



Looking Back, Looking Forward

REFLECTIONS ON FARMERS MARKET ADVOCACY AND ACTION IN PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MARYLAND

Farmers markets represent a critical food access point for many communities across Prince George's County. Beyond bringing food from local farms to local tables, farmers markets also support local economies, increase access to fresh and nutritious food in communities with limited grocery store access, and promote sustainable farming practices. Since the Prince George's County Food Equity Council (FEC) was founded in 2013, the organization has influenced policies, developed resources, and created infrastructure to promote and expand county farmers markets that help residents grow, sell, and choose healthy and locally produced food.

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Farmers Markets & SNAP:

The FEC's first step into farmers market advocacy began in early 2014. In collaboration with County Councilmember Mary Lehman, the FEC supported the passage of CB-37-2014; the bill supported the creation of the SNAP-to-Health Program. SNAP-to-Health supported and encouraged the usage of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) funds at farmers markets county-wide by bridging the divide between vulnerable community members and access to nutritious local food at farmers markets. It allocated funds to help markets purchase equipment to accept SNAP funds and train market managers on how to accept and process those funds.



Image source: Crossroads Community Food Network

After CB-37-2014 passed in September 2014, the bill was slated to take effect January 1st, 2015. Unfortunately, the bill was defunded before it could take effect. Despite this setback, the FEC continued to rally for funding to support these initiatives and the funding was ultimately reallocated to help farmers markets purchase equipment to accept SNAP. Funding was also used to support the Prince George's County Health Department develop new initiatives focused on the connection between food retail and



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health. Though the outcome was unexpected, the bill fostered community partnerships, leveraged funding for farmers markets, and laid the foundation for further legislative action.

Soon after, the FEC advocated for County funding to support Maryland Market Money (MMM), a statewide program that provides a dollar-for-dollar match for farmers market purchases made using federal nutrition assistance dollars. Recognizing similar policy gaps that SNAP-to-Health aimed to bridge, the FEC was grateful to participate in a successful advocacy campaign to fund MMM in Prince George's County. MMM has now been implemented at six county farmers markets, processing and extending benefits for thousands of residents in need. In 2020, \$56,768 in Federal nutrition benefits & MMM incentive dollars were spent in Prince George's County, with \$73,806 allotted for the ongoing 2021 season.

Further Legislation:

In the past few years, new opportunities arose to support further legislation concerning farmers markets in the county. In collaboration with County Councilmember Dannielle M. Glaros, the FEC advocated for [CB-66-2016](#) and [CB-67-2016](#) to expand the definition of farmers markets within the county and ease permitting challenges. By creating a direct route for temporary-use-permitting for farmers markets, these bills lessened barriers to establishing new markets within the county.

While these bills were extremely beneficial for county markets, further constraints remained, including regulations that limited market operating days to 50 per calendar year. This limitation meant that markets could not operate more than one day per week, limiting resident access to fresh and local foods, as well as producers' access to a consistent marketplace.

Recognizing the downsides of such a limitation, the FEC and Council Member Glaros advocated to expand the viable operating days from 50 to 106. This expansion facilitates more consistent operations



Image source: Crossroads Community Food Network



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and improves access to local, sustainable, and nutritious food for residents. Additionally, [CB-66-2016](#) allowed for farmers markets to operate in non-daylight hours, a change from the previous daylight-only restrictions. The opportunity to collaborate on this legislation also created a space for structural changes to the permitting process. Recognizing the frustrations faced by farmers market management, the FEC helped establish a dedicated permit navigator for farmers markets within the Department of Permitting, Inspections, and Enforcement.

The Capital Market:

In 2016, the Safeway Supermarket at Addison Plaza in Seat Pleasant closed its doors for good. The area, which was already considered a Health Enterprise Zone, a state designation for areas with low access to medical professionals and high rates of chronic diseases, was further removed from essential resources and healthy food with the nearest grocery option over three miles away in any direction.¹ Recognizing barriers to healthy food access (the area is now also considered a [Healthy Food Priority Area](#), an area with a high poverty rate, limited access to transportation, and a high ratio of unhealthy to healthy food options) the FEC connected with community members and the Capital Area Food Bank to create the Food Justice Coalition of 20743. In the Coalition's monthly meetings, a vision of community investment in food access via a co-op supermarket was born. Due to the financial and human capital hurdles that such a venture faces, the coalition launched a farmers market to bridge the gap.



Image source: The Capital Market

¹ "Amid Food Desert, Seat Pleasant Loses Grocery Store" NBC Washington.
<https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/amid-food-desert-seat-pleasant-loses-grocery-store/1999088/>



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Known in its first iteration in July 2018 as the Oakcrest Farmers Market, the market's pilot season was held at the Oakcrest Community Center in Capitol Heights and supported by Prince George's County Parks and Recreation Department. In 2019, the market partnered with the Town of Capitol Heights to relocate across from the Capitol Heights Metro Station, where it was subsequently rebranded and launched as The Capital Market. In 2020, The Capital Market opened a second location at Creative-Suitland Arts Center, supported 25 Black-owned-and-operated businesses and community organizations (including four regional farms), and was patronized by more than 3,000 community members. The Capital Market serves as not only a site of integral food access but also supports small and Black-owned-business incubation and fosters community connection.

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Since 2013, the FEC and dedicated members have been a driving force in advocating for county farmers markets through funding and legislation that helps business and residents alike. Moving forward, the FEC continues to support local markets through a dedicated FEC Farmers Market Committee, which meets monthly to work on goals for market access, improve cross-community market communication, and address residents' concerns. In addition, the FEC co-hosts a yearly Market Managers Meeting with the University of Maryland Extension to outline and field questions about permitting, inspection, and resource needs for county farmers markets. By continuing to support farmers markets and all that they represent, the FEC and partners hope to support a resilient and sustainable local food system that benefits all who grow, sell, and shop in the county.

If you are interested in participating in an upcoming FEC meeting or becoming a member, please contact Sydney Daigle, Sydney@pgcfec.org.

ABOUT THE FOOD EQUITY COUNCIL

The Prince George's County Food Equity Council (FEC) is a local food policy council that works to help residents grow, sell, and choose healthy foods. Since 2013, FEC has been a voice for county residents at the policymaking table. The FEC focuses on systematic and sustainable changes to promote health, economic opportunity, food security, and well-being in Prince George's by advocating for policy that creates a more equitable local food system. The FEC is housed within the Institute for Public Health Innovation.



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