



Affordable, Accessible Groceries for All

When families have access to healthy, affordable food, and when our local farmers are supported, it's good for our health, good for our economy, and good for our environment.

But that's often not the case. Our family's grocery bill has skyrocketed in the last few years - and I'm sure yours has too. For many people in Anne Arundel County, these increases are making it harder to make ends meet. And many people in our county don't live in places where they have easy access to fresh and healthy food, regardless of what it costs.

Here's my plan to build seven new grocery stores and secure the future of local farming in my first term as County Executive.

First, here are the core values that I'll use when making decisions:

- **Food access is an economic necessity, not a luxury.** Just like affordable housing and childcare, access to nutritious food is a pillar of economic stability. When families are forced to choose between rent and groceries, our entire community suffers.
- **We need to support our local food economy.** Our farmers are small business owners who face unique challenges, particularly the high cost of land. Supporting them also means preserving our culture, our green space, and our local economy.
- **Government must be innovative.** We can't wait for national grocery chains to decide our neighborhoods are "profitable enough." We need to use county resources—land, buildings, and purchasing power—to solve market failures ourselves.

Specific solutions to ensure no one in Anne Arundel County goes hungry:

1. Build Grocery Stores on County Land Where They Are Needed Most

Too many of our communities—including Glen Burnie, Brooklyn Park, Linthicum Heights, Eastport, Fort Meade, Jessup, and Severn—are classified as food deserts. Residents in these areas often have to drive long distances just to buy fresh produce. I've got a plan to fix it.

- **Public Land for Public Health:** We will identify underutilized county land and buildings in these priority areas and lease them to grocery store operators at a reduced cost. If a building doesn't exist, we will buy and retrofit homes to serve as community markets.
- **A Low-Risk Investment:** This approach minimizes risk for the county. We will set a goal to build seven new grocery stores on county land. If a location ultimately does not succeed as a grocery store, the county retains the asset, and we will simply flip the property into affordable housing or another productive use.
- **Walkable Communities:** Our goal is simple: more people should be able to walk to a grocery store. By embedding these markets directly into neighborhoods, we reduce traffic and build stronger communities.

2. Create a "Farm-to-Door" Meal Kit Program

We can connect our residents directly with our farmers while lowering costs for everyone. Following the award-winning model of the "Roving Radish" in Howard County, recognized by the National Association of Counties, we will create a county-run meal kit subscription service.

- **Healthy Meals for All:** This program will aggregate food from local producers and bundle it into meal kits (e.g., 3 meals a week) available to all county residents on a subscription basis.
- **Subsidized Rates for Families in Need:** While the general public can buy in at cost, families who qualify for FARMS or SNAP will be able to subscribe at significantly reduced rates.
- **Supporting Local Farmers:** This creates a consistent, reliable customer base for our local farmers, providing them with the stability they need to grow their businesses. The county covers the operational expenses, ensuring the program is sustainable.

3. Lower Barriers for New Farmers

The biggest barrier to new farmers entering the industry is the price of land. Unless you have inherited farmland, the startup costs to buy farmland in Anne Arundel County are often untenable - and leasing from private owners doesn't provide the stability farmers need to build a business. We need a new generation of farmers, and the county can help them get started.

- **Lease Land to Farmers:** We will expand on the successful model of Rock Hold Creek Farm, where the county owns the land and leases it to an agricultural operator. By purchasing farmland and offering long-term leases to new farmers at market rates, we provide the consistency and reliability they need—protecting them from being kicked off land by owners looking to install solar arrays or developments, and allowing them to get started even if they don't have funds to buy the land outright.
- **Competitive Entry Program:** We will create a competitive program for new farmers to apply for these leases, prioritizing those who are committed to sustainable practices and local food production.

- **Land Preservation:** This is a multipurpose strategy: it supports the agricultural economy, increases the supply of fresh, local food in the county, and permanently preserves open space against sprawl.

4. Strengthen the Safety Net and Protect Against Federal Cuts

With the threat of SNAP cuts from the federal level, we must ensure our county's safety net is robust enough to catch those who fall through the cracks.

- **Protecting SNAP Recipients:** We will work closely with the state to help backfill any gaps created by federal funding cuts.
- **Supporting Our Seniors:** Our senior centers currently do an excellent job providing nutrition to our older residents. We will ensure that the 13 meal distribution sites for seniors throughout the county continue to receive full funding and support.
- **Collaborating with the Food Council:** We will continue to rely on the Anne Arundel County Food Council for data-driven recommendations, ensuring our policies adapt to real-time needs on the ground.

Investing in food access is investing in our future. If we do these things, we will not only ensure that no child goes to bed hungry, but we will also build a more resilient local economy that works for everyone.