

# DELAWARE COUNCIL ON FARM & FOOD POLICY:

A model for collaboration within the food system.

A FIVE-YEAR IMPACT REPORT



A subset of the Delaware Department of Agriculture



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*"This group is important to help facilitate coordination within our food system. Our top priority is to connect family farms with local community members that need wholesome, safe, and affordable food products that they can easily access in their neighborhoods."* - Michael T. Scuse, Delaware Secretary of Agriculture.

2023 marks five years since the creation of the Delaware Council on Farm & Food Policy. Established in August 2018, the Council has become a pivotal force to enhance local food system operations and capacities throughout the state, positively impacting Delaware communities in all three counties. Beginning January 2025, Delaware's state government will transition to a new governor and members of the cabinet. The Council has been a resource to the current administration and offers a significant foothold, in Delaware's food system, to the next administration.

This report summarizes the Council's role and impact during its first five years and outlines priorities for the next five. The Council will continue its focus on food supply chain initiatives prioritizing local & state infrastructure, resource integration & partnerships, and coordinating data to inform decisions.

## Member Organizations (2018-2023)



[Click Here: Learn More about the Council](#)



# PRACTICAL IMPACTS

In 2016, the Delaware Department of Agriculture and University of Delaware jointly released the **Connecting Healthy Farms to Healthy Delawareans 2016 Report** that synthesized insights from interviews with 45 individuals across various sectors. This led to seven recommendations, including the establishment of a statewide farm and food policy council.

In 2018, the Delaware Council on Farm & Food Policy was created as an advisory group, helping to shape the state's food systems. The Council has carried out its role to help develop food policy and sustain food security in Delaware, through targeted projects and programs. The Department used a grassroots approach and organized a seminar, uniting stakeholders from diverse sectors including food, agriculture, health, policy, academia, business, community development, and education, to build the Council.

Nearly 60 participants engaged in brainstorming, breakout discussions, and questionnaires to shape the group and frame its work. To ensure flexibility in its composition and formalize member responsibilities, the Secretary appoints all Council members.

## A snapshot of Council achievements during its first five years

<p><b>\$1.3M</b></p> <p>In grants to producers and food supply chain businesses. To date, 26 projects funded after 2 grant cycles.</p> 	<p><b>1<sup>st</sup></b></p> <p>Delaware Farm to School Program Coordinator hired. Enhancing state capacity to facilitate local food procurement.</p> 	<p><b>3</b></p> <p>Roundtable discussions held to discuss critical food topics like production, access, and waste. Participants –mayors, legislators, county administrators, health professionals, community members.</p> 	<p><b>12</b></p> <p>Delaware farms supplied product for the first ever Delaware Grown Culinary Challenge. Delaware high school culinary students and chefs teamed up to showcase seasonal agriculture products.</p> 	<p><b>5</b></p> <p>Farm &amp; Food Planning and Networking Seminars. Marking a continued effort to foster communication, information sharing, collaboration, and the opportunity to shape priorities together.</p> 
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The Council is designed to pool expertise and experiences of members and the organizations they represent to weigh in on or develop policy, legislation, project plans, or reports. The Secretary has confidently looked to the Council for advice on a wide range of topics related to food, nutrition, health, markets, and community needs.

Furthermore, the Secretary relies on the Council to inform decisions about Delaware's food supply chain landscape, existing resources, what's missing, and areas for improvement. To inform the Council's perspective programs like Farm to Community and the First State Food System grant program have established direct relationships with farmers and producers in the state. Efforts have complemented the longstanding mission of the Department to ensure the viability of agriculture, which starts with our producers.



2022 Council meeting. Not all members pictured.

Council members are appointed for two-year terms and the group is capped at 15 members. The Council uses subcommittees to work with additional experts in the state and to accomplish specific projects. The Executive committee oversees the annual report, budget planning, project review, and meeting schedules and is chaired by the Director of Delaware Office of State Planning and Coordination. The Council Liaison oversees work on behalf of the Secretary, managing the scope, communication, and exchange of work.

Embedding the Council within a state agency and supporting the mission of that agency helps to anchor the group's focus.

The Council's function as an extension of the Department of Agriculture ensures that the goals to improve food systems, supply chains, and food security are rooted at the beginning of the food system – food production and agriculture.



Silent conversation during 2018 Seminar.



# FUNDING INTO DELAWARE'S FOOD SYSTEM

The Council is centered on two components, data management and project development, with an emphasis on fostering coordination. These are foundational to the Council's structure and have positioned Council members and the Department to secure upwards of \$4M in state and federal grants during its first five years.

\$2M of State American Rescue Plan Act funds used to create the First State Food System Program. Dispersing grants directly to Delaware farmers and other food supply chain operators to support projects that strengthen the local food supply chain.



**\$2M**

State American  
Rescue Plan Act



## **\$1.9M USDA Local Food Purchase Cooperative Agreement**

As part of the USDA LFPA (+) Cooperative Agreement programs to create the Farm to Community Pilot Program. Working with community outlets with established food distribution programs to procure products directly from producers, getting food into communities through pantries and direct to households.

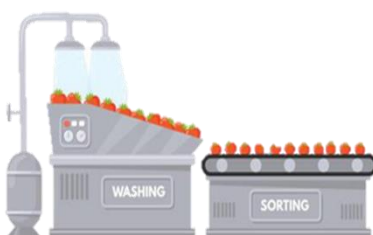
## **\$50k to advance the Division of Public Health's Advancing Healthy Lifestyles Initiative**

Created the Farm to Store Pilot program to connect Delaware farmers and neighborhood-based retailers to increase the volume of fresh food products in stores for consumers to access right in their communities.



## **\$120K USDA Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Cooperative Agreement**

As part of the Department's state plan to fulfill the USDA RFSI Cooperative Agreement. The Council will facilitate the administration of technical assistance and training for food aggregation, storage, transportation, and processing.



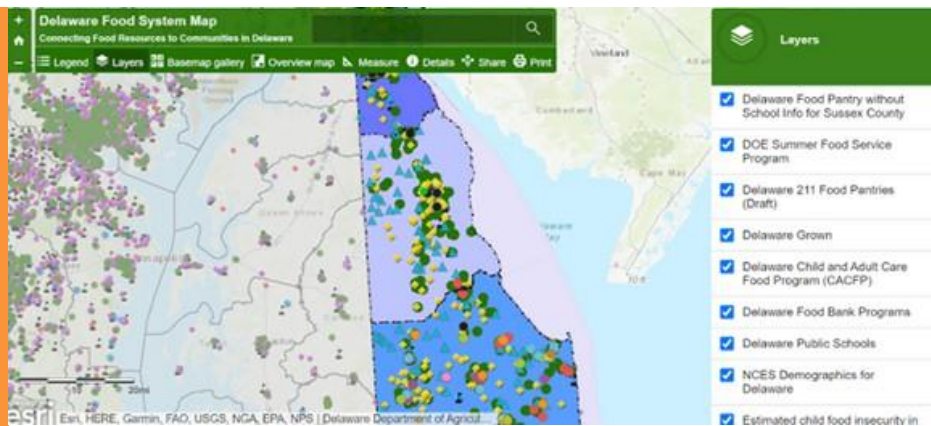


## Data Management

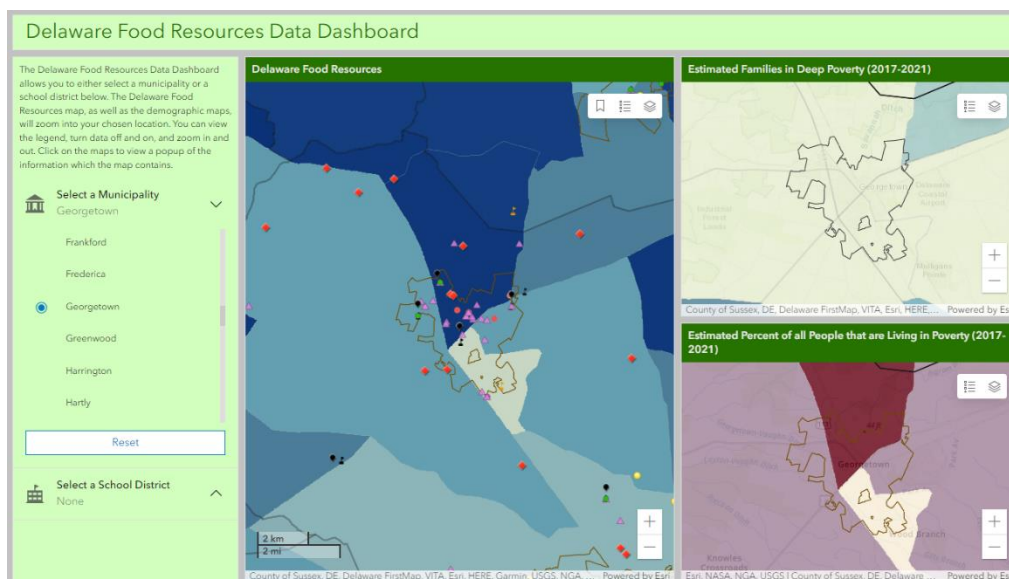
Relying on real data strengthens the Council's advisory role and helps to better understand circumstances, pinpoint needs, and anticipate outcomes.

In 2019, the Council initiated its first project using geospatial information systems (GIS) to map food access resources in Delaware. The Secretary shared this tool with Delaware Emergency Management Agency, aiding resource alignment at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Delaware Food System Map has local and state boundaries, demographic data, and more than 10 data layers showing food program information in Delaware and Maryland.



Today, the Council collaborates with the University of Delaware Biden School's Institute for Public Administration (IPA) to manage qualitative and quantitative data.



The Council and IPA have developed the Delaware Food Resource Connection, a series of geospatial maps, story maps, vulnerability indexes, dashboards, policy briefs, and case studies. A suite of tools accessible to the Council and other organizations to inform priorities and allocated resources.





## Project Development

The Council develops and provides input to projects in three ways: (1) using Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) change framework to determine project scopes and ways to measure progress; (2) relying on diverse Council member perspectives to strengthen project proposals and improve the likelihood of project success and sustainability; and (3) as a sounding board for projects from other groups. The Council opens its quarterly meetings to allow organizations to present new project ideas, brainstorm project plans, learn about resources and existing work, and hear Council ideas.

The Delaware Division of Public Health and University of Delaware Cooperative Extension hosted PSE training. The Council Chair, Liaison, and several members completed the training to be practitioners of the PSE approach. This approach reflects how the work of its members is integrated to affect food systems in holistic ways.

A Council priority is addressing the need for better awareness and communication between organizations involved in food-work throughout the state.

The Farm & Food Planning and Networking Seminar is a forum for Council members and stakeholders to exchange information, share updates, and collaborate. Annually, the Council compiles attendee priorities from the meeting, shaping the focus for the coming year.



2023 Seminar panel. Left: Rob Gurnee (Lutheran Community Services), Shane Marvel (Marvelous Produce), Major Phillip Davis (Salvation Army), Zach Dittmar (Dittmar Family Farms), Karen Shore (Upstream Strategies LLC).

## Statewide Coordination

The Council's statewide scope reflects an understanding that food system topics are important in each county, in urban and rural communities, and connects the wide-ranging food-related efforts in progress throughout the state. The Council advances its work sustainably by relying on two things:

- Communication – Delaware is not lacking in initiatives that address food needs. Recognizing that food system and food security projects are happening in a variety of ways, in a variety of communities, and led by a variety of organizations, the Council has facilitated opportunities to connect organizations with similar goals or similar service areas. This has led to shared resources, streamlined processes, and improved outcomes.





- Building Relationships – Creating opportunities to bring together project partners, annual meeting attendees, program participants, and other stakeholders is a core function. Focusing on learning and understanding more about the work of individuals and organizations that make up the food system in Delaware has allowed the Council to slowly build and add to a network of eager and mindful collaborators. Program partners and collaborators have expressed that the Council's existence has enhanced their trust and confidence in state government.

Maintaining a feedback loop with partners and stakeholders is crucial for generating awareness and coordination. The Council has engaged with over 60 organizations in annual meetings and hosted roundtable discussions on specific topics like on Food Waste in 2019. In 2020 on the Availability of Healthy Food Options in Communities, where mayors, town managers, and county administrators participated to talk about specific issues and brainstorm solutions for their jurisdictions. And in 2021 on Urban Farming, Food Security Tools, and Food Systems. The Council collects notes from each discussion to document the work and inform next steps.

As part of the 2023 Farm & Food Planning and Networking Seminar, the Council introduced the Delaware Grown Culinary Challenge. A cooking competition where local chefs and highschool culinary students teamed up to show their skills at preparing an appetizer and main course dish using Delaware Grown agriculture products. Ingredients included seasonal produce, oysters, chicken, culinary lavender, and honey all sourced in Delaware.



2023 Delaware Grown Culinary Challenge participants. Left Back: Tom Wiswell (Drift), Michael Paoli (William Penn), Kaniyah Askia (Cape Henlopen), Matt Kern (One Coastal), Alex Bennett (Poly Tech), Justin Jordan (Henlopen Oyster House)  
Left Front: Sara McCarthy (Brandywine School District), Don Clifton (Farm Bureau), Mayor Christiansen (Dover).



# OPTIMIZING STATEWIDE OUTCOMES

The Council is equipped to develop project plans that capitalize on unexpected opportunities like funding that was dispersed to states throughout the country as part of the American Rescue Plan Act. The Council has a pulse on local food system and food supply chain gaps and opportunities, enough to develop focused initiatives with a quick turnaround.

## Creating Sustainable Food Systems

The sustainability of food systems and food supply chains was challenged during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Pandemic revealed vulnerabilities in national supply chains, however also underscored opportunities at regional and local levels.

The Council's mapping work evolved during the pandemic as food needs increased for many Delawareans. The Council and the Cape Community Coalition (CCC) joined forces, along with other partners to map Sussex County food sites. This inventory of food pantries and other food establishments connected families in need to available food, in real time. Offering essential information during the height of pandemic lockdown and closures.

This work is a significant demonstration of Delaware's community led resourcefulness and how coordination can compound positive impacts and help build resilience.

At the outset of the pandemic, the Council contributed the Delaware Food System Map to the state Joint Information Center.

Mapping the available food sites informed critical decisions about food access needs and deployment of emergency response resources.



Community site in New Castle County offering grab and go meals in 2020.



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## Data Sharing & Automation

A significant accomplishment has been expanding the original mapping tool in a couple of ways.

- Automation – The Council and IPA have added to the Food System Map to include food program information from the Department of Education Summer Food Service Program, Delaware Grown and Buy Local, Delaware Child and Adult Care Food Programs, Delaware Food Bank Programs, Cape Community Coalition pantry network, Delaware Public Schools, population demographics for Delaware, and Delaware Transit (Park and Rides).



Delaware Grown products available through Buy Local sites like farmers markets and farm stands.

In 2022, IPA worked with each of the contributing data partners and the Department of Information & Technology to automate program datasets that feed into the mapping tool.

- Data Sharing – By uploading the Food System Map and data layers to Delaware First Map, the Council has made the information publicly accessible. While the Council and IPA use this data to develop context, story maps, and briefing materials from the Council's viewpoint, allowing public access to the tool means that organizations can use the raw data for their own purposes. The Council and IPA have worked closely with contacts from each program to align data collection schedules and streamline data inputs to the tool to make sure information is up to date and not static.





## New Programs & Policy

Addressing food system resilience has increasingly become a priority at federal, regional, and local levels. The Council plays a crucial role in articulating state needs. Advising on funding, policy, and program implementation to ensure readiness in the event of supply chain disruptions and to strengthen capacities. Council members and the Secretary expressed how uniquely effective the Council has been in achieving tangible outcomes.

In 2022, the Council created the First State Food System grant program, which the state funded at \$2 million from American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. Through this program, a partnership with the Delaware Community Foundation (DCF), the Council has awarded grants to farmers, local businesses, and non-profit organizations for projects directly improving Delaware's food supply chain.

During cycles 1 and 2, \$670,000 across 14 projects and \$665,872 across 12 projects were awarded respectively. Funds have been dispersed to projects in New Castle, Kent, and Sussex counties and represent seven food supply chain categories – production, storage and distribution, community food access, food waste, processing capacity, transportation, and markets and industry. Applications for Cycle 3 of the grant program are scheduled to open March 2024.



Sussex Academy Elementary students harvest radishes from their school garden.

The Council has also worked with the Department of Education and Department of Agriculture to reinstate the Farm to School Program Committee. The Committee is made up of school and district representatives in each county, as well as relevant childcare organizations like the Boys & Girls Club and Healthy Foods for Healthy Kids. The Committee is updating a strategic plan, refreshing the program logo, renewing procurement relationships, and expanding opportunities for schools to work with a range of farmers and for students to learn more about where their food comes from here in Delaware.



School lunch meal prepared using produce sourced through Farm to School program.

In 2023, the Department of Agriculture and Department of Education joined an agreement to hire a state Farm to School Program Coordinator.

A first for Delaware. A position that majority of states in the country have, to manage and administer farm to school programming.



The Council expanded the Farm to School Program model to create two pilot programs. The Farm to Store Pilot connects Delaware farmers and local retail stores to increase the availability of locally grown products in communities.

With the greatest food insecurity rate in the state at 12.6%, Kent County was the focus of the pilot work in 2022. The first stores were in Dover, Farmington, and Harrington. In just 4 months during the pilot growing season, program participants successfully moved over 800 pounds of Delaware grown fruits and vegetables like tomatoes, corn, green peppers, and cantaloup, from farmer to retailer to consumer.

The Council will collaborate with partners such as Eastern Shore Entrepreneurship Center, Delaware Farm Fresh, Delaware Division of Social Services, and Delaware Division of Public Health to expand the program, adding farmers and at least one additional retailer in 2024.

The pilot established procurement relationships between retailers and farmers. Marvelous Produce, and three retail stores, Downtown Junction in Harrington, Dija's African Market in Dover, and Farmington Mini Mart in Farmington.



Fresh Delaware produce for sale at Downtown Junction store in Harrington.



The Farm to Community Pilot is funded by the USDA Local Food Purchase Cooperative Agreement. Through the program, fresh produce and other agriculture products are distributed to food pantries and households throughout the state.



Food pantry volunteer unloads fresh produce from signature Farm to Community program green bins.

As a program partner, Historic Lewes Farmers Market is the Sussex County Community Outlet, and has expanded its Pantry Purchase Program, increasing the number of farmers supplying fresh farm products to pantries especially in the western part of the county.

Lutheran Community Services (LCS) is the New Castle County Community Outlet and has introduced Delaware grown agriculture products into its Delaware Food Farmacy program. This program works with patients with chronic medical conditions to incorporate healthy food options as part of their treatment. LCS also distributes procured products to other community church pantries in the county. The Council is working with partners and farmers to expand Farm to Community into Kent County.

The Council's Executive Committee meets with the Secretary for an annual review, during which members discuss relevant legislation or policy items. Council members have also engaged directly with state legislators to weigh in on draft bill language. Most recently, In June 2023, Senate Concurrent Resolution 90 passed.

Directing the Council to work with state agencies, higher education institutions, and other partners to prepare a report outlining current local procurement efforts supporting a locally sourced food economy in Delaware.



Freshly harvested apples from Stag Run Farm in Georgetown.





## Outcomes Across Agencies

While the scope and guiding principles of the Council align with the Department of Agriculture's mission, its activities are cross-cutting. Several state agencies and organizations in Delaware that represent healthcare, retailers, restaurants, community development, agriculture, academia, and others have contributed to and benefited from the holistic scope of the Council's work.

It is continuously important for the Council's work to support other organizations in realizing their objectives. This improves efficiencies and optimizes outcomes statewide. Below is a selection of Council partnerships and collaborations with other Delaware organizations.

### **Healthy Communities Delaware**

Worked closely during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic to brainstorm with other organizations (Complete Communities Delaware, UD CRESP, UD IPA, DHSS, and UD Cooperative Extension) about action steps and policy to address immediate needs.

### **Delaware Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association**

Working together to identify, grow, and support a network of farmers that supply to local market outlets and community distribution channels.

### **Sussex County Health Coalition**

Connected during the COVID-19 pandemic. Both groups participate in meetings and share project updates.

### **Delaware Department of Education**

As part of the USDA Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement, partnered to hire a Farm to School Program Coordinator for the state.

### **Delaware Cooperative Extension**

Working to meet Extension's health and wellness objectives by increasing the availability of healthy food options in communities and creating opportunities to provide education materials and engage consumers.

**General  
Coordination**



### **Historic Lewes Farmers Market**

Helping to expand the Pantry Purchas Program to develop a food transportation and aggregation network, supply to new Sussex County pantries, and purchase product from a network of farmers.

### **Lutheran Community Services**

Helping to enhance the Delaware Food Farmacy Program to incorporate fresh, locally grown agriculture products as part of patient meal packages.

### **Delaware Farm Bureau**

Working together to offer new market opportunities to Farm Bureau members and continue to engage and build relationships with producers.

### **Delaware Division of Social Services**

Coordinating resources to facilitate food transportation from Delaware farms to market and community outlets.

### **Delaware Farm Fresh**

Partnering to improve food procurement and distribution logistics for buyers and sellers.

### **Division of Public Health**

Helping to advance the Division's Advancing Healthy Lifestyles Initiative through the Farm to Store program.

## Farm to Community Program

### **UD Biden School Institute for Public Administration**

Collaborating to expand food data analysis. Managing partner on data analysis, data communication, case studies, and briefs.

### **Cape Community Coalition**

Added data points to the Food System Map to include CCC's extensive inventory of Sussex County pantries. Working with pantry contacts to maintain updates.

### **Delaware 211**

Coordinating to update datasets and streamline resource information for users.

### **Food Bank of Delaware**

Mapping program sites and automating data to ensure current information. Offers an opportunity to assess resource coverage and gaps.

### **Delaware Department of Information & Technology**

Expanding the data sources available on the state operated First Map.

### **Delaware Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (DEVOAD)**

Participating with other members to share and learn about food resources and others to plan and prepare for emergencies.

## Delaware Food System Map & Food Resource Connection



**Delaware Department of Information & Technology**

Worked with project managers to define and shape a food security use case, identify relevant data sets across state agencies, and develop research questions.

**Family Services Cabinet Council**

Worked with FSCC and DTI to develop and pursue one of the first use cases to help demonstrate the state's efforts to integrate data access and use across agencies.

**Delaware  
Integrated  
Data System**

**Delaware Community Foundation**

DCF leads the administration of the grant program through their online portal, Foundant. This partnership streamlines grant reporting requirements for participants and helps cross promote grants and other resource opportunities offered by the Council and DCF partners.

**Healthy Food for Healthy Kids**

Helped to build the 50th HFHK school garden in the state and increased the HFHK footprint to Sussex County, expanding school garden programming to students in rural communities.

**Delaware Boys & Girls Club**

Helped to develop a small farm on the Milford campus to educate youth about growing food and to supplement before-school and after-school meals and snacks.

**Delaware State University**

Supported a feasibility study related to advancing an aquaculture industry in Delaware.

**Teach a Person to Fish Society**

Helped to build garden beds in Milton accessible to community members.

**La Red Health Center**

Helped to purchase refrigeration for community food access in Seaford, Georgetown, and Milford health center locations.

**First State Food  
System Grant  
Program**



# PRIORITIES OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

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Since 2018, members have focused the Council's scope and developed a workable structure to effectively achieve its mission and significant project milestones. Over the next five years the Council will build on the strong foundation that has been established. Specifically to:

## **Develop a Procurement Strategy:**

Drafting a state strategy to understand and improve the procurement process for Delaware institutions and producers will increase market outlets for family farms and help to increase the availability of Delaware-grown products in our institutions and throughout our communities.

## **Inventory Resources & Assess Needs:**

Defining resources that are used for the food supply chain across the state and clarifying a way to categorize them has not been done. This is the first step to develop a catalogue of the soft infrastructure like food programs and services and hard infrastructure like aggregation facilities and delivery routes/fleets that are readily available or being developed throughout the state. A consolidated record of these resources allows local and state actors to better understand capacities, gaps, and opportunities to streamline and improve food system efficiencies. This will also inform budget decisions and public-private partnerships.

## **Strengthen Partnerships to Ensure Continuity:**

Like the rest of the globe, the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged Delaware communities. Despite its devastation, the public health emergency was a real-life case study. Council members and partners have reflected on what has changed about how we produce and consume food. Some silver linings of the pandemic are the increased funding from state and federal governments dedicated to building resilience in food supply chains, changes in consumer preferences wanting to be closer to where their food comes from, and shifts in how we all think about food security and resilience. The Council's attention to the food system is more prudent than ever and as 2025 marks a changeover in state government, articulating the Council's role as a state resource will be helpful to build on progress, ensure continuity, and leverage new opportunities. To that end, the Council will prioritize the following:



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- Maintaining partnerships to carryout foundational elements of project and program development for the Council and others, means informed decisions about allocating resources and what to prioritize. This includes a partnership with the UD Institute for Public Administration (IPA) to manage and expand food data tools.
  - Developing new partnerships to expand coordination with organizations that have expertise in related and new fields to broaden the perspective of the Council's work and increase engagement with undergraduate and graduate students in Delaware. This includes initiating a partnership with the UD Center for Research in Education & Social Policy (CRESP).
  - Offering opportunities for participants and Council members to provide feedback about projects, programs, and other Council initiatives will inform what is needed to better target gaps. The Annual Seminar and Annual Report are useful. This includes preparing materials to effectively communicate to members of the Cabinet and General Assembly.

# Thank you to all our partners.

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The council is a subset of the Delaware Department of Agriculture and will continue its work as an advisor to the Secretary and a resource to partners throughout the state. Helping to shape food policy and sustain food security in Delaware.

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## Photo Credits

- Title page: Josh Nash, Nash Veggies, Lincoln. Photo taken by Historic Lewes Farmers Market
- Pantry volunteer: Photo taken by Historic Lewes Farmers Market
- Mapping images: Content generated by University of Delaware's Biden School Institute for Public Administration
- Delaware Grown images: Photos taken by Delaware Department of Agriculture Marketing & Communications Section

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