

2019 DC Food Policy Priorities

Identified by the DC Food Policy Director and the Food Policy Council

The DC Food Policy Director (FPD) and Food Policy Council (FPC) have identified the following policy concepts as priorities for the District to act on in 2019. The FPD and FPC will work to promote these priorities, and welcome partners and other District leaders to help fulfill these ambitious goals. The FPC approved these priorities on December 12, 2018.

Food Access & Equity:

1. **Create a Locally-Owned Healthy Food Retail Investment Fund** that matches private investments in locally-owned, community-driven grocery stores in underserved areas. This Fund would focus on small footprint stores, possibly co-located on the bottom floor of affordable housing, healthcare centers, and other community-serving facilities. Learning from best practices from other state grocery investment funds, this fund would target investment and technical assistance towards local entrepreneurs and businesses that create living wage jobs and offer products based on the needs/wants of the surrounding community. To support emerging business owners in opening their first stores as well as existing businesses looking to expand, the Program would also provide technical assistance and training on store operations, business strategy, and branding.
2. **Identify and promote strategies to invest healthcare dollars in healthy food as medicine programs for food-insecure populations.** Explore opportunities through Medicaid waivers and other means to strengthen the case for healthy food as an effective treatment for diet-related chronic disease and a strategy to decrease healthcare costs. Monitor the current DC Health pilot program with AmeriHealth, Giant, and DC Greens to provide prescriptions for healthy food to food-insecure patients, and consider expanding this program if it shows positive results.
3. **Establish an Online Grocery Delivery Pilot:** The USDA is piloting online grocery purchasing/delivery for SNAP recipients in eight states, including Maryland. DC could move ahead with piloting online grocery purchasing/delivery for low-income residents, possibly targeting residents receiving SNAP or WIC benefits. This would expand access to healthy food for low-income residents in underserved parts of the District and put the District at a strategic advantage if USDA decides to expand the pilot.

Sustainable Procurement:

1. **Streamline and improve institutional food procurement in the District:** The District is purchasing food for institutional meals, such as in schools, correctional facilities, homeless shelters, and senior centers, through separate contracts. These contracts should be analyzed to determine how best to streamline them, improve the quality of the meals served, and support more local food businesses.

2. **Move towards developing a DC Food Processing and Innovation Center (“central kitchen”)** to: (1) produce healthy food and meals for the District’s institutions, including schools, hospitals, childcare centers, and retirement homes; (2) provide hands-on training on food preparation skills needed to enter the quickly-growing food workforce in DC; (3) provide commercial kitchen space for entrepreneurs; and (4) aggregate fresh produce to distribute to smaller food retailers. Interim steps could include the central kitchen study in the Healthy Students Amendment Act and convening District agencies and developers.
3. **Pilot self-operated school food services in a limited number of DCPS schools:** Bringing school food services in-house has the potential to cut costs while also improving the quality of school meals. Every other major city has moved their school food services in-house, which has consistently saved money and improved quality. To test the concept and develop best practices for expanding to more schools, DCPS should conduct a pilot program where a small number of schools transition to self-operated school food services.
4. **Explore best practices for increasing organics diversion:** Businesses, schools, and other entities that create over a certain amount of organic waste should be incentivized to separate and send that waste to composting/anaerobic digestion facilities rather than combining it with the solid waste stream. This would create a market for more composting/anaerobic digestion facilities to open in the region. This would also create jobs and help the District achieve its sustainability goals.

Urban Agriculture:

1. Expand the **Urban Land Lease Program and Urban Agriculture Tax Credit** by encouraging more District agencies to identify parcels of unused property that could be leased to urban farmers and promoting the Tax Credit with District developers and property owners. Agencies should be encouraged to work with DGS, which already has a database of government properties that could be used for urban agriculture.
2. **Increase financial support and resources for urban farms in the District:** The District is opening new pathways for urban agriculture through programs such as the Urban Agriculture Land Lease Program and the upcoming Urban Agriculture Tax Credit. Nevertheless, urban farms in the District struggle to navigate government requirements and identify resources to expand their operations. Urban farms would benefit from increased technical assistance in meeting government requirements and small infrastructure grants of \$5-20K for the development of hoop houses, greenhouses, water infrastructure, cold storage, and other infrastructure. These relatively small investments would make a big impact on how much fresh, locally-grown produce is available year-round to District residents and would promote job creation as farms expand their operations.

Local Food Business & Labor Development:

1. Elevate the importance of the DC food economy by promoting the **DC Food Economy Study** (to be finalized in January 2019) at public events and through media outlets.
2. Publish and begin implementation of the **DC Food Workforce Development Strategy** (funded by Kaiser Permanente, to be finalized July 2019), which will outline a strategy for local government, investors, and other stakeholders to strengthen the District's food sector workforce.
3. **Expand the Cottage Food Act of 2013** to make it easier for small, at-home food producers to operate in the District, such as increasing the current annual revenue cap (\$25,000).

Nutrition & Food System Education:

1. **Identify needs and opportunities for increased nutrition and food system education** in coordination with other District coalitions, including the Healthy Youth and Schools Commission, the Diabesity Committee, and the Mayor's Committee on Nutrition, Health, and Physical Activity.
2. **Support local food producers that promote and preserve DC culture and food traditions:** The District already promotes local makers and producers through successful programs such as Made in DC. Small food producers, particularly minority and female business owners and those maintaining ethnic food traditions, should have access to more support through increased engagement and promotion of these types of businesses through targeted programming and marketing.