

Sustainable Community Food System Initiative:

Vision and Key Elements

Montgomery County is perfectly positioned to create the nation's model sustainable community food system where more healthy food is locally produced, distributed, consumed, and composted in an efficient and environmentally sustainable way that promotes public health through improved eating habits and unites the rural, suburban, and urban communities around food. We have a 93,000 acre agricultural reserve. We have the necessary agricultural, entrepreneurial, environmental, and marketing talents in abundance. We have an immigrant workforce as yet largely untapped for agriculture. We have a huge market crying out for healthy, locally produced food. Our school system is nationally recognized as a trend setter. We are moving forward on progressive policies like the farm incubator.

By working together toward a shared and larger vision, Montgomery County can become the nation's model sustainable community food system. Fast forward six years and imagine. Imagine that the farm incubator recommended by the Green Economy Task Force is operating and with the start-up of a Farm School the Reserve is blossoming as a community of farmers dedicated to providing fresh produce to the residents of Montgomery County. Imagine a healthy local food education campaign has increased public awareness about the value of "Buying Montgomery and Eating Healthy" and built a critical mass of consumers.

Imagine using the growing market for local food to fuel economic development, promote entrepreneurship, and increase workforce training opportunities. Imagine a Food Innovation Center that includes a commercial kitchen incubator and a food processing facility to support local catering and other businesses. Imagine tapping the talents of hundreds of immigrant workers recruited from day labor sites to increase dramatically the production of local food. Imagine expanding Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, increasing tours of County farms, bringing mobile markets to neighborhoods previously deprived of access to locally grown fruits and vegetables. Imagine shoppers at major grocery chains and ethnic supermarkets expanding their selections of local foods.

Imagine MCPS partnering with a Healthy Food Hub to enhance meals with more local produce and to encourage good eating habits by students and their families. Imagine hundreds of home, school, and community gardens across the County. Imagine a surge in green food related jobs, a dramatic decrease in childhood obesity and poverty, and a substantial drop in greenhouse gas emissions.

But why just imagine? Let's roll up our sleeves and get to work building a diverse coalition of stakeholders to turn this vision into reality. What would it take? What are we missing? What are you willing to do?

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Here are the mission critical program areas needed to build a Sustainable Community Food System according to the paper written by Andy Lowy:

1. **Training and Development of Sustainable Agriculture Workforce** through a **Small Farm Incubator** that leases land and provides equipment and assistance to entrepreneurs who want to launch and grow organic farms and a **Sustainable Farm Network** that includes business planning assistance, education, and support programs for sustainable table food growers. This will include a **Farm School** that trains aspiring farmers and prepares them to succeed in commercial organic farming in Montgomery County and mentors them based upon the Intervale model which has successfully operated near Burlington, VT.
2. **Creation of a Food Innovation Center** that includes a **Commercial Kitchen Incubator** that rents out commercial kitchen space, provides equipment, business support, and advice to culinary entrepreneurs and chefs who want to launch and grow healthy food businesses, a **Healthy Food Processing Center** that rents food-processing equipment to farmers and cooks, and produces healthy processed/packaged foods using local ingredients, and a **Healthy Catering Company** that produces healthy meals for County institutions, private parties, and others.
3. **Design and Implementation of a Healthy Food Hub** that assists sustainable farms with marketing and provides storage space, that collects, distributes, and sells local produce to restaurants, schools, Food Innovation Center, as well as other, large bulk purchasers, including the Manna Food Center and others who provide food to our neighbors most in need.
4. **Expand and grow CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) Network** that is currently in its infancy but continues to mobilize community groups and connect them with local producers.
5. **Community Food Education Program** that works with schools and community centers to educate the public about producing and consuming healthy local food sustainability while growing food in suburban/urban down county areas. By working together with MCPS and MC Park and Planning to focus on creating school gardens and developing a curriculum to teach kids (while in school and out-of-school) about where their food comes from, about gardening and composting, and about eating and cooking seasonally grown foods.
6. **Launch a “Buying Montgomery and Eating Healthy” Marketing Campaign** that uses advertising and product labeling to educate consumers about the value of Buying Montgomery and Eating Healthy.