations as well as agricultural businesses with a variety of enterprises and market outlets.^{70, 71, 72} Further, the American

⁶⁶ Maryland Department of Labor (MDOL). (2024). *Maryland Tax Credit for Eligible Apprentices - Maryland Apprenticeship and Training Program (MATP) - Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning*. Maryland Department of Labor (MDOL). <https://labor.maryland.gov/employment/appr/apprtaxcreditinfo.shtml>

⁶⁷ Maryland Department of Labor (MDOL). (2024). *Apprenticeship Grant Funding Opportunities - Maryland Apprenticeship and Training Program (MATP) - Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning*. Maryland Department of Labor (MDOL). <https://www.labor.maryland.gov/employment/appr/apprgrants.shtml>

⁶⁸ Maryland Division of State Documents. (2024). *Standards of an Apprenticeship Program* (No. 09.12.43.05). Maryland State Government. <https://dsd.maryland.gov/regulations/Pages/default.aspx>

⁶⁹ United States Department of Labor (DOL), Wage and Hour Division. (2024). *Wages and the Fair Labor Standards Act*. United States Department of Labor (DOL). <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/flsa>

⁷⁰ Future Harvest. (2024). *Beginner Farmer Training Program*. Future Harvest. <https://futureharvest.org/programs/beginner-farmer-training-program/>

⁷¹ Maryland Farm Bureau. (2017, November 4). *Maryland Farm Bureau*. Maryland Farm Bureau. <https://mdfarmbureau.com/>

⁷² University of Maryland Extension (UME). (2024). *University of Maryland Extension (UME)*. University of Maryland Extension (UME). <https://extension.umd.edu/home/>



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Job Centers should include agricultural jobs in their job placement listings for clients and ensure agricultural employers are being served through other Maryland workforce development programming, such as the [Maryland Corps/Service Year Option](#) and the Maryland State Department of Education's [apprenticeship partnership with FFA](#) (formerly Future Farmers of America).^{73, 74}

Implementation: The recommendation is the creation of a commission headed by the Maryland Department of Labor, with commissioners named from the following entities: Maryland Department of Agriculture, Maryland Department of Commerce, Maryland State Department of Education, Maryland Farm Bureau, and other community stakeholders, including non-profits in agricultural workforce development, University Extension, and agricultural commodity groups. The Commission should issue a report with recommendations responding to the Commission's objectives by December 2026.

Target Audience: The Commission report will be relevant to a statewide target audience and will include Maryland farmers, farmworkers, apprentices, inmates, K-12 students, small and medium farms, new and beginning farmers, agricultural commodity groups, NGOs, and University of Maryland Extension.

Is Funding Required? No, funding is not required. Rather, this recommendation necessitates agency and employee support from Maryland Department of Labor to spearhead the Commission.

Is Legislation Required? A legislative mandate directing the Maryland Department of Labor to lead the Commission would ensure forward progress on increasing the Maryland agricultural workforce and developing apprenticeship programs to help the current aging agricultural workforce by providing skilled labor. Doing so will ensure that local Maryland agriculture thrives, especially given the labor difficulties experienced by small and medium farm owners and by new and beginning farmers trying to enter the agriculture workforce.

⁷³ Department of Service and Civic Innovation. (2024). *Department of Service and Civic Innovation*. Department of Service and Civic Innovation. <https://dsci.maryland.gov/Pages/default.aspx>

⁷⁴ Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). (2024). *FFA*. Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). <https://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Pages/CTE-Programs-of-Study/CTSOs/FFA.aspx>



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Recommendation 4.5: Creation and Maintenance of an Early Warning Weather System to Provide Farmers With a Planning Tool and Local Weather Alert

Overview: More local-level weather data is a consistent need identified by the state's farming community. In order to maintain the sustainability of the state's agricultural industry, farmers need to understand the current weather conditions and adapt their operations as well as develop plans for future weather events and changes. The introduction of MDEM's Mesonet System provides the opportunity to address this need by increasing the collection of more local-level, timely weather data and providing the state's farmers and community members with the opportunity to access this information. Sustainability of this system will provide the opportunity for an increase in knowledge about weather conditions throughout the state and the opportunity to develop plans based on data.

MDEM will continue to administer the Mesonet system with the assistance of the University of Maryland. Other state and local agencies will collaborate with MDEM to use this information in their current programs and in future planning efforts.

The beneficiaries of this recommendation are the citizens of Maryland. The use of this local-level data will help to ensure that decisions and plans are based on scientific data.

Objectives: The creation and maintenance of a statewide weather monitoring and data sharing system will provide farmers and their communities with increased knowledge to plan for and adapt to extreme weather conditions, mitigate damages, and develop new approaches as they plan for the future. By sharing local weather information, farmers and communities can also develop greater knowledge about potential risks and develop appropriate plans for their farming operations and communities to include such needs as infrastructure changes (e.g. cold and dry storage), labor safety, and appropriate crops for growth.

Reviewing the data from the current Mesonet system will assist with the development of the state's resilience strategy. The data review will provide a greater understanding of current conditions and assist in identifying appropriate next steps. Continued review of the data will help state and local agencies to adapt emergency plans in order to ensure the safety of the state's food supply and communities.

Justification: Weather conditions and events continue to change and intensify in Maryland. At present, Maryland's farmers operate with limited local-level weather data as they prepare for changing weather conditions and plan for the sustainability of their operations. Data collected by the research team for the state's [Climate Smart Agriculture Project](#) noted that temperatures will continue to rise, resulting in



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increased heat stress on crops and farmworkers.⁷⁵ The team's report also noted that farms on the Eastern Shore will continue to experience loss of farmland due to saltwater intrusion and drought, while the threat of severe weather events continues to increase.

The introduction and increased use of MDEM's [Mesonet](#) system will provide farmers with access to more local-level weather data.⁷⁶ The recent introduction of additional weather sites throughout the state affords the opportunity to collect more data and provide farmers with a greater understanding of current conditions and weather trends in their area. Having access to this information will allow farmers to safely operate in current conditions while planning for the future.

In addition, the use of this data can help the local agencies and communities develop a greater understanding of their current weather conditions and plan appropriately for the public's needs and safety.

A Note on Stakeholder Participation: *This recommendation is the result of extensive stakeholder engagement regarding the impact of weather-related events on farming operations. Over the past year, the Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology and a series of partners (including the Maryland Department of Agriculture, Maryland Department of the Environment, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, farmers, academia) have worked on the Climate Smart Agriculture Project to develop a plan for Maryland's agricultural community to prepare for and adapt to changing climate conditions. The project's scientific research team noted that the weather conditions related to climate change are difficult to predict without local-level data. The introduction of the statewide Mesonet Program with over 70 monitors throughout the state will play a key role in providing more local-level data.*

Another component of the Climate Smart Agriculture Project focused on extensive stakeholder engagement to determine what farmers were experiencing and what their needs are to address shifting climate conditions. A survey was distributed to farmers and a series of listening sessions were conducted throughout the state. A top priority identified by farmers is the need for more local-level weather data and an early warning system so they can prepare for weather events.

The Maryland Department of Emergency Management (MDEM) acknowledges the need for the collection and dissemination of more local-level weather data. With the advent of the state's first resilience strategy and the increase in the Mesonet System, MDEM and the appropriate other state agencies are preparing to address this need. Recently, the Mesonet program was enhanced to provide more research-grade weather monitoring stations throughout the state providing the opportunity for an increase in more local-level

⁷⁵ Maryland Climate-Smart Agriculture Project. (2025). University of Maryland. <https://agmr.umd.edu/research/research-and-education-centers-locations/harry-r-hughes-center-agro-ecology/maryl>

⁷⁶ Maryland Mesonet. (2025). University of Maryland. <https://mesonet.umd.edu/>



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data.

Implementation: The Mesonet system is a collaborative project between MDEM and the University of Maryland. Both entities recognize the importance of gathering and sharing more local-level weather-related data to assist the state and communities in addressing the changing weather and planning for the future.

Target Audience: This recommendation will provide much-needed local-level weather data for producers and communities throughout the state. The state's farming community and its products differ from region to region. The impact of climate change also varies according to location and the type of farming operation. For example, an orchard in Western Maryland may be experiencing earlier frost while a farm on the lower Eastern Shore may be coping with saltwater intrusion or drought conditions. A greater understanding of the weather conditions in their local area will enable farmers to develop plans for the future while also increasing their ability to maintain continuity of operations during the present weather conditions.

Is Funding Required? Yes. Additional information is required to determine the cost of maintaining and growing the Mesonet system. Funding is additionally required to provide educational outreach efforts for the agricultural community about the Mesonet system and how to access the information it provides.

Is Legislation Required? No, legislation is not required.

Recommendation 4.6: A Collaborative Approach to Resource Sharing

Overview: Climate change and weather events are impacting Maryland's agriculture. State agencies are examining and addressing climate change impacts on their areas of focus. Agriculture as the state's leading industry needs to be included in these conversations as climate change impacts on agriculture will affect the state's food system, exacerbating supply chain uncertainty. One of the state's primary concerns is consistently ensuring a safe and stable food supply for Marylanders, made possible through coordination. This recommendation encourages state agencies to work collaboratively on approaches and solutions to adapt to climate change impacts and to ensure that the agricultural community is engaged in the discussion and aware of the resources.

During recent outreach for the state's Climate Smart Agriculture Project, farmers shared that additional research, outreach, and funding are needed to help them adapt to changing weather conditions and prepare for the future. In a recent study cited by the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES), 51% of farmers indicated



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that they were familiar or slightly familiar with the range of available conservation practices, while 71% indicated that they would only implement a practice if funding was available. Individuals cited the difficulty in accessing current research and funding. A commonly heard request from the agricultural community is the creation of a web-based "one-stop shop" where farmers could locate this information.

The "one-stop shop" site would include links to current research, available data on how weather predictions will impact the agricultural season, links to relevant state and county resources and agencies, and funding opportunities. This information could be shared through state agencies and trusted sources (i.e. Future Harvest, Farm Bureau, UMD, UMES, MARBIDCO). This site would also provide researchers, funders, and technical service providers with the opportunity to educate themselves about statewide efforts and opportunities. The designation of a "one-stop shop" will reduce duplicative efforts, promote collaborative efforts, and help farmers respond to changing weather events. The [Maryland State Climatologist Office](#) website is one possible location for this resource.⁷⁷

Farmers also cited the need for "pilot" projects where they could view first-hand strategies and approaches to address climate issues. Pilot projects could include the use of new crops, best management practices, or adaptation of existing infrastructure to accommodate changing weather patterns and adjust relevant marketing practices. Pilot projects could be funded through federal, state, local, or private funds. An example of success to expand on is MDA's [cover crop funding program](#), which could be modified to widen the range of practices eligible for funding to include climate smart practices and involve peer-learning programming among farmers.⁷⁸

Objectives: The creation of a "one-stop shop" is a solution to the agricultural community's request for an efficient and concise method to locate climate-related information. One possibility is the creation of a dashboard similar to the [Climate Toolbox](#) created by University of California Merced.⁷⁹ The "one-stop shop" would include relevant information customized for Maryland and should be designed in a manner to meet the needs of all sectors of the farming community (the information and resource needs of a commodity farmer will differ from those of a produce farmer). As research, programs, and funding sources are constantly changing, the creation of this resource is achievable and would have an immediate benefit for the agricultural community.

Justification: Promoting a safe and stable food supply is a primary function of the state. The combined effects of climate change, including prolonged drought,

⁷⁷ University of Maryland. (2025). *Maryland State Climatologist Office*. <https://mdsco.umd.edu/>

⁷⁸ *Cover Crops*. (2025). Maryland Department of Agriculture. https://mda.maryland.gov/resource_conservation/Pages/default.aspx

⁷⁹ University of California Merced. (2025). *Climate Toolbox*. The Climate Toolbox. <https://climatetoolbox.org/>



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extreme heat, and saltwater intrusion, severely impacted Maryland's agricultural output in 2024. These challenges underscore the need for adaptive strategies and support systems to help farmers mitigate risks and sustain productivity in the face of a changing climate.

In 2024, Maryland farmers reported stunted crops (with grain quality cited as a significant concern) due to extreme heat and limited precipitation during the summer months. Between June 18 and 25, the area of Maryland experiencing drought expanded dramatically from 5% to 61%. On Maryland's Eastern Shore, corn and soybean yields were below average due to uncharacteristically dry conditions. The lack of rain in 2024 hindered the establishment of wheat and cover crops. In addition to drought, Eastern Shore producers contended with increasing saltwater intrusion due to rising sea levels. The economic impact of saltwater intrusion is substantial, with estimated losses nearly doubling from \$58M in 2011 to \$107M in 2017.

The creation of the "one-stop shop" would immediately address the needs of the state's agricultural community by providing a hub for farmers to access up-to-date climate-related information, including current research and funding opportunities. By streamlining the process to locate these resources, farmers will easily access critical information to make real-time decisions to ensure productivity in their operations in light of changing weather conditions. Likewise, technical service providers can also increase their knowledge and enhance efficiency in supporting the agriculture community.

With the current budgetary and staffing pressures within federal and state agencies, this project could alleviate duplicative efforts by agencies and researchers.

A Note on Stakeholder Participation: *The Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology's Climate Smart Agriculture Project engaged extensively with the state's agricultural community to determine their needs as they navigate climate change impacts to their operations. The results of a statewide survey and listening session series noted that farmers are eager to locate research and funding that will assist them. As a result of this request, the team leading the Climate Smart Agriculture Project recommends the creation of a "one-stop shop" to address farmers' needs. The Climate Smart Agriculture Project leadership team includes representatives of the Maryland Department of Agriculture, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Maryland Department of the Environment as well as members of the agricultural community, technical service providers, and researchers.*

The Montgomery County Food Council is currently undertaking a Climate Smart Farms Initiative in partnership with Montgomery County Green Bank. As part of the initiative, twenty-one farmers and eighteen technical service providers were consulted to share their perspectives on climate smart agriculture, discussing their level of preparedness to implement practices and the resources producers need to address the worst impacts of



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climate change. Their input informed the development of this recommendation.

Implementation: The “one-stop shop” should be created and administered by a trusted and stable source, such as the Maryland State Climatologist Office, with access to state agencies, researchers, and funders. The Maryland State Climatologist Office is one possible location for this resource.

Challenges to implementation of this project include securing the necessary funding for staff and maintenance of the “one-stop shop”. There will also be the initial challenge in gathering the information regarding current and past research, pilot projects, and funding opportunities.

Target Audience: The primary target audiences for the “one-stop shop” would be the state’s farmers. However, it would also be used by technical service providers, researchers, state and local agencies, and funders. The impact of having access to this information in one location would be felt statewide, as individuals are often only aware of efforts occurring in their local area. The state’s greatest beneficiary, however, will be all Marylanders for whom a safe and stable food supply is essential.

Is Funding Required? Funding would be required for the creation, coordination, and maintenance of the “one-stop shop”. Funding may also be required for the implementation of the “pilot” projects. However, there are examples at both national and state levels where local governments and private entities provide funding.

Is Legislation Required? No, legislation is not required.

Recommendation 4.7: Create a Statewide Local Food Procurement Guidance Document for Institutional Buyers and Maryland Producers

Overview: The FSRC proposes creating a state-specific food procurement guidance document to help overcome challenges limiting institutional local food procurement. This guidance will educate stakeholders on the procurement process and will provide actionable steps to encourage producer and buyer participation in Maryland’s local food system. The document will be tailored to Maryland producers and institutional buyers, taking into account the needs of different institution types and the barriers to working with small and beginning farmers. The Council recommends supporting a legislative mandate to direct the Maryland Department of General Services (DGS), the lead agency for state procurement, to develop this guidance document in collaboration with partner state agencies and community stakeholders.



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Objectives: The goal of this recommendation is to develop a comprehensive state-specific guidance document that will help educate institutional buyers, agricultural producers, and seafood providers in Maryland to encourage local food purchasing. This document will explore procurement challenges and outline implementation procedures designed to enhance local food procurement efforts, ensuring that both buyers and producers can effectively navigate and benefit from local food production systems. This will include relevant regulatory requirements, institutional buyers' needs, procurement processes, quality and standards, and local food procurement goals. Furthermore, the document will review current procurement processes and practices and identify opportunities for centralization of state procurement systems to improve efficiency. The procurement guidance document will have a targeted completion/publication date of December 2026.

Justification: Presently, there is a low level of institutional procurement of Maryland-produced foods. Based on the December 2024 [Maryland Certified Local Farm and Fish Program Report](#), only 0.25% of state agency/university food procurement budgets were spent purchasing from Certified Local Farm and Fish providers.⁸⁰ This represents only \$238,920 of a total food budget of \$97.6M. Moreover, non-milk local food purchases were 2% of the total amount spent on food by Local Education Agencies (LEAs). Simultaneously, producer participation also has room for growth, with only sixteen Certified Local Farm and Fish Providers (CLFFP) selling to state agencies in fiscal year 2024.

The implementation of this recommendation will serve as a means to better understand challenges faced by buyers and producers, and provide guidance to overcome barriers restricting local food procurement. During the development of the procurement guidance document, an emphasis will be placed on better understanding the specific needs and limitations related to cold storage and food processing, and how these factors contribute to challenges with local procurement. Additionally, the document will serve as a resource to help small and beginning farmers understand the requirements and benefits for becoming a CLFFP and participating in the local food procurement process. State procurement represents an economical approach to strengthening Maryland's food system while meeting state nutritional needs locally.

Implementation: This document will be primarily authored by DGS, the lead agency for state procurement, in collaboration with MDA. DGS will receive additional support from other stakeholder groups, including but not limited to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). During the development of the document, the challenges faced by institutional buyers, categorized by institution type (e.g., state agencies, University System of Maryland, etc.), as well as by growers, will be further explored while providing practical guidance. The guidance document will leverage

⁸⁰ MDA. (2024). *Certified Local Farm and Fish Program* [State Agency]. Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA). https://mda.maryland.gov/maryland_products/Pages/certified-local-farm.aspx



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existing guides with the inclusion of state-specific considerations and resources for buyers and producers. The guidance document will have a targeted publication date of December 2026.

Target Audience: The guidance document proposed by this recommendation will be relevant to a statewide target audience, including farmers and other producers, seafood providers and processors, but also will include relevant materials for state institutional/agency buyers. The document will also be used as a reference outlining Maryland procurement requirements and processes.

Is Funding Required? This recommendation would not require additional funding, as the guidance document would be developed by Maryland State government employees.

Is Legislation Required? A legislative mandate directing DGS to lead the development of this guidance document would be useful in ensuring forward progress. The guidance document would help support several key pieces of existing legislation promoting local food procurement. Specifically, [the Certified Local Farm and Fish Program in Title 14, Subtitle 7 of the State Finance and Procurement Article](#) and the Locally Grown Foods preference in [SPR 21.11.07.08](#).^{81, 82}

Recommendation 4.8: Establish Scalable and Specific Standards for Farm Processing and Production of Value-Added Agriculture

Overview: Existing state licenses and environmental health regulations should be reevaluated by relevant regulatory state agencies. Whereas the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) inspects and licenses food and agricultural processing entities, the Maryland Department of Environment (MDE) guides and enforces as it relates to the regulatory process. These regulatory agencies, consulting with the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) and other relevant agencies, should establish a more appropriate system for tracking, scaling, and expanding farm-based value-added operations throughout Maryland.

Justification: "Farm processing" is a concept that now goes beyond a residential kitchen but might not be a viable enterprise if held to commercial standards on a farm property. Being reduced to an in-home kitchen by regulatory interpretation and having a revenue cap lower than unlicensed Cottage Food products, the "[On-Farm Home Processing License](#)" is outdated and ineffective for encouraging and

⁸¹ Article - State Finance and Procurement, §14-703, Code of Maryland (2024). https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/2025RS/Statute_Google/gsf/14-703.pdf

⁸² 21.11.07.08 Locally Grown Foods. (2025). Maryland Division of State Documents. <https://dspd.maryland.gov/regulations/Pages/21.11.07.08.aspx>



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incentivizing the further processing of Maryland-grown products.⁸³ Public health and safety remain of the utmost importance, but creative solutions exist that would present cost-effective opportunities for farms to successfully conduct value-added processing operations.

Thresholds must exist in regulation for consistent and clear decisionmaking. Without definitions recognizing unique features of agricultural industries, such as seasonal activities or processing, many farms will be presented with costly requirements that do not make business sense. Without a clear threshold or formula for significant investments, such as "water under pressure" or permanent bathrooms, regulatory agencies will be unable to offer concise or consistent direction to the business community. Standards need to be established for value-added and agritourism enterprises as they relate to environmental health regulation. Otherwise, businesses in the agricultural communities will continue to experience inconsistencies and "moving goal posts".

A Note on Stakeholder Participation: *A wide array of stakeholders were engaged throughout the development of this recommendation, including several farmers who participated in a virtual listening session. In a parallel effort, MDA has led a series of farm visits and other stakeholder engagement to understand this issue area.*

Implementation: This recommendation will be implemented by MDH and MDE, in consultation with MDA. Implementation will consist of reviewing licenses and regulations associated with farm-based value-added operations. This review will result in a clear picture of the current processes, more consistent application and understanding of those processes, and potential opportunities for improvement.

Target Audience: Farmers and agricultural businesses will benefit from this recommendation, since it would clarify their regulatory requirements and make administrative processes simpler for them.

Is Funding Required? No.

Is Legislation Required? Yes, legislation is required to make necessary adjustments to existing regulations.

⁸³ COMAR 10.15.04.18 *On-Farm Home Processing Licensing Procedure Step-by-Step*. (2018). Maryland Department of Health. https://health.maryland.gov/phpa/oehfp/ofpchs/siteassets/pages/plan-review/on-farm%20step%20by%20step%20proc%20ess%20licensing_5-2019.pdf



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Recommendation 4.9: Create a Statewide Streamlined Permitting Process for Food Sampling in Community-Based Food Sales and Distribution Settings

Overview: Offering food sampling has been shown to increase local food economic activity, have a positive effect on healthy eating, and increase the use of nutrition benefits for healthy local farm products. Maryland has the opportunity to show national leadership in creating a statewide, annual process for becoming certified to offer food tastings and/or cooking demonstrations at community-based food access points (i.e. farmers markets, mobile markets, popup markets, and farm stands). A statewide path to becoming authorized annually would simplify and streamline the process while safeguarding adherence to relevant food safety practices as outlined in the existing regulations and standards related to food sampling ([COMAR 10.15.03.02B\(70\)](#)).⁸⁴

Farmers don't grow and sell based on county lines, and organizations often don't operate within a single jurisdiction. Mobile markets are an emerging and effective means of increasing access to healthy foods, and often operate across multiple jurisdictions. Therefore, having a patchwork of processes and interpretations of statewide standards held at the county level creates significant roadblocks to effectively delivering programming, offering food tastings, and sampling local farm products.

This recommendation would standardize a process for farmers, farmers' markets, or other community-based food access points to demonstrate food safety practices applicable in this specific type of setting and receive a season-long permit that is recognized across jurisdictions statewide.

Objectives:

- Work with the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to create a universal permitting process that will be used across the state and allow recipients to conduct sampling season-long in community-based food access settings.
- Increase purchases of local foods.
- Increase opportunities to sample local food before purchase.
- Increase consumer confidence and knowledge of how to prepare local foods.

⁸⁴ Maryland Department of Health. (2018, October 12). *10.15.03 Food Service Facilities*. Maryland Department of Health Regulations. <https://health.maryland.gov/regs/Pages/10-15-03.aspx>



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Justification: Increasing the capacity to offer tastings and cooking demonstrations at local food access points is an effective way to boost access and consumption of healthy local food. We know that consumers may often attempt to mitigate wasting food and conserve resources by avoiding unfamiliar food.⁸⁵ While a good strategy, this uniquely limits their ability to adapt to locally available food and make dietary changes that may align with their health goals. Increasing the ability for farmers and other food system partners to safely offer tastings and cooking demonstrations at distribution points could have a significant effect in increasing food access and use of nutrition benefits.⁸⁶

A key role of Maryland SNAP-Ed has been collaborating with local producers and farmers' markets, as well as other community sites, to provide nutrition education programming in the form of food tastings and cooking demonstrations. With the elimination of funding for the SNAP-Ed program, additional support will be required from state and local governments to ensure that the needs of Maryland's food producers and low-income consumers are met in maintaining this invaluable approach to nutrition education.

In the wake of the 2009 implementation of a statewide sampling certificate for farmers' markets in Kentucky, the University of Kentucky produced [an analysis of the value that sampling brings](#) to local food points of sale.⁸⁷ The corresponding economic and health improvement opportunities associated with increased sampling represent a win-win for achieving local food systems goals. While Kentucky's program focused narrowly on farmers' market vendors, it provides a proof of concept model that Maryland could expand to cover local food points of sale more broadly. Unlike the Kentucky program, this recommendation would establish a single food handlers class administered at the state level instead of maintaining separate county-level processes. The Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission's (SMADC) process to coordinate the Acidified Foods Certification in partnership with MDH could serve as another reference model.⁸⁸

While not an exact parallel, it is worth noting that other states have taken this statewide route to resolve licensing and permitting issues related to food truck

⁸⁵ Metcalfe, J. J., McCaffrey, J., Schumacher, M., Kownacki, C., & Prescott, M. P. (2022). Community-based nutrition education and hands-on cooking intervention increases farmers' market use and vegetable servings. *Public Health Nutrition*, 25(9), 2601–2613. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980022000660>

⁸⁶ Scott, M. K., Gutuskey, L., Zwemer, T., & Gallington, K. (2022). Farmers Market Food Navigator Program: Key Stakeholder Perceptions and Program Outcomes. *Health Promotion Practice*, 23(1), 166–173. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839920978163>

⁸⁷ Spencer, S. (2024). *Farmers' Market Sampling Packet*. Kentucky Department of Agriculture. https://www.kyagr.com/marketing/documents/FM_SamplingPacket.pdf

⁸⁸ Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission. (2025). *Acidified Foods*. <https://smadc.com/farmer-resources/tutorials/acidified-foods/>



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operations.⁸⁹ Many of the issues addressed by these measures reflect the same difficulties encountered with food tasting and cooking demonstrations at local farm product distribution sites.

Implementation: With a state-level mandate, MDH, in collaboration with local health departments, MDA, and other food system partners (e.g. University of Maryland Extension, SMADC, Maryland farm advocacy and training nonprofits, etc.) would develop a common standard and process to obtain seasonal certification to offer food tastings and cooking demonstrations at local food access points throughout the state. Development of this process would involve clarifying the role of local health departments and authorities in the monitoring, enforcement, and interpretation of these blanket authorizations.

This program would apply not only to farmers' market vendors but also include other innovative local food access models across the state, such as mobile markets, pop-up markets, farmstands, and other local food access strategies. As with the Kentucky state model, different tiers of certification would be created for those only sampling minimally processed products (e.g. cut produce) versus those who want to offer cooking demonstrations and tastings of prepared dishes made with local products.⁹⁰

Comparing the number of applications and food tastings offered before the statewide process is implemented and in the years afterward could be an effective evaluation measure. Surveys with entities that have participated in these processes both before and after this new approach would be another way to evaluate the recommendation.

Target Audience:

- Consumers at local food access points, especially those receiving nutrition assistance benefits (SNAP, WIC, FMNP, etc.) will benefit from this recommendation. The main purpose is to promote a beneficial behavior change among consumers who are less likely to purchase local products due to unfamiliarity, lack of confidence, or concerns regarding wasted food. Foundationally, it is intended to create welcoming environments for consumers of all backgrounds and cuisines, offering exposure to Maryland-grown products in ways that increase consumer confidence in choosing and preparing healthy foods.
- Farmers, market managers, and nutrition educators will benefit from a streamlined permitting process and the resulting increased sales of Maryland farm products.

⁸⁹ Deggs, K. (2025, April 8). Some Green Country food trucks supporting statewide permit bill. *News On 6*. <https://www.newson6.com/story/67f5b33f539bfa94b8b2aa15/some-green-country-food-trucks-supporting-statewide-permit-bill>

⁹⁰ *Kentucky Farmers' Market Manual and Resource Guide 2024-2025*. (2024). Kentucky Department of Agriculture. https://www.kyagr.com/marketing/documents/FM_Manual_and_Resource_Guide.pdf



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Is Funding Required? Temporary funding for MDA and MDH may be needed to cover additional staffing requirements and to convene essential stakeholders for the development of a standard that will effectively cover the breadth of settings across the state. Implementation of this process would be partially funded by permit fees. However, given the anticipated scale and the need to provide affordable access, permit fees alone would not sustain the financial support necessary to fund the required level of technical support to maintain the system. As such, sustained administrative funding would be necessary for longer-term implementation.

Is Legislation Required? Yes. In order to create a statewide process, legislation would be needed to align and supersede any county or local codes with provisions that may contradict or impede the implementation of a statewide program.



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Committee Summary

Communication and Coordination Committee

Voting Member Roster

Committee Position	Name, Affiliation
Co-Chair	Heather Bois Bruskin, <i>Director Office of Food Systems Resilience Montgomery County</i>
Co-Chair	Michelle Caruso, <i>Steering Committee Chair Frederick County Food Council</i>
Member (FSRC Co-Chair and Co-Vice Chair)	Dr. Stephanie Lansing <i>Professor of Environmental Science & Technology University of Maryland, College of Agriculture & Natural Resources</i>
Member	Annmarie Hart-Bookbinder, <i>Food Security Programs Director Montgomery County Food Council</i>
Member	Senator Katie Fry Hester <i>Maryland State Senate</i>
Member	LaMonika Jones, <i>Director Maryland Hunger Solutions</i>
Member	Taylor LaFave, <i>Chief of Food Policy and Planning Baltimore City Department of Planning</i>
Member	Steve McHenry, <i>Executive Director MARBIDCO</i>
Member	Nancy Nunn, <i>Assistant Director Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology</i>
Member	Diana Taylor, <i>Director of Strategic Initiatives Anne Arundel County Partnership for Children, Youth, & Families</i>

Non-voting Participant Roster

Committee Position	Name, Affiliation
Participant	Beth Brewster, <i>Food Service Supervisor Caroline County Public Schools</i>
Participant	Lisa Lachenmayr, <i>Director of SNAP-Ed</i>



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Committee Position	Name, Affiliation
	University of Maryland Extension
Participant	Grace Leatherman, <i>Executive Director</i> <i>Future Harvest</i>
Participant	Shannon McDonald, <i>Natural Resource Planner</i> <i>Maryland Department of the Environment</i>
Participant (FSRC Co-Vice Chair)	Mark Powell, <i>Chief of Agriculture and Seafood Marketing</i> <i>Maryland Department of Agriculture</i>
Participant	Leslie Sessom-Parks, <i>Section Chief</i> <i>Professional Development & Performance</i> <i>Maryland State Department of Education</i>
Participant	Karl Shlagel, <i>District Director</i> <i>Maryland Farm Bureau</i>
Participant	Theresa Stahl, <i>Vice Chair</i> <i>Western Maryland Food Council</i>

Local Food Council Collaborative. Since the publication of the 2024 Annual Report, the Communication & Coordination Committee has assumed a facilitator role for the Maryland Local Food Council Collaborative, providing a channel for Maryland's local food councils to virtually convene and share information across jurisdictions. The local food councils involved in these roundtable discussions include: Anne Arundel County Food Council, Baltimore City Food Policy Action Coalition, Caroline County Food Stability Workgroup, Frederick County Food Council, Howard County Food Council, Kent County Food Council, Lower Shore Food Council, Mid-Shore Food Council, Montgomery County Food Council, Prince George's County Food Equity Council, Upper Shore Food Council, and the Western Maryland Food Council. The first of these meetings was held on December 6, 2024 and the second on May 9, 2025.

Of note, the number of local food councils across Maryland expanded from ten to twelve over this fiscal year, in conjunction with funds received through USDA Regional Food System Partnerships Grant in 2023 and 2024. This grant was coordinated by the Montgomery County Food Council and Prince George's Food Equity Council, providing funding for ten local food councils to expand their organizational capacity. In addition, the Maryland Department of Health's Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Control re-launched a funding program for five Local Health Improvement Coalitions (LHICs) to organize "Food Security Subcommittees" in Baltimore, Charles, Garrett, Howard, and Saint Mary's Counties. Of these Food Security Subcommittees, Howard County has successfully [transitioned to a local food council](#) structure.⁹¹

⁹¹ Malcolm-Lym, S. (2025, January 23). *Howard to Launch Food Council to Combat Food Insecurity*. Conduit Street. <https://conduitstreet.mdcounties.org/2025/01/23/howard-to-launch-food-council-to-combat-food-insecurity/>



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Legislative Monitoring. From January 2025 through April 2025, the Communication & Coordination Committee met weekly to review and monitor legislation in the Maryland General Assembly related to food, agriculture, and community resilience. For the third consecutive year, the Center for Health and Homeland Security (CHHS) performed legislative tracking for the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (FSRC). Working with FSRC members and staff at the Maryland Department of Emergency Management (MDEM), CHHS maintained a tracking spreadsheet for all food systems bills, which was made available for public use.

Over the course of nine meetings, CHHS and Committee leaders selected several key bills each week to unpack for Committee members and other attendees. The Committee additionally invited state legislators and their support staff to provide supplemental information for each bill presented.

Of the sixty-eight bills monitored by the Communication and Coordination Committee, ten passed both chambers and were approved by Governor Moore.

Total Unique Priority Bills Passed	10
Total Unique Bills Reviewed	68
<i>Total House Bills Monitored</i>	62
<i>Total Senate Bills Monitored</i>	50

Priority bills approved by the Governor include:

- **[HB0009](#) Public Safety - Food System Resiliency Council - Definitions and Reports** Altering certain definitions related to the Food Resiliency Council; defining what constitutes "healthy food priority areas" as predominantly lower-income areas that have limited access to retail outlets that sell affordable, healthy foods; defining "wasted food" as food not used for its intended purpose; requiring the Council to make recommendations to increase the availability of local foods, create market opportunities for Maryland food businesses, and expand access to small scale food production infrastructure; etc.
- **[HB0104/SB0226](#) Maryland Farms and Families Fund - Purpose and Use - Alterations** Altering the purpose and use of the Maryland Farms and Families Fund to match purchases made with FMNP, SNAP, and WIC benefits at certain farmers markets and farm stands, support nonprofit farmers markets by providing logistical and marketing support to increase the use of federal nutrition programs at these markets, and to support nonprofit organizations or other responsible persons to implement the Program.
- **[HB0262/SB0240](#) Department of Agriculture - Maryland Agricultural Commission and Young Farmers** Altering the membership of the Maryland Agricultural Commission; establishing the Committee on Young Farmers for purposes of communicating to the Maryland Agricultural Commission on



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issues relating to young and beginning farmers in the State; and repealing the provisions of law establishing and governing the Young Farmers Advisory Board.

- **[HB0397/SB0363](#) Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation - Oyster Shucking House Loan Program** Altering a certain loan program to authorize the Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation to provide loans in an amount up to \$25K for certain seasonal full-time jobs; and reducing, from 5 years to 3 years, the number of years that a person must have been a licensed seafood dealer in order to be eligible to receive financing under the loan program.
- **[HB0443](#) Baby Food Labeling - Statement Regarding Toxic Heavy Metal Testing - Terminology** Altering the statement that must be included on a baby food product label if the baby food product has been tested for toxic heavy metals for the purpose of changing the term included on the label from "toxic heavy metal" to "toxic element".
- **[HB0506/SB0428](#) Chesapeake Bay Legacy Act** Establishing the Maryland Leaders in Environmentally Engaged Farming (LEEF) Program; establishing the Maryland Leaders in Environmentally Engaged Farming (LEEF) Program Fund to support actions associated with the Program's purpose; altering the definition of "healthy soils" for purposes of the Maryland Healthy Soils Program; exempting certain holders of certain fishing licenses from the requirement to obtain a food establishment license from the Maryland Department of Health; establishing the Water Quality Monitoring Program; etc.
- **[HB0538/SB0445](#) Department of Human Services - Federal Commodity Supplemental Food Program - Administration** Requiring the Family Investment Administration in the Department of Human Services to be the central coordinating and directing agency of the federal Commodity Supplemental Food Program using certain funds and resources; and repealing the requirement that the Secretary of Aging administer the Program.
- **[HB0598/SB0131](#) Anne Arundel County - Property Tax Credit - Supermarkets** Authorizing the governing body of Anne Arundel County or of a municipal corporation in Anne Arundel County to grant, by law, a property tax credit against the personal property tax imposed on personal property of a supermarket that completes certain construction and is located in a certain food desert retail incentive area; requiring the governing body to designate what constitutes a food desert retail incentive area for purposes of the tax credit; etc.
- **[HB0881/SB0703](#) Family Investment Program - Child Support** Phasing in a requirement that all child support received in a month pass through to a family seeking assistance under the Family Investment Program and



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prohibiting the consideration of child support in computing the amount of assistance received.

- SB0789 Higher Education - Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program - Alterations** Requiring the Maryland Higher Education Commission to designate certain private institutions of higher education as hunger-free campuses; prohibiting a 4-year or 2-year private institution of higher education or a regional higher education center operated by a private nonprofit institution of higher education from being eligible to receive grant funding under the Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program; and beginning in fiscal year 2027, requiring the Governor to include in the annual budget bill an appropriation of \$250K for the Program.

Distribution and Access Committee

Voting Member Roster

Committee Position	Name, Affiliation
Co-Chair	LaMonika Jones, <i>Director Maryland Hunger Solutions</i>
Co-Chair	Lisa Lachenmayr, <i>Director of SNAP-Ed University of Maryland Extension</i>
Member	Beth Brewster, <i>Food Service Supervisor Caroline County Public Schools</i>
Member	Del. Lorig Charkoudian <i>Maryland House of Delegates</i>
Member	Annamarie Hart-Bookbinder, <i>Food Security Programs Director Montgomery County Food Council</i>
Member	Meg Kimmel, <i>Chief Executive Officer Maryland Food Bank</i>
Member	Joe Liu, <i>Director of Advocacy and Public Policy Capital Area Food Bank</i>
Member	Nancy Nunn, <i>Assistant Director Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology</i>
Member	Theresa Stahl, <i>Vice Chair Western Maryland Food Council</i>
Member	Diana Taylor, <i>Director of Strategic Initiatives Anne Arundel County Partnership for Children, Youth, & Families</i>



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Non-Voting Participant Roster

Committee Position	Name, Affiliation
Participant (FSRC Co-Chair and Co-Vice Chair)	Dr. Stephanie Lansing, <i>Professor of Environmental Science & Technology University of Maryland, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources</i>
Participant	Heather Bois Bruskin, <i>Director Montgomery County Office of Food Systems Resilience</i>
Participant	Michelle Caruso, <i>Steering Committee Chair Frederick County Food Council</i>
Participant	Lindsey Doyle <i>Food System Impacts on Climate and the Environment Expert</i>
Participant	Dr. Enrique Nelson Escobar, <i>Associate Dean University of Maryland Eastern Shore Extension</i>
Participant	Senator Katie Fry Hester <i>Maryland State Senate</i>
Participant	Grace Leatherman, <i>Executive Director Future Harvest</i>
Participant	Shannon McDonald, <i>Natural Resource Planner Maryland Department of the Environment</i>
Participant	Steve McHenry, <i>Executive Director MARBIDCO</i>
Participant (FSRC Co-Vice Chair)	Mark Powell, <i>Chief of Agriculture and Seafood Marketing Maryland Department of Agriculture</i>
Participant	Karl Shlagel, <i>District Director Maryland Farm Bureau</i>

Overview. Over the past year, the Distribution and Access Committee met monthly to discuss approaches and develop recommendations to promote equitable healthy food access. Strategies considered include: diverting healthy, local foods that would otherwise be wasted to Maryland’s communities experiencing food insecurity; addressing consumer misconceptions regarding “use by”, “best by”, and “sell by” food date labels; as well as strengthening existing state-implemented programs such as the [Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement](#) (LFPA) and the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) to enhance food access.⁹²

⁹² *Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program.* (2025). USDA Agricultural Marketing Service. <https://www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food-to-usda/lfpacap>



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Subject matter experts. The Distribution and Access Committee invited various subject matter experts to present on priority issues, including:

- **Mark Powell**, Marketing Service Program Manager, Maryland Department of Agriculture, **Anne Wallerstedt, Esq.**, Vice President of Government Relations and Strategic Initiatives, Maryland Food Bank, and **Meg Kimmel**, Chief Operating Officer, Maryland Food Bank - [Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program \(LFPA\)](#)
- **Julia Gross**, Senior Anti-Hunger Program Associate, Maryland Hunger Solutions, **Elizabeth Marchetta**, Executive Director of Food and Nutrition Services, Baltimore City Public Schools, and **Julie Fletcher**, Executive Director for School and Community Meal Programs, Maryland State Department of Education - [Community Eligibility Provision \(CEP\) in Maryland](#)
- **Joe Liu**, Director of Advocacy and Public Policy, Capital Area Food Bank - [2024 Hunger Report](#)
- **Meaghan Christian**, Director of Operations, Misfits Market, and **Shannon McDonald**, Natural Resource Planner, Maryland Department of the Environment - Wasted Food Reduction and Food Rescue in Maryland

Next Steps. The Distribution and Access Committee has examined Food Is Medicine (FIM) programs and reached broad agreement that such efforts could both reduce healthcare expenditures and food insecurity. Maryland would benefit from cost-effective Food Is Medicine (FIM) interventions for food-insecure individuals with nutrition-related chronic conditions as well as pregnant and postpartum women. Evidence from existing FIM programs in Maryland and other states, such as Massachusetts and North Carolina, demonstrates that FIM programs improve health outcomes, reduce hospitalizations, and achieve cost savings.

Food insecurity is a pressing issue in Maryland and disproportionately affects low-income individuals and communities of color. It exacerbates chronic diet-sensitive conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and obesity. Inequities in access to nutritious, healthy, and affordable foods significantly exacerbate health disparities among low-income and marginalized populations. This gap contributes to persistent health disparities and rising healthcare costs. 90% of the United States' annual \$4.5T healthcare costs are for people with chronic and mental health conditions. Among Medicaid beneficiaries, most are diagnosed with one or more chronic conditions.

Several FIM programs already exist in Maryland, including:

- Montgomery County's [Food as Medicine Grant Program](#) funds institutional initiatives to integrate food and nutrition services into healthcare systems such as Adventist Healthcare, Holy Cross Healthcare, Community FarmShare,



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Community Health and Empowerment through Education and Research, and the Casa Ruben Foundation.⁹³

- The University of Maryland Medicaid System's [Food Access and Support Services Team](#) (FASST) with Moveable Feast, Maryland Food Bank, and Meals on Wheels of Central Maryland is a collaborative multi-year project that aims to improve health outcomes, reduce cost, and improve health equity for safety net populations with complex or high-risk medical and social conditions by addressing social determinants of health, including food insecurity, poor nutrition, economic insecurity, and lack of support services.⁹⁴
- [MedStar Baltimore City's Food Rx Program](#), funded by the Baltimore Department of Planning, partners with organizations like Maryland Food Bank and Hungry Harvest.⁹⁵ It has improved clinical markers such as HbA1c, HDL, and triglycerides through fresh produce prescriptions.
- Kaiser Permanente's [FIM Center for Excellence](#) acts as a hub to screen, provide resources, and provide education for individuals experiencing food insecurity.⁹⁶

FIM programs could produce budget savings for Maryland. Nationally, Medicaid Section 1115 waivers provide states with flexibility to test innovative, cost-neutral approaches to supporting the health and healthcare needs of individuals who are eligible for Medicaid. Eleven states have FIM waivers in place to provide treatments like produce prescriptions or medically tailored meals and groceries. Similarly, Medicaid managed care plans have increasingly chosen to use ILOS (In Lieu of Service) flexibility to provide services that address their enrollees' nutrition-related and other social needs. Managed care capitation rates can reflect nutrition-related ILOS programs and incorporate projected savings such as reduced emergency room use and fewer nursing home admissions. However, changing federal Medicaid policies have increased uncertainty for states. The FSRC should re-examine potential FIM recommendations next year.

⁹³ Office of Food Systems Resilience. (2025). *Food as Medicine Grant Program*. Montgomery County Government. <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ofsr/grants/medicine.html>

⁹⁴ Schwartzberg, M. (2022, August 11). University of Maryland Medical System Announces \$2.3 Million In Community Grants Across State. *University of Maryland Medical System*. <https://www.umms.org/news/news-releases/2022/umms-community-grants>

⁹⁵ Schindler, D. (2021, August 13). *MedStar Health Partners to Create Food Rx Program at MedStar Good Samaritan*. MedStar Health. <https://www.medstarhealth.org/news-and-publications/news/medstar-health-partners-to-create-food-rx-program-at-medstar-good-samaritan>

⁹⁶ Costa, H. (2024, April 11). *Launching the Food Is Medicine Center of Excellence*. Kaiser Permanente. <https://about.kaiserpermanente.org/news/press-release-archive/launching-the-food-is-medicine-center-of-excellence>



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Environment and Production Committee

Voting Member Roster

Committee Position	Name, Affiliation
Co-Chair	Joe Milone, <i>Agricultural Programs Manager Maryland Department of Commerce</i>
Co-Chair	Nancy Nunn, <i>Assistant Director Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology</i>
Member (FSRC Co-Chair and Co-Vice Chair)	Dr. Stephanie Lansing, <i>Professor of Environmental Science & Technology University of Maryland, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources</i>
Member	Dr. Enrique Nelson Escobar, <i>Associate Dean University of Maryland Eastern Shore Extension</i>
Member	Anmarie Hart-Bookbinder, <i>Food Security Programs Director Montgomery County Food Council</i>
Member	Dr. Lila Karki, <i>Associate Professor of Agricultural Economics & Extension Program Evaluation Specialist University of Maryland Eastern Shore Extension</i>
Member	Grace Leatherman, <i>Executive Director Future Harvest</i>
Member	Steve McHenry, <i>Executive Director MARBIDCO</i>
Member (FSRC Co-Vice Chair)	Mark Powell, <i>Chief of Agriculture and Seafood Marketing Maryland Department of Agriculture</i>
Member	Karl Shlagel, <i>District Director Maryland Farm Bureau</i>

Non-Voting Participant Roster

Committee Position	Name, Affiliation
Participant	Heather Bois Bruskin, <i>Director Office of Food Systems Resilience Montgomery County</i>



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Participant	Michelle Caruso, <i>Steering Committee Chair Frederick County Food Council</i>
Participant	Senator Katie Fry Hester <i>Maryland State Senate</i>
Participant	Lisa Lachenmayr, <i>Director University of Maryland Extension SNAP-Ed</i>
Participant	Joe Liu, <i>Director of Advocacy and Public Policy Capital Area Food Bank</i>
Participant	Shannon McDonald, <i>Natural Resource Planner Maryland Department of the Environment</i>
Participant	Leslie Sessom-Parks, <i>Section Chief Professional Development & Performance Maryland State Department of Education</i>
Participant	Theresa Stahl, <i>Vice Chair Western Maryland Food Council</i>

Overview. The Environment and Production Committee met monthly to discuss recommendations to strengthen the production and procurement of Maryland-grown food, including streamlining local food procurement and production for Maryland’s agricultural industry, and mitigating climate impacts for agricultural producers.

Subject matter experts. The Environment and Production Committee invited several subject matter experts, including:

- **Mike Thielke**, Executive Director, **Chris Hlubb**, Program Director, and **Tony Kern**, Board Chair, F3 Tech - Innovative Aggregation Technology for Local Food Procurement
- **Kristin Hanna**, Director of Special Projects, Maryland Department of Agriculture - [Maryland’s Best](#)
- **Ernie Shea**, Board Vice President, Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology - [Climate-Smart Agriculture Project](#)
- **Logan Dean**, Program Manager, Maryland Partnership & Training Program, and **Norton Pereira**, State Rural Services Coordinator, Maryland Department of Labor - Agricultural Labor, Apprenticeships, and H-2A Visas
- **Jackson Urie**, Procurement Coordinator, Frederick County Public Schools, **Emma Jagoz**, Owner of Moon Valley Farm, and **Leslie Sessom-Parks**, Section Chief of Professional Development and Performance, Maryland State Department of Education - Farm to Institution Procurement
- **Sophie Jones**, Policy and Advocacy Project Manager, and **Brenda Platt**, Director of Composting for Community Initiative, Institute for Local Self-Reliance - Maryland Bill on Wasted Food Reduction and Diversion



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Next Steps. The Environment & Production Committee has identified three key areas to pursue in the coming year, including:

- **Food date labeling for wasted food reduction:** The FSRC has identified a need for additional clarification regarding food date labeling (e.g. “best by”, “use by”, and “sell by” dates). Demystifying these labels for consumers will help reduce unnecessary food loss as consumers will be better able to determine which foods are safe to consume. The Committee identified [California’s 2024 legislation on “expiration dates”](#) as a potential model for a future recommendation. The Environment & Production Committee will work jointly with the Distribution & Access Committee on this initiative.
- **Facilitating access to the H-2A Program to enhance the state’s agricultural workforce:** As mentioned above, the Environment & Production Committee received a presentation and valuable insight from the Maryland Department of Labor’s State Rural Services Coordinator, who oversees administration of the federal [H-2A Program](#) for temporary agricultural work visas. Though the Committee has put forth a recommendation on the development of an agricultural workforce development commission in this report, they see potential to further leverage the H-2A Program as a legal pathway for agricultural producers to employ an international workforce. Doing so would be in support of the Council’s legislative mandate to “increase the quality and quantity of production and procurement, as well as aggregation, marketing, and distribution of local food”.
- **Incentivizing the purchase of locally grown food for Maryland’s public schools:** The FSRC previously recommended that public schools in Maryland could increase procurement and distribution of local agricultural products through the Maryland Farm-to-School Grant Pilot Program, which was introduced and passed in [HB147](#) during the 2022 legislative session, but was not funded. The Grant Pilot Program will provide school districts with the needed funds to purchase healthy, local agricultural products (e.g., produce, meat, poultry, honey, etc.) to serve their students.⁹⁷ The purpose of the pilot program is to incentivize the production, procurement, and provision of local foods in school meals through grant funding for eligible school districts. Local school districts are eligible to receive grant awards from the fund if they operate reimbursable federal nutrition programs (e.g. the National School Lunch Program).

The Maryland Farm-to-School Grant Pilot Program could be administered by the Maryland State Department of Education in coordination with the Maryland Department of Agriculture. Awards could be based on criteria that include the local school district’s participation in the reimbursable federal

⁹⁷Maryland Farms and Families Fund, Maryland Food and Agricultural Resiliency Mechanism Grant Program, and Maryland Farm-to-School Meal Grant Pilot Program – Alterations and Establishment, No. HB147 (2022). <https://legiscan.com/MD/bill/HB147/2022>



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nutrition program as well as the school district's demonstration of how meal reimbursements will support the development, cultivation, and longstanding commitment to incorporating local food components into school districts. School districts would be strongly encouraged to prioritize purchasing from historically marginalized or socially disadvantaged producers, processors, distributors, or businesses. Metrics will be generated and tracked by the administering agencies to evaluate the success of the programs.



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Summary of Council Activities

In addition to its regular virtual Council and Committee meetings, the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council (FSRC) organized several virtual and in-person events, including: a launch for the 2024 Annual Report; panel discussion on food is medicine policies and programs; presentations for the Maryland Agricultural Commission and Joint Committee on Program Open Space and Agricultural Land Preservation; and a regional food and farm tour of Western Maryland. This section will highlight the activities of the FSRC between July 2024 and June 2025.

Membership Updates

Since the publication of the Council's 2024 Annual Report, the FSRC welcomed several new appointed members, including:

- **Michele Burton**, Program Manager, Prince George's Food Equity Council
- **Michelle Caruso**, Steering Committee Chair, Frederick County Food Council
- **Lindsey Doyle**, Food System Impacts on Climate and the Environment Expert
- **Dr. Enrique Nelson Escobar**, Associate Dean of University of Maryland Eastern Shore Extension
- **Anmarie Hart-Bookbinder**, Food Security Programs Director, Montgomery County Food Council
- **Nick Hargrove**, Owner, Tilghman Island Seafood
- **Labelle Hillgrove**, Senior Director, Office of Nutrition Assistance Programs (ONAP), Maryland Department of Human Services
- **LaMonika Jones**, Director of Maryland Hunger Solutions
- **Taylor LaFave**, Director of Baltimore City's Food Policy and Planning Division, Baltimore City Food Policy Action Coalition
- **Joe Liu**, Director of Advocacy and Public Policy, Capital Area Food Bank
- **Joe Milone**, Agricultural Programs Manager for the Maryland Department of Commerce
- **Karl Shlagel**, District Director of the Maryland Farm Bureau

August 26, 2024 - FSRC Annual Report Listening Session

In August 2024, the FSRC published its 2024 Annual Report to the Maryland General Assembly and hosted its first virtual listening session on the recommendations included. The listening session was attended by eighty-seven individuals, including members of the Council, state agency representatives, local food council members, and other community stakeholders from across the state. During the listening session, the Council received positive feedback regarding their recommendations, with particular emphasis on their cold storage proposal. Attendees submitted



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numerous questions regarding the Council's next steps for pursuing the funds and means necessary to carry out their recommendations within Maryland's local jurisdictions.

September 5, 2024 - Adoption of Council Bylaws and a Definition of Food System Resilience

During their June 2024 bi-monthly meeting, FSRC members began drafting a Council definition of food system resilience in small groups. These conversations were recorded and aggregated by MDEM staff. The definition underwent a formal drafting and revision process with the Council and, on September 5, the Council voted to adopt this collaborative definition.

In addition to developing and adopting a food system resilience definition, the Council formally adopted its first set of [bylaws](#) to provide additional structure to its work. The bylaws set new guidelines on Council member attendance and participation, and established a framework for the three FSRC subcommittees: Communication & Coordination, Distribution & Access, and Environment & Production. Each Committee identified its scope of work within the Council's four legislatively mandated goals and further developed activities to delineate how these goals might be achieved. The bylaws also formalized election procedures for the subcommittees' two co-chairs, outlining that these six positions would be subject to a nomination and voting process at the start of each fiscal year alongside the annual election of the FSRC's co-chair.

The Council's bylaws and definition of food system resilience can be found in the appendices of this report.

September 11, 2024 - Presentation to the Maryland Agricultural Commission (MAC)

On September 11, Dr. Stephanie Lansing, Chair of the Environment and Production Committee, and Diana Taylor, Chair of the Distribution and Access Committee, were invited by the [Maryland Agricultural Commission](#) (MAC) to present on relevant recommendations from the 2024 Annual Report, including their recommendation requesting that the MAC investigate barriers to entry and expansion for small-scale producers in Maryland.⁹⁸ Immediately following Dr. Lansing and Ms. Taylor's presentation, the MAC voted to adopt the FSRC's 2024 recommendations and moved to launch a committee to carry out the FSRC's request for the MAC.

⁹⁸ MDA. (2024). *Maryland Ag Commission* [State Agency]. Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA). https://mda.maryland.gov/about_mda/Pages/default.aspx



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September 13, 2024 - Western Maryland Food Tour



On September 13, the FSRC toured three Western Maryland counties thanks to generous support and planning from the Western Maryland Food Council. The FSRC's first destination was the Western Branch of the Maryland Food Bank in Hagerstown, where Council members toured the warehouse and heard presentations from Maryland Food Bank representatives Ruthie Pritchard, Anne Wallerstedt, and Meg Kimmel (FSRC member) on food insecurity and emergency food assistance usage in Allegany, Garrett, and Washington Counties. The Maryland Food Bank updates its [Maryland Hunger Map](#) annually using [United for ALICE](#) (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) data.





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Next, FSRC members visited Frostburg, where they toured the [Wholesome Harvest Food Co-op](#) and the [City Place Farmers Market](#). Council members enjoyed a locally-sourced lunch while hearing presentations from Allison Boyd, owner of [Honey Moon Farm](#), Willie Lantz of [Garrett Growers Cooperative](#), and Melissa Bolyard on the [Appalachian Farm and Food Alliance](#).





The Council's final tour destination was Frostburg State University's (FSU) [Chesapeake Dining Hall](#) (managed by Chartswell). Staff provided an informative tour of their facilities and demonstrated use of their Rocket Composter which instantly converts food scraps into landscaping material for use on campus grounds. Council members also heard a presentation from representatives of [Allegany College of Maryland's food pantry](#) and were provided a beet brownie cooking demonstration for Council members in the FSU Teaching Kitchen.

November 7, 2024 - Farmer Panel

When developing their work plan for the 2025 fiscal year, the FSRC emphasized a desire to actively seek additional farmer input when discussing food system resilience in Maryland. On November 7, the FSRC convened a virtual panel of farmers from across the state, including representatives from the dairy, grain, vegetable, and poultry industries.

The farmers shared valuable insights about how extreme weather events and climate impacts affect their operations, and what methods they are pursuing to overcome these challenges. They additionally discussed key concerns regarding navigating regulatory hurdles, and expressed concern over inconsistencies across county lines. The panel emphasized the importance of government programs and policies to help sustain the industry, citing the enhancement of crop insurance and financial support programs, such as those from MARBIDCO, as essential for agricultural resilience.

Jennie Schmidt, owner of [Schmidt Farms Inc.](#), [Maryland Grain Producers Utilization Board](#) (MGPU) member, and [U.S. Grains Council](#) (USGC) At-Large



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Director, is a dietitian and farmer based out of Sudlersville, MD in Queen Anne's County. Schmidt Farms Inc. operates on 2K acres and is a 3rd generation farm producing corn, soybeans, soft red winter wheat, fresh market green beans, lima beans, and winegrapes. Land stewardship is a core tenet of their operation, which includes no-till growing methods in addition to other sustainable practices.

Mary Creek is a member of the Governor's Dairy Advisory Council and co-owns [Palmyra Farm](#) (Hagerstown, MD), a small, family dairy farm selling milk, cheese, and local products directly to consumers. Their herd currently consists of 100 cows, but has ranged from 65 to 220 over the years. Around 2008, the dairy industry started to see dramatic and unpredictable price fluctuations, making business planning and budget management very challenging. Since 2013, the number of dairy farms in Maryland has reduced by 34%. However, the number of dairy cows in Maryland has remained relatively static as the remaining farms have increased their herd size.

As small farm business owners, Ms. Creek and her brother work 365 days per year. They have struggled to find reliable outside labor in the past, and, as such, prefer to remain at a scale that can be managed by family members. Palmyra Farm contracts with a custom farm operator to manage their field crops, including corn, soybeans, winter wheat, and cover crops, and to provide forage (hay, straw, and corn silage) for Palmyra's herd as part of their contract.

Jenny Rhodes, Principal Agent with [University of Maryland Extension, Queen Anne's](#), is a tenth generation farmer with eight LLCs across multiple enterprises of her family farm. Deerfield Farm is Ms. Rhodes' organic chicken farm, where she raises broilers for Purdue. Hillsdale Farm is a timber operation and a no-till grain farm. Black Dog at Ewing Farm is an irrigated corn production operation. Ms. Rhodes highlighted that misinformation and agricultural regulations are key barriers for farmers, especially beginning farmers. As such, she is dedicated to consumer outreach and agricultural education.

Jesse Albright is a member of the FSRC, co-owner of [Albright Farms](#) in Baltimore County, and board member for the Baltimore County Soil Conservation District. Albright Farms focuses primarily on direct-to-consumer outlets and produces commodity crops, vegetables, turkeys, eggs, broilers, beef, pork, hay, forage, and cut flowers. The Albrights practice land stewardship with a closed-loop system, including composting on-farm. Albright Farms sells eggs to the University of Maryland, restaurants, grocery retailers, direct-to-consumer at farmers markets, and to the Capital Area and Maryland Food Banks through the USDA's [Local Food Purchase Assistance](#)



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[Cooperative Agreement](#) (LFPA) Program.⁹⁹

December 9, 2024 - Food is Medicine Lunch & Learn

On December 9th, the FSRC hosted a virtual Lunch & Learn featuring a panel discussion on Food is Medicine with three subject matter experts: Holly Freishtat of the Milken Institute's Feeding Change, Dr. Alyssa Moran of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and University of Pennsylvania Perelman School of Medicine, and Evan Lutz, owner and founder of Hungry Harvest. The panel discussion was well attended by Council members and community stakeholders. The three panelists covered a variety of topics, including Medicaid 1115 Waivers, produce prescriptions, and the critical roles of dietitians, pharmacists, and other healthcare providers in leveraging healthy food for preventative medicine. Attendees learned about the role of public policy in addressing diet-related public health disparities and discussed the impacts of institutional procurement policies for both local food producers and the well-being of consumers and patients.

December 11, 2024 - Presentation to the Joint Committee on Program Open Space and Agricultural Land Preservation

In anticipation of the 2025 Maryland General Assembly's legislative session, FSRC co-chair, Nancy Nunn, and MDEM's Chief Resilience Officer, Mike Hinson, were invited to address the Joint Committee on Program Open Space and Agricultural Land Preservation. Ms. Nunn and Mr. Hinson presented on the overall scope of work for the FSRC and the Maryland Office of Resilience before providing an overview of the Council's 2024 recommendation regarding the development of a comprehensive food insecurity map and data repository.

January 30, 2025 - Recommendations Development Process

For the 2025 Annual Report, the FSRC adopted a new process for developing recommendations to the Maryland General Assembly. This included the creation of two documents: a template and a set of criteria to help ensure the integrity and quality of each recommendation proposed, and to encourage the engagement of external stakeholders in the drafting process. In addition, the Council members updated their recommendations development processes within the Environment and Production and Distribution and Access Committees by establishing topical "ad hoc workgroups" to carry out strategic research and stakeholder engagement.

⁹⁹ *Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program*. (n.d.). USDA Agricultural Marketing Service. Retrieved July 8, 2025, from <https://www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food-to-usda/lfpacap>



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Finally, the Council established a new formal review period for state agencies to provide feedback on proposed recommendations during the drafting phase. In doing so, the Council has been better able to align the recommendations in this report with state agency priorities and feasibility requirements.

January 15, 2025 - Presentation to LEAD Fellows

On January 15, FSRC co-chairs Secretary of Emergency Management, Russell Strickland, and Assistant Director of the Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology, Nancy Nunn, presented to the University of Maryland's [LEAD Fellowship Program](#) in Linthicum Heights on the Maryland Office of Resilience, food system resilience planning at the state level, and the work of the FSRC.¹⁰⁰ The 2025 cohort of LEAD fellows included agricultural technical service providers, local government representatives, and Maryland farmers who asked insightful questions and discussed their views on the qualities of a resilient food system.

January 29, 2025 - Testimony for House Bill 9

On January 29, FSRC co-vice chair Dr. Stephanie Lansing provided oral testimony at the hearing for [House Bill 9 Public Safety - Food System Resiliency Council - Definitions and Reports](#) on behalf of the FSRC. This legislation updated the Council's statute to reflect current preferred terminology and definitions in food system advocacy:

- The term "food desert" was updated to "healthy food priority area", defined as "predominantly lower-income areas that have limited access to retail outlets that sell affordable, healthy foods."
- The term "food waste" was updated to "wasted food", defined as "food not used for its intended purpose that is managed in a variety of ways, including: (1) donations to feed people; (2) the creation of animal feed; (3) composting; (4) anaerobic digestion; or (5) disposal in landfills or combustion facilities."

Further, the Council's legislative mandate was updated to require the Council to "develop equity and sustainability policy recommendations" to:

- Address and eliminate "limited food options and food scarcity that exist in healthy food priority areas";
- Reduce "wasted food";
- Increase "the quantity, quality of aggregation, marketing, and distribution of local food";

¹⁰⁰ *LEAD Fellowship Program*. (2025). University of Maryland Extension. <https://extension.umd.edu/programs/agriculture-food-systems/program-areas/integrated-programs/lead-maryland/fellowship-program>



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- Increase “the procurement of local food through schools, institutions of higher education, nonprofit organizations, and other institutions”;
- Create “additional market opportunities for Maryland food businesses; and”
- Expand “access to small-scale manufacturing and food production infrastructure”.

This updated mandate replaced the Council’s previous requirement “to develop a strategic plan to increase the production and procurement” of foods from [Maryland Certified Local Farms](#), which the Maryland Department of Agriculture plans to accomplish by the end of 2025.

Spring 2025 - Capacity Building for Eastern Shore Food Councils

FSRC Co-Chair, Nancy Nunn, was a member of the planning committee for the [Tackling Hunger Together: an Eastern Shore Food Insecurity Symposium](#) on March 18, 2025 at Chesapeake College, organized by the Eastern Shore Food Coalition. FSRC member, LaMonika Jones of Maryland Hunger Solutions, served as the keynote speaker for the event, discussing food equity, community engagement, and efforts to advocate for improved food access through policies and programs.

FSRC Co-Chair, Secretary Russell Strickland, and MDEM’s Deputy Chief Resilience Officer, Summer Modelfino, attended the subsequent *Stepping Toward Resilient Food Systems: Food Council Workshop for the Upper Shore* hosted by Washington College’s [Center for Environment & Society](#) in Chestertown, MD on April 25.¹⁰¹ There, Secretary Strickland presented on the work of the FSRC, underscoring the Council’s goals to build capacity for local food councils and promote local-level food system resilience across the state.

¹⁰¹ Center for Environment & Society. (2025). Washington College. <https://www.washcoll.edu/learn-by-doing/ces/index.php>



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Conclusion and Next Steps

Over the coming year, the Council will continue to convene regularly, develop equity and sustainability policy recommendations for the Maryland General Assembly, and collaborate with stakeholders to create innovative and achievable solutions to enhance the resilience of Maryland's food and farm systems. The recommendations included in this report may continue to evolve as new information and partnerships emerge.

Next Steps. The Council is committed to working collaboratively across sectors and jurisdictions to identify community-centered solutions that fulfill its legislative mandates. Priorities include increasing the availability and consumption of healthy foods statewide, reducing barriers to entry for new and beginning farmers, and fostering economic and climate resilience for agricultural producers. The Council underscores the importance of enhanced infrastructure and technical support for food aggregation and processing facilities, as well as local food purchasing policies for institutional procurement, as critical pathways to strengthen Maryland's food supply chain. To advance these efforts, the Council will continue partnering with state agencies, community organizations, and Maryland's food and farm businesses.

Additionally, the Council remains dedicated to addressing the root causes of food insecurity and public health disparities affecting a growing number of Marylanders. Developing achievable and sustainable strategies for food and community resilience assessments in alignment with the Council's legislative mandate remains a key step toward creating a more equitable food system. As such, the Council looks forward to strengthening partnerships with Maryland's growing number of local food councils and other food security working groups across the state.



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Acknowledgement

The drafting of these recommendations coincided with the Council's first formal election for Committee Co-Chairs as well as the recurring annual election for the Council's Co-Chair, to serve alongside Secretary Russell Strickland. The Council's efforts over the past year were made possible by the dedication of the Council's FY2025 leadership group: Nancy Nunn, Diana Taylor, Meg Kimmel, Dr. Stephanie Lansing, Heather Bruskin, and Michelle Caruso.

In addition, the Council would like to acknowledge the important contributions of the following FSRC members who have departed since the publication of the Council's 2024 Annual Report: Brian Alexander (Capital Area Food Bank), Lee Babcock (Frederick County Food Council), Emily Bauer (Maryland Department of Human Services), Heather Buritsch (Headwaters Seafood & Grille), Nanya Chiejine (Montgomery County Food Council), Jon Class (Class Produce Group), Lisa Orr (Frederick County Food Council), Anne Palmer (Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future), Dr. Camille Range (Prince George's County Food Equity Council), Allyson Redpath (Maryland Department of Commerce), J.D. Robinson (Maryland Hunger Solutions), Berran Rogers (UMES Small Farms Program), Mike Scheffel (Maryland Farm Bureau), and Chloë Waterman (Friends of the Earth). Their participation in Council activities supported the creation of this report.



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Appendix A: Council Definition of Food System Resilience

Food system resilience refers to the capacity of a food system to ensure the availability, accessibility, and acceptability of food to all communities over time, even in the face of disruptions such as natural disasters, climate impacts, economic shocks, or public health emergencies. This comprehensive concept involves several key components:

1. **Supply Chain Continuity:** The ability to withstand and recover from economic shocks, both short- and long-term. This includes insulating the food system from global, national, and regional disruptions by increasing local food consumption and creating robust supply chains capable of effectively distributing food during crises. Measurable indicators are used to identify and respond to gaps in food system resilience.
2. **Diversity and Redundancy:** Encouraging a diverse network of food producers, processors, distributors, and retailers ensures multiple sources of food, reducing dependency on any single source and enhancing overall resilience.
3. **Adaptability and Innovation:** Building a system that can learn from disruptions and adjust its practices to become more effective over time. This includes the ability to innovate and integrate new solutions in response to changing conditions resulting from climate impacts, while balancing food security, waste reduction, and support for local agriculture.
4. **Community Involvement:** Upholding agricultural and economic resilience through community efforts. Prioritizing bottom-up approaches empowers communities, particularly those facing food insecurity, to actively participate in shaping the food system.
5. **Distributional Accessibility and Equity:** Ensuring the food system is inclusive and provides access to healthy, culturally appropriate, and affordable food for all communities. Enhancing the capability of food producers to ensure a sufficient supply of healthy food for everyone, especially in areas with limited access to nutritious food.
6. **Local Market Viability and Reliability:** Reducing barriers to entry for local producers and ensuring long-term stability for both food producers and consumers. This includes balancing price constraints, raising consumer awareness about the value of local food, and fostering connections between producers and consumers.
7. **Aggregation and Efficiency:** Modifying regional food supply chains to enable the consolidation of products from small-scale, local producers; adjusting institutional procurement systems to facilitate local farmers' participation in the broader food system; and implementing measures to minimize otherwise wasted foods resulting from food abundance through food preservation and food recovery initiatives.



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Appendix B: Council Bylaws

Article I: Name and Authority

1. **Name:** The name of this organization is the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council, hereinafter referred to as the "Council."
2. **Authority:** The Council was established by House Bill 831/Senate Bill 723 and is organized pursuant to MD Code, Public Safety, § 14-1101, § 14-1102, § 14-1103. The Council is housed under the Maryland Office of Resilience in the Maryland Department of Emergency Management.
3. **Definitions:**
 - 3.1. "Food council organization" means a local food council organization that is established in the State.
 - 3.2. "Secretary" means the Secretary of Emergency Management.
 - 3.3. "Food system resilience" refers to the capacity of a food system to ensure the availability, accessibility, and acceptability of food to all communities over time, even in the face of disruptions such as natural disasters, economic shocks, or public health emergencies. See [Appendix A](#) for a comprehensive definition and list of key components.

Article II: Vision and Purpose

1. **Vision:** To shape a resilient, sustainable, collaborative, and equitable food system for all Maryland communities.
2. **Mission:** To advance the Maryland food system's resilience, sustainability, and equity by collaborating with stakeholders and community partners.
3. **Core Values:** Collaboration and Resilience
4. **Goals:**
 - 4.1. Address the food insecurity crisis in the State of Maryland resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis.
 - 4.2. Develop equity and sustainability policy recommendations to increase the long-term resiliency of the food system.
 - 4.3. Expand the impact of existing food council organizations.
 - 4.4. Develop a strategic plan to increase the production and procurement of Maryland certified food.

Article III: Membership

1. **Council consists of the following members:**
 - 1.1. Two members of the Maryland Legislature:
 - 1.1.1. One member of the Senate of Maryland, appointed by the President of the Senate;
 - 1.1.2. One member of the House of Delegates, appointed by the Speaker of the House;
 - 1.2. Secretaries of State:



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- 1.2.1. The Secretary of the Maryland Department of Emergency Management, or the Secretary's designee;
- 1.2.2. The Secretary of Human Services, or the Secretary's designee;
- 1.2.3. The Secretary of Agriculture, or the Secretary's designee;
- 1.2.4. The Secretary of Commerce, or the Secretary's designee;
- 1.3. Representatives from key food system stakeholders:
 - 1.3.1. The Executive Director of the Maryland Farm Bureau, or the Executive Director's designee;
 - 1.3.2. The Executive Director of the Maryland Agricultural and Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation, or the Executive Director's designee;
 - 1.3.3. The Dean of the University of Maryland College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, or the Dean's designee; and
- 1.4. Appointed by the Secretary of the Maryland Department of Emergency Management:
 - 1.4.1. Five representatives of five different food council organizations who are recommended by members of food council organizations;
 - 1.4.2. One representative of the University of Maryland Extension;
 - 1.4.3. One representative of the University of Maryland Eastern Shore Small Farm Program;
 - 1.4.4. One representative of the Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology;
 - 1.4.5. One representative of a public school system in the State who has experience in food security and local food procurement;
 - 1.4.6. One representative of a statewide food security advocacy organization;
 - 1.4.7. One farmer in the State;
 - 1.4.8. One representative of the seafood industry;
 - 1.4.9. One owner of a food business in the State;
 - 1.4.10. One expert in food system policy;
 - 1.4.11. One expert on racial equity in the food system;
 - 1.4.12. One expert on food system impacts on climate and the environment;
 - 1.4.13. One expert on food nutrition and public health; and
 - 1.4.14. Any other individual that the Secretary deems appropriate.
2. **Representation:** The Secretary shall ensure that all five geographic areas of the State are represented by the appointed members of the



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Council.

3. Appointment Terms:

- 3.1. The term of a Council member appointed by the Secretary is 3 years.
- 3.2. A Council member appointed by the Secretary may not serve for more than two consecutive 3-year terms.
- 3.3. There is no term limit for members appointed to the Council by statute. However, a 3-year appointment letter will be issued to any individual serving as a designee to a member named by statute.
- 3.4. At the end of a term, a member continues to serve until a successor is appointed and qualifies.
- 3.5. Membership for any individual appointed by the Secretary is at will and discretionary. A member may resign at any time during their term by submitting an electronic statement of resignation to the Council staff and co-chairs..

4. Attendance and Resignations:

- 4.1. A member may resign at any time during their term by submitting an electronic statement of resignation to the Council staff and co-chairs.
- 4.2. A member who fails to attend at least 50% of the meetings of the Council without assigning a designee during any consecutive 12-month period shall receive a warning by email. If a member fails to attend either of the two meetings immediately following the warning, he or she will be considered to have resigned. If a member is considered to have resigned due to absenteeism, he or she will receive a notice of termination electronically.
- 4.3. If a member is considered to have resigned due to absenteeism, the Secretary will receive a statement from Council staff and the co-chair including: (1) the name of the individual considered to have resigned; and, if applicable, (2) a statement describing the individual's history of attendance during the period. If the individual has been unable to attend meetings for reasons satisfactory to the Secretary, he or she may waive the resignation.

5. **Vacancies:** The Secretary shall appoint a successor in the event of a vacancy on the Council.

6. Compensation:

- 6.1. A member of the Council may not receive compensation as a member of the Council; but
- 6.2. is entitled to reimbursement for travel expenses under the [Standard State Travel Regulations](#), as provided in the State Budget.

Article IV: Council Meetings



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1. **Regular meetings:** The Council shall convene (virtually or in-person) at least six times per year at two month intervals.
2. **Notice of meeting:** Electronic notice of each meeting shall be provided at least 24 hours prior to the meeting start, in accordance with the Maryland Open Meetings Act, MD GENPROVIS § 3-305.
3. **Open Meetings:** The Council meetings will be opened to the public but may move to a closed session when conditions are met as per MD GENPROVIS § 3-305.
4. **Closed Sessions:** [All requirements](#) per the Open Meetings Act must be met prior to closing a meeting, including a valid closing statement disclosing the "topics to be discussed" and the statutory exception relied upon as authority for closing the meeting, as well as a recorded vote to close the meeting. The Council and each Committee must ensure its completion and compliance with the Open Meetings Act, subject to the review and direction of the Council's Open Meetings Act compliance officer.
5. **Quorum:** At least 51% of members must be present at any properly announced meeting to constitute a quorum.
6. **Procedures:** All issues to be voted on shall be decided by a quorum of members present at the meeting in which the vote takes place. An electronic process may also be used for meetings that require a majority vote, including elections.
 - 6.1. Except otherwise specifically provided herein these Bylaws, all elections and matters shall be decided by simple majority of the votes cast at a duly constituted meeting.
 - 6.2. Upon motion duly made and seconded, a vote shall be taken upon any election or matter, after allowing sufficient time for discussion.
 - 6.3. Unless otherwise determined by a majority of members in attendance, all votes shall be taken by voice vote or show of hands.
 - 6.4. Any member in attendance may request that votes be recorded by member name.
 - 6.5. No member shall abstain from voting on a matter before the Board unless they have a declared conflict of interest, which shall be handled in accordance with the Organization's conflict of interest policy.
7. **Attendance:** Council Members shall attend all meetings of the Council; or
 - 7.1. delegate attendance to an authorized representative within their organization in advance of the meeting.
 - 7.2. recuse themselves from a meeting or a vote for which they have declared a conflict of interest by providing written notice 24 hours in advance to Council staff. Recusal from a vote will remove said party from quorum on any voting items during that specific meeting for which the member had advance notice.
 - 7.3. be subject to an assumed resignation, if they fail to attend at least 50%



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of all Council meetings within a 12-month period (see Article III, Item D. "Attendance and Resignations").

Article V: Council Structure

1. **Officers:**

- 1.1. **Co-chairs:** The Secretary, or the Secretary's designee, and one annually elected member of the Council shall co-chair the Council.
 - 1.1.1. At the first meeting of each fiscal year, the Council shall elect a co-chair from among the Council members for a term of 1 year.
- 1.2. **Co-vice chairs:** 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.

2. **Committees:**

- 2.1. **Establishment:** The Council may establish subcommittees to provide technical assistance to the Council. The Council may establish subcommittee topics and activities as the Council deems appropriate (see [Appendix B](#)).
- 2.2. **Membership:** Membership in a subcommittee is limited to appointed council members, and is at will and discretionary.
- 2.3. **Structure:** Committee structure shall follow Council structure including annual election of two co-chairs. Committee co-chairs may serve recurring terms throughout their appointment to the Council, pending re-election.
- 2.4. **Quorum:** At least 51% of the appointed members must be present at any properly announced committee meeting to constitute a quorum.
- 2.5. **Meetings:** Committee meetings shall follow Council meeting guidelines including compliance with the Open Meetings Act and voting requirements (see Article IV).

Article VI: Duties of the Council

1. **The Council shall meet regularly to work toward the following goals:**

1.1. **to address the food insecurity crisis in the State resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis by:**

- 1.1.1. coordinating state- and local-level food insecurity services to support residents of the State;
- 1.1.2. tracking and analyzing data to create a comprehensive map of food insecurity across the State and identify the gaps in service;
- 1.1.3. leveraging federal and private sector grants and other resources in order to address food insecurity needs;



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- 1.1.4. advising the State on how best to allocate resources and increase efficiency; and
- 1.1.5. exploring the role of and potential for the federal Community Eligibility Provision to ensure all students in the State are fed;
- 1.1.6. and making recommendations to the Maryland State Department of Education and the Maryland General Assembly to implement relevant findings;
- 1.2. to develop equity and sustainability policy recommendations to increase the long-term resiliency of the food system, including:**
 - 1.2.1. addressing and eliminating racial inequities in the food system;
 - 1.2.2. addressing and eliminating diet-related public health disparities;
 - 1.2.3. addressing and eliminating healthy food priority areas; and
 - 1.2.4. reducing wasted food, increasing recycling, and encouraging other relevant environmental impacts;
- 1.3. to expand the impact of existing food council organizations by:**
 - 1.3.1. providing coordination and facilitation of knowledge exchange at the state level; and
 - 1.3.2. supporting identification and application of grants to operating funds to support existing and new food council organizations as needed; and
- 1.4. to develop a strategic plan to increase the production and procurement of Maryland certified food, including:**
 - 1.4.1. increasing the quality and quantity of production, as well as aggregation, marketing, and distribution of local food in urban, suburban, and rural settings;
 - 1.4.2. increasing procurement of local food through schools, universities, and other institutions;
 - 1.4.3. creating additional market opportunities for Maryland food businesses; and
 - 1.4.4. expanding access to small scale manufacturing and food production infrastructure.
- 2. To advance the goals of the Council, the Council shall engage and collaborate with interested stakeholders, including:**
 - 2.1. residents of the State with lived experience of food insecurity; and
 - 2.2. food council organizations and similar local level food system convening organizations.
- 3. The Council shall submit a report to the General Assembly on or before Nov. 1 of each year in accordance with § 2-1257 of the State Government Article, on key findings and activities undertaken by the Council. Annual reports may also include:**
 - 3.1. appropriate policy and legislative changes;
 - 3.2. potential ways to restructure the Council such as:
 - 3.2.1. placing the Council within a different agency or organization; and



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- 3.2.2. enacting a sunset provision for the Council; and
- 3.3. any other recommendations of the Council.

Article VII: Administration

1. **The Maryland Department of Emergency Management shall provide administrative duties including but not limited to:**
 - 1.1. Coordinating Council meetings and reports, subject to statute, funding, and availability.
 - 1.2. Assisting with and coordinating projects recommended by the Council subject to statute, funding, and availability.
 - 1.3. Coordinating member appointments.
 - 1.4. Maintaining Council and Committee work plans as recommended by Council leadership.



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Appendix C: Council Member Roster

Organization	Name
Maryland Department of Emergency Management (FSRC Co-Chair)	Russell Strickland <i>Secretary</i>
University of Maryland College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (FSRC Co-Chair and Co-Vice Chair)	Dr. Stephanie Lansing <i>Professor of Environmental Science & Technology</i>
Maryland State Senate	Senator Katie Fry Hester
Maryland House of Delegates	Delegate Lorig Charkoudian
Maryland Department of Human Services (FSRC Co-Vice Chair)	Labelle Hillgrove <i>Senior Director, Office of Nutrition Assistance Programs</i>
Maryland Department of Agriculture (FSRC Co-Vice Chair)	Mark Powell <i>Chief of Agriculture and Seafood Marketing</i>
Maryland Department of Commerce	Joseph Milone <i>Agricultural Programs Manager</i>
Maryland Farm Bureau	Karl Shlagel <i>District Director</i>
Maryland Agricultural & Resource-Based Industry Development Corporation	Stephen McHenry <i>Executive Director</i>
Capital Area Food Bank	Joe Liu <i>Director of Advocacy & Public Policy</i>
Farmer	Jesse Albright <i>Owner/Farmer, Albright Farms</i>
Food Business Owner	Vacant
Food Council Member	Michele Burton



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Organization	Name
	<i>Program Manager, Prince George's Food Equity Council</i>
Food Council Member	Michelle Caruso <i>Steering Committee Chair, Frederick County Food Council</i>
Food Council Member	Annmarie Hart-Bookbinder <i>Food Security Programs Director, Montgomery Council Food Council</i>
Food Council Member	Taylor LaFave <i>Chief of Food Policy & Planning Food Policy Director, Baltimore City Department of Planning, Food Policy and Planning Division</i>
Food Council Member	Theresa Stahl <i>Nutritionist, Allegany County Health Dept. Vice-Chair, Western Maryland Food Council</i>
Food, Nutrition, and Public Health Expert	Daphene Altema-Johnson <i>Program Officer, Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, Food Communities & Public Health</i>
Food System Impacts on Climate and Environment Expert	Lindsey Doyle
Food System Policy Expert	Grace Leatherman <i>Executive Director, Future Harvest</i>
Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology	Nancy Nunn <i>Assistant Director</i>
Maryland Department of Environment (Ex-officio)	Shannon McDonald <i>Natural Resource Planner</i>
Maryland Food Bank	Meg Kimmel <i>Chief Executive Officer</i>
Maryland State Department of Education (Ex-officio)	Leslie Sessom-Parks



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Organization	Name
	<i>Chief, Professional Development & Performance</i>
Montgomery County Office of Food Systems Resilience	Heather Bois Bruskin <i>Director</i>
Public School System, Food Insecurity, and Local Food Procurement Representative	Beth Brewster <i>Food Service Supervisor, Caroline County Public Schools</i>
Racial Equity in Food System Policy Expert	Diana Taylor <i>Director of Strategic Initiatives, Anne Arundel County Partnership for Children and Families</i>
Seafood Industry Representative	Nick Hargrove <i>Owner, Tilghman Island Seafood</i>
Statewide Food Insecurity Advocacy Organization	LaMonika Jones <i>Director, Maryland Hunger Solutions</i>
University of Maryland Eastern Shore Extension, College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences	Dr. Lila Karki <i>Associate Professor of Agricultural Economics and Extension Program Evaluation Specialist</i>
University of Maryland Extension	Lisa Lachenmayr <i>Director, SNAP-Ed</i>
University of Maryland Eastern Shore Small Farm Program	Dr. Enrique Nelson Escobar <i>Associate Dean, UMES Extension</i>