

For Immediate Release

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Montgomery County Office of Agriculture and Montgomery Countryside Alliance partner on a guide for BIPOC New and Established Farmers

A Montgomery County farmland protection nonprofit, Montgomery Countryside Alliance (MCA) and the County's Office of Agriculture (OAG) have partnered to produce an online guide for new and expanding Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) farmers.

[\(Guide on OAG site w/ language translation\)](#) [\(Guide on MCA Site\)](#)

The guide seeks to marry Montgomery County's dual commitments to equality and agriculture by providing farmers of color with specific resources to get growing and sustain farm ventures in the County. The county is home to the Agricultural Reserve, an area of over 90,000 with special zoning set aside for open space and ag preservation 40 years ago. "Farming is a tough business," acknowledges Jeremy Criss, Director of the Office of Agriculture, "We've kept land protected for Ag but that is just one piece, so much goes into a successful farm and we hope this guide will help farmers access the tools they need to maintain a farm."

The guide is split into several sections- looking back as well as forward- starting with a background on the systemic and intentional exclusion of BIPOC farmers from land and resources. The guide features virtual and real-life networks assisting BIPOC farmers, grants tailored to farmers from underserved backgrounds and local/state/national resources to start and sustain thriving farms with training, marketing assistance and more. On the Office of Agriculture site, translation into over one hundred languages is available to make the content widely accessible.

According to the last Ag Census in 2017, Non-White producers made up 9.7% of Montgomery County's farmers – up from 6.7% in the previous census of 2012. With the newest Ag Census data release this year it is expected that the ranks of Non-White farmers will continue to increase – but these gains do not show the farmers who have hit insurmountable stumbling blocks to starting or sustaining a farm. In June 2022 MCA convened a listening session with diverse new and established producers and Councilmember Albornoz at Dodo Farms to discuss some of the challenges. Takeaways included the need for more support – in funding and land access– but also inspiration. "I am energized and excited by the possibilities and creativity around potential policies and funding to build equity for farmers of color here," said Nia Nyamweya, operator of Beauty Blooms Farm in Damascus.

MCA launched the Land Link Montgomery program in 2011 to help address the challenge of affordable farmland access in our expensive region. "Over the past few years farm seekers are far more likely to be people of color, women, and immigrants – many with decades of experience farming, many looking to meet the increasing demands for culturally relevant local food," says Kristina Bostick who directs the program. "There are specific needs this population of farmers have and thankfully there are increasingly more tailored resources to help sustain farms. This guide is a way to collect and share those resources."

The Office of Agriculture and MCA are clear that the guide is just the first step on the path to more BIPOC run farms. "We hope this will point people toward resources and then we can engage one-on-one to help them navigate their path forward," says Jaqueline Arnold, OAG Administrative Specialist.

"We have a ways to go to achieve a just and equitable food system. Montgomery County has plenty of room for more farms, and we will all thrive with greater inclusiveness – it's our hope that we will need to update this guide often with more and more success stories and opportunities," concludes MCA Executive Director Caroline Taylor.

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