

For Immediate Release:

How do we keep more farmers growing healthy food on the ground in the Washington Metro region? One local farm preservation group is rising to the challenge.



Montgomery Countryside Alliance Launches Land Link: an online service linking farmers and land in Montgomery County and the wider region.

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In February 2011, [Montgomery Countryside Alliance](http://www.mocoalliance.org) (MCA) (a nonprofit that promotes and protects Montgomery County's 93,000 acre Ag Reserve) brought together a broad array of local farmers and community members to discuss challenges to farming in Montgomery County and the Washington metro region.

All agreed that the price of land in the DC area is prohibitive for new and expanding family farms. Add to this fact the economic downturn that has resulted in deeply slashed government programs that would otherwise help new farmers and the result is an inability to meet the exploding demand for locally grown food. Waiting lists are long for vegetable shares and new farmers markets sprouting each season clamor for more vendors. To meet the demand for local food and build a strong local food system, farmers need to be able to acquire land and hold on to it.

MCA, with intern Brian Walker and small local grower Shannon Varley of [Bella Terra Family Farm](http://www.bellaterrafarm.com), pressed forward to create [Land Link Montgomery](http://mocolandlink.org) (mocolandlink.org). The site aims to connect aspiring and expanding farmers with rural landowners offering long term leases, land for sale or other arrangements. Farmers and landowners join Land Link Montgomery for a small one-time application fee, enabling them to post their needs, whether seeking land or seeking farmers to lease their land. Postings are anonymous to protect each member's privacy, MCA facilitates initial contact between interested members.

Land Link Montgomery is based on similar programs that have successfully been helping landowners and farmers find each other for years. Varley herself was a member of a similar program while farming in Vermont and currently leases 10 acres from a Montgomery County Ag Reserve landowner. Says Varley, who with her young family raise sustainably grown vegetables, heritage breed chickens, sheep, cows, rabbits and pigs, "Without this lease, there is no way that we could afford to farm here. When you are farming sustainably you put so much work and time into building rich soil that a long term lease is really important."

Caroline Taylor, MCA's Executive Director, is optimistic about the future of farming in the shadow of the Nation's capitol: "The metro region's residents know well the value of locally, sustainably grown food, so the customer base is a given. With programs like Land Link and soon to be launched Labor Link, we can help give the necessary boost to our farmers, especially those not born into the trade, to get on the ground and stay growing."

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