

Partnership for a Healthy and Sustainable Food Future - Details on the Proposal
DRAFT – Please comment to Dan Fiscus, Coordinator, or to Willie Lantz, Chair

In this Document

- 1. Initial Goals and Metrics**
- 2. Partnership Collaborative Process**
- 3. Personnel and Funding**
- 4. Action Plans in Development Toward the Goals**
- 5. Example Initiatives in a Coordinated “System of Solutions”**

1. Initial Goals and Metrics

By 2030, the Partnership will strive to:

1. Increase the portion of our food supply that is locally grown from 1% to 10%

This will redirect \$122 million of food expenditures, most of which now leaves the area during purchase of imported food, to support local agriculture and the local food economy; approximately \$35 million in Allegany Co., \$14 million in Garrett Co., and \$73 million in Washington Co.

2. Decrease food insecurity from 13% to 5%

This will involve collaboration on food assistance as well as developing multiple pathways out of food insecurity and poverty. This Partnership will collaborate with Bridges to Opportunity and other regional efforts already working to assist citizens in the transition to better employment and food security.

3. Decrease the rate of diabetes from 10% to 5%

This will also have positive impacts on obesity, heart disease and other food-driven factors of health. The Partnership will collaborate with Western Maryland Health and others who provide “produce prescriptions” and treat “food as medicine”, and also with University of Maryland Extension programs in health and nutrition education.

We have chosen these three initial goals from priorities we have heard in Western Maryland, and because we see them as factors with very high leverage to improve other aspects of the food system. We welcome partner input to modify or add to these goals as needed.

2. Partnership Building and Collaborative Process

The Partnership will hold 6 meetings per year to develop, implement, evaluate, and refine Partnership efforts.

Partners can help to modify the goals, efforts, activities, programs, projects, policies, communications, research, and initiatives.

Partnership Timelines

Year 1 – form and launch the Partnership

3-year plan to implement the first version of the coordinated "system of solutions" as described below and as depicted in the diagram.

10-year plan to achieve the ambitious goals listed above

We will develop agreements on specific roles for each partner. In developing and agreeing on partner roles, we will seek benefits at the intersection of the food-related needs and priorities of both the individual partner, the Partnership as a whole, and the Western Maryland community.

We plan to recruit and engage partners on those food issues of greatest importance to them. Potential partners include Western Maryland Health System and hospitals in Garrett and Washington Co.; three county governments and their economic development departments; Frostburg State University, Allegany College of Maryland, and other colleges; county public school systems; Garrett Growers Cooperative and other farms and farm groups; Cumberland, Hagerstown, Oakland, and other cities; Maryland Farm Bureau; food businesses, and many more. We have developed a list of these stakeholders (available as a Google sheet) and we welcome input to add new organizations to contact.

We envision developing a Partnership Pledge that can enable citizens to sign on to support the effort, as well as proclamations that we will develop and present to city and county governments to enable their formal support.

3. Personnel and Funding

The Partnership will support ½ time salary for the WMFC Coordinator with a target of \$25,000 from funding partners. The WMFC Coordinator will serve as the leading staff person for the Partnership, and the WMFC will seek other funding so the Coordinator can also work ½ time on WMFC efforts such as the annual regional food system conference, facilitating efforts of work groups in each county, and more.

Partnership sustaining members will contribute \$2,500 for the first year. Higher or lower contributions can be discussed as needed. The WMFC has applied for grants that will provide

additional funding, and current major partners provide significant in-kind contributions through administrative staff support, senior and leadership staff support, office space and technology, and more.

4. Action Plans in Development Toward the Goals

WMFC has nine goals (see the website home page), and WMFC work groups in each county have developed priorities and action plans, and all of these are aligned with the goals of the Partnership.

In Washington County, a local food event on Groundhog Day has been held twice, and will continue annually, that brings together local farmers and food producers with local citizens. Washington Co. WMFC is also working to collect surplus food from farmers at farmers markets to distribute it to food assistance agencies thus providing valuable fresh, healthy and locally grown food. WMFC partner, University of Maryland Extension in Washington Co., does food, nutrition and diabetes education and research.

In Allegany County, WMFC has provided matching funds to double SNAP used at the farmers markets. Allegany WMFC is also working to collect surplus food from farmers markets to distribute it to food assistance agencies. We collaborate with multiple partner agencies on grant proposals for coordinated efforts to improve the food system.

In Garrett County, the WMFC has two work groups. The Food Access and Education work group has developed plans for cooking demonstrations and classes. In the past this group developed a guide to all food assistance resources in the county. The Food Economy work group is developing efforts to convene farmers and food producers to learn about new opportunities, markets, products and practices in farming, marketing and distribution and the food system.

Several more action plans are described below such as the AgCorps project and the online local food purchasing system. The WMFC also plans to convene an annual regional food system conference to bring together diverse stakeholders, citizens and leaders. The first annual conference in April 2019 was a great success. Results of this conference will be published in a report in Spring 2019 and made available on the WMFC website.

5. Example Initiatives in a Coordinated “System of Solutions”

We have developed example initiatives to illustrate the Partnership’s coordinated “systems of solutions” approach. The examples are meant to illustrate that multiple mutually reinforcing efforts, with a well-coordinated collaborative partnership, could be more effective than individual efforts.

The initiatives below and in the attached diagram have come from comments made at the April 12 conference and other WMFC meetings. This is a brainstorm set of examples, and it is **not**

meant to be taken as if we would necessarily do all the things on the diagram. The specific set of best coordinated actions will be developed by the members of the Partnership.

While this initial diagram and set of examples are focused largely on Allegany and Garrett counties, the strategic partnership approach is also applicable to Washington County and the Western MD region (and beyond). We plan to make more links in the coming year so the Partnership will be more clearly a regional coordinated system of solutions.

The Food Council could work to lead the Partnership on efforts to include (these are circles or ovals in the attached diagram):

1. An AmeriCorps like program to provide a source of less inexpensive workers to local farms/farmers. This could involve some folks who are currently food insecure and thus potentially provide a transitional pathway out of poverty and out of food insecurity. We are calling this AgCorps and have submitted a letter of intent (pre-application) to Rural Maryland Council for initial funding.
2. A 20% locally grown food purchasing pledge for leading institutions that are already our allies, such as the Western MD Health System, FSU, etc. This may start at some lower level like 5% and increase to 20% as is realistic given the purchasing volume of institutions and supply capacity of local growers. We plan to start this effort by purchasing software for an online ordering and purchasing system and have submitted a letter of intent (pre-application) to Rural Maryland Council for initial funding.
3. A coordinated effort to aggregate locally grown food to allow institutions and perhaps grocery stores and other businesses to be able to work with (order and purchase from) a single entity while having access to food grown by many growers in the area. This will also be advanced by the online ordering system mentioned above.
4. Links to Future Harvest/Chesapeake Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture (CASA), University of Maryland Extension, University of Maryland, and other beginning farmer training programs, and also area high school agriculture education programs and area colleges to provide another source of interns, apprentices, volunteers, and workers for area farms. This can integrate with the AgCorps project.
5. A food waste collection effort linked to composting, with finished compost made available to local farmers. This would address county interests of keeping food waste out of the landfill and address WMFC goals in food and environmental quality.

The WMFC seeks comments, critiques, suggestions and input on all aspects of the Partnership for a Healthy and Sustainable Food Future. Please contact Dan Fiscus or Willie Lantz to help us to improve the Partnership, the action plans, and everything described in this document. Thank you for your assistance to help us achieve the best food future!

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