



Addressing Climate Change by Improving DC's Food System Meeting the Goals of the Glasgow Food & Climate Declaration

The “food system,” or the way we produce, distribute, and consume food, is inextricably linked to climate change, being both causal of and threatened by the climate crisis. Food system activities, such as raising livestock for consumption, transporting food around the globe, and disposing of wasted food in landfills, are a significant driver of climate change; it is estimated that such activities produce **a third of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions** caused by humans. At the same time, the effects of climate change put our food system at significant risk. Drought, flooding, and severe weather can damage the farms our food comes from, cause power outages leading to waste of perishable food, and cause transportation and supply chain disruptions that make it difficult for residents to access food. Across the world, climate change is already causing a steady reduction of crop yields and even lowering the nutrient value of staple crops such as wheat and rice.

Recognizing the connection between food and climate, **Mayor Muriel Bowser recently signed the Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration (“Declaration”), a commitment by over 100 subnational governments to integrate food policy into government strategies to tackle the climate emergency.** The Declaration recognizes that cities are leading the way to drive food system change through cross-cutting policy approaches, and there are many opportunities for the District to meet or exceed its ambitious climate goals.

This policy brief will describe **1)** the District's commitments under the Declaration, **2)** current efforts underway to achieve these commitments, and **3)** legislative and policy recommendations for future action.

Current District Efforts to Address Food and Climate

The Declaration builds on several other global agreements the District has joined, including the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact and the C40 Good Food Cities Declaration. On the following pages are the food and climate programs already underway that reflect the commitments under the Declaration.

Key Policy Recommendations

- 1) Increase awareness of the climate impact of the food system** among policymakers, businesses, and residents by providing trainings and public awareness campaigns, as well as technical assistance and financing to expand the adoption of more climate-friendly practices
- 2) Reduce GHG emissions from food waste** by implementing commercial and residential curbside composting and implementing a Zero Waste Plan
- 3) Strengthen the climate resiliency of the local food system** by building a Central Food Processing Facility and expanding land access for urban agriculture
- 4) Reduce GHGs associated with meat consumption** by implementing the Green Food Purchasing Act, creating financial incentives for meat-free meals, and adopting values-based food procurement standards for all District government contracts

Glasgow Commitment 1:

Developing and implementing integrated food policies and strategies as key tools in the fight against climate change; and ensuring that these instruments adopt a food systems approach that involves actors across all parts of the food chain; include metrics to assess GHG emissions reduction targets from food systems, as well as opportunities for cooperation and best practice sharing between subnational governments.

The District has long taken the integrated, systems approach to food policy envisioned by the Glasgow Declaration, recognizing that we cannot achieve a sustainable food system without including actors across all parts of the food chain in the decision-making process. In 2015, the District established a **Food Policy Council (FPC), led by a Food Policy Director within the Office of Planning**, tasked with promoting food access, sustainability, and the local food economy by centering food policy within government decision making. The Food Policy Council includes ten ex-officio representatives from District agencies and thirteen Mayor-appointed leaders in the local food system, as well as a broad group of residents who participate in its meetings and events. The Food Policy Council convenes over 50 working group meetings and six public meetings every year, bringing together government, public, and lived experience experts from across the District's food system to develop recommendations for integrated food policies.

Glasgow Commitment 2.1:

Reducing GHG emissions from urban and regional food systems in accordance with the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Central to the Glasgow Declaration is a commitment by subnational governments to **measure and reduce their food-related greenhouse gas emissions**. While the District does not have a significant agriculture industry, it is taking steps to reduce its food-related GHG emissions through food procurement practices and by decreasing food waste from businesses, institutions, and homes.

The DC Council recently passed the **Green Food Purchasing Amendment Act of 2021**, which requires the District to reduce GHG emissions from its meal procurement by 25% by 2030. To achieve this goal, the legislation requires the Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE) to implement best practices for sustainable food procurement at meal-providing agencies. The District also recently joined the **Cool Food Pledge**, a program that will provide DOEE with tools to achieve these targets. Other signatories to the Pledge include Toronto, Milan, and New York City.

The District is also working to reduce food waste, a major source of food-related GHG emissions. When food breaks down in landfills, it produces methane, a powerful greenhouse gas. Under the **Sustainable DC 2.0 Plan**, the District has committed to diverting 80% of its waste from landfills or incinerators by 2032 as a means to reduce methane emissions. It has also set a specific food waste reduction goal of 60% by 2032.



The District currently offers several free options for residents to compost their organics, including the Department of Public Works (DPW) Food Waste Drop Off program at farmers markets and the Department of Parks and Recreation's (DPR) Community Compost Cooperative Network. In addition, the DC Council recently funded a pilot to implement curbside composting at 10,000 homes, to provide a model for implementing a universal composting program.



For businesses that want to cut food waste, the Department of Small and Local Business Development (DSLBD) recently launched Food Waste Innovation Grants to support 22 food businesses and commercial corridors in minimizing their food waste. The Zero Waste Omnibus Amendment Act of 2021 requires DPW to establish a comprehensive organic waste management plan and to roll out composting requirements for certain food businesses beginning in January 2023.





Through its incorporation of the Paris Climate Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals, the Declaration also recognizes the need to **prioritize climate resilience in food system planning**.

In this vein, the District is taking steps to strengthen the local food supply chain to make it more prepared for future disruptions. The District supports a robust network of **farmers markets** in all eight wards. Farmers markets provide decentralized points of food access and can meet residents where they are, particularly when public transportation options are limited. A suite of nutrition assistance programs, including Produce Plus and the Senior and WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Programs, further improve financial accessibility to farmers markets.

The District is also investing in a more localized food system by expanding **urban agriculture**. In 2020, the District created an Office of Urban Agriculture within DOEE, which works to increase food production in DC by providing grants to local farmers, leasing District-owned parcels for urban farming, and providing tax abatements for private land used for urban farming. In addition, DPR's Urban Farm Park Partnership program hosts farms on DPR properties; the Department of Transportation runs a "food forest" program planting urban orchards; and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education supports over 100 school gardens.

The District is also taking steps to strengthen its food infrastructure. In 2021, the Office of Planning and the Food Policy Council issued a report on how a **Central Food Processing Facility** (CFPF) could support local food businesses and strengthen the District's food resiliency in case of future emergencies. In addition, the District Homeland Security & Emergency Management Administration is conducting a **regional food and water resiliency study**, funded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, to create a food and water supply chain delivery and restoration plan for emergencies, including from climate change.

For more information on how a Central Food Processing Facility would benefit food & climate, see:

- 1 [FPC CFPF Assessment](#)
- 2 [FPC-Redstone Fact Sheet](#)

Glasgow Commitment 2.2:

Building sustainable food systems that are able to rebuild ecosystems and deliver safe, healthy, accessible, affordable, and sustainable diets for all.

In line with the Declaration commitment to deliver safe, accessible, affordable, and sustainable diets for all, the District is working to **support an equitable supply of fresh, healthy food across all communities**. Structural racism and a history of disinvestment in low-income Black communities has led to a persistent "grocery gap" in the District. Currently, there is one grocery store for every 60,000 residents east of the Anacostia River, and one grocery store for every 10,000 residents in wealthier, majority-white wards such as Wards 3 and 6. To address this gap, the District has set a goal of ensuring that 75% of low-income residents live within one-quarter mile of a quality, full-service grocery store by 2032.

The District is pursuing innovative policies to achieve this goal, including a recent \$58 million investment to launch a **Food Access Fund** to provide capital investments for restaurants and grocery stores, and a \$5 million investment for the **Nourish DC Collaborative**, which supports small food businesses in underserved neighborhoods.

The District is also addressing food insecurity by modernizing and increasing access to **federal and local nutrition assistance programs**, which are proven tools to address food insecurity and improve health. For example, in recent years the Department of Human Services (DHS) has increased access to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits by enabling customers to purchase groceries online. Expanding the use of technology in SNAP has served as a lifeline to residents who live at a great distance from a grocery store, have mobility challenges, or have medical vulnerabilities. DHS also introduced an online application for SNAP, which decreases trips to submit paperwork. Online SNAP and the online application are both crucial tools in preparing for climate-related emergencies when it would be unsafe to walk long distances or when transportation and childcare are disrupted.

DC Health has also modernized the **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)** program by transitioning to electronic benefits, allowing participants to redeem benefits over multiple visits rather than being limited to a single transaction. DC Health has also expanded the number of stores eligible to accept DC WIC benefits. In 2021, DC Health authorized 8 healthy corner stores as WIC vendors, ensuring that more WIC customers can shop for healthy foods in their neighborhoods. DC Health also supports multiple food access programs through its **Equitable Healthy Food Access Grants**, including Produce Plus; Healthy Corners; Joyful Food Markets; and the Medically Tailored Home Delivered Meals Program.

Glasgow Commitment 3:

Calling on national governments to establish supportive and enabling policy frameworks and multi-level and multi-actor governance mechanisms, allowing coordinated decision-making on food systems.

The Glasgow Declaration focuses on cities and other subnational governments because these jurisdictions are pioneering innovative food policies and strategies. However, the Declaration recognizes that **reform will also be necessary at the federal level to achieve a truly sustainable and just food system.**

The District is already participating in several regional and national efforts to strengthen food systems. Mayor Bowser co-leads the **U.S. Conference of Mayors Food Policy Taskforce**, which shares best practices across local government and makes collective requests for federal policy changes to improve local food systems. In addition, the District is a signatory to the **Milan Urban Food Policy Pact** and participates in the **C40 Food Policy network**, where District government representatives share best practices and learn from other governments on the international scale.

At the regional level, the District participates in the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' **Food and Agriculture Regional Member (FARM) Policy Committee**, where it collaborates with neighboring jurisdictions to support development of a more resilient, connected food and farm economy across metropolitan Washington. The Committee has advocated to the White House and federal agencies regarding its food and agriculture priorities.

Snapshot of the District's Food and Climate Commitments

[Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration](#)

[Milan Urban Food Policy Pact](#)

[The C40 Good Food Cities Declaration](#)

[Paris Climate Agreement](#)

[Sustainable Development Goals](#)

[Cool Food Pledge](#)

"We know that when it comes to climate change, cities acting together can have a powerful impact on our ability to protect the environment and shrink our collective carbon footprint."

-Mayor Muriel Bowser

The District's Primary Guiding Sustainability Plans

[Sustainable DC 2.0 Plan](#)

[Carbon Free DC](#)

[DC Food Policy Council's Central Food Processing Assessment](#)

Key Areas for Future Action:

To further the District's efforts to combat climate change, there are **four key areas where future actions must be taken** to meet the commitments of the Glasgow Declaration

1

Increase awareness of the climate impact of food systems among policymakers, government agencies, businesses, and residents. The connection between food and climate is still not well understood by many policymakers and residents, which means it is not prioritized in policy or daily practice. To fully achieve the Declaration's goals, the District should take the following actions to raise public awareness of the food-climate nexus to foster interagency collaboration, behavior change, and other immediate steps to reduce emissions.

A

Create an Office of Food Purchasing within the Office of Contracting and Procurement to establish and centralize climate and nutrition standards for the District's food procurement contracts. This office would work with DOEE to implement the Green Food Purchasing Act and other sustainable procurement programs. It would also collaborate with food-providing agencies to facilitate a systems approach to food procurement and perform key data collection and reporting.

B

Develop trainings and public awareness campaigns on the food-climate nexus for policymakers and residents. The District should require trainings on the intersection of food and climate change for all District government workers who work on policy and programs related to food and/or climate. The District should also implement a public awareness campaign targeted to residents on the food-climate nexus and what actions individuals can take to mitigate food-related GHG emissions.

C

Develop financing, training, and direct technical assistance for District food businesses and institutions to adopt more climate-friendly practices. Target support areas should include: reducing food waste and shifting menus; upgrading refrigeration units and supporting the switch from gas to electric appliances; increasing small, private food businesses' ability to purchase local food items; and supporting small food businesses in realizing economies of scale both in purchasing more sustainable products and in securing larger contracts through aggregated demand and supply.



2

Reduce GHG emissions from food waste. One third of food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted each year, contributing significantly to global GHG emissions. These emissions come from the production and transportation of food that is never consumed, as well as from the disposal process itself. When food waste decomposes in landfills, it releases methane, a GHG with 80 times the global warming potential of carbon dioxide. Thus, the District should take the following steps to both reduce food waste (source reduction) and to implement disposal practices that keep food waste out of landfills, such as composting.

A

Implement a universal, residential curbside composting program for all DPW-serviced homes (residences with three or fewer units) based on successful programs in other jurisdictions and using existing regional composting capacity. A curbside composting pilot for 10,000 homes was funded in the Fiscal Year 2023 Budget and the District should begin preparations to launch District-wide composting within the fiscal year following the pilot's completion.

B

Issue and Implement a Zero Waste Plan. In 2014, the DC Council passed a law establishing an Interagency Waste Reduction Working Group and requiring the Group to develop a Zero Waste Plan to achieve at least an 80% waste diversion rate. This Plan has yet to be issued. The District should prioritize the Zero Waste Plan and ensure that it comprehensively addresses both source reduction of food waste as well as sustainable food waste processing strategies. In developing the Plan, the District should conduct a food waste assessment to identify the types and quantities of foods that are thrown away in the District at various points in the supply chain, to support more targeted waste reduction planning.

C

Require organic waste separation for all multi-family households and commercial entities. The Zero Waste Omnibus Amendment Act establishes food waste separation requirements for certain large commercial entities beginning in 2023. The District should exercise its authority to extend these requirements to all commercial entities, including restaurants. In addition, the District should require composting services be made available at multi-family properties not serviced by DPW. To ensure that these requirements are not too onerous for small businesses, the District should couple any new requirements with financial and technical assistance.



3

Strengthen the climate resiliency of the District's food system through investments in infrastructure and local food production.

The District can prepare for climate-related disruptions to supply chains by strengthening the local food system. This should include investing in infrastructure that addresses vulnerabilities in the local supply chain, such as inadequate storage and kitchen space for emergency food distribution, as well as supporting local food cultivation as a way to build climate resiliency and keep more dollars spent by the District in the District.

A

Build a Central Food Processing Facility to strengthen the District's physical food infrastructure and resilience within the local and regional food system. A central food processing facility (CFPF) is a facility that conducts food production and processing for meal preparation, and provides aggregation, cold and dry storage, and co-manufacturing space. A CFPF can serve as an anchor food processing facility for the District government's food services as well as act as a food hub for local businesses, regional farms, and food access organizations. By providing critical infrastructure that is currently limited or unavailable in the District, a CFPF can strengthen the local food supply chain, fortify the District's emergency preparedness response, and even reduce the District's carbon footprint through composting infrastructure.

B

Expand land access for urban agriculture, particularly for those most historically marginalized from land owning. To achieve the Sustainable DC 2.0 commitment to reach 20 additional acres of cultivated land by 2032, the District should incorporate urban agriculture into its planning decisions. The District should include urban agriculture as a goal in the Comprehensive Plan and Future Land Use Map, ensure that all new and renovated affordable/public housing developments include commensurate space for food cultivation on site, and require the incorporation of urban farming infrastructure into designs of District recreation centers, schools, and resilience hubs. In addition, to expand and preserve urban farming space, the District should make more public land available in the Urban Farm Land Lease Program and place these parcels in a conservation easement for protection and preservation.



4

Reduce GHGs associated with meat consumption. A recent study on global GHG emissions found that nearly 20% of human-caused emissions can be directly attributed to industrial meat production. Conventional animal farming is done in environmentally intensive conditions, which create harsh living conditions for animals and generate large amounts of animal waste and byproducts. These practices harm local air and water quality, risk worker safety, and produce methane, a potent greenhouse gas. Animal agriculture also contributes to deforestation, desertification, and ocean dead zones (due to runoff and fish farming), further increasing emissions. By taking the following steps to reduce meat consumption, the District can achieve GHG reductions in the food system.

A

Create incentives for Meat-Free Meals in school meals and other federal meal programs operated by the District. The District already offers additional reimbursements for local food programming in schools and childcare facilities under the Healthy Schools Act and the Healthy Tots Act. These programs should be expanded to provide an additional reimbursement for meat-free meals. This would incentivize use of plant-based foods in meals and decrease the financial burden of meal providers to make climate-positive changes.

B

Establish values-based food procurement standards for all District government contracts. Given the millions of dollars that the District spends on food each year, procurement can be a powerful tool to address food and climate. DC Public Schools is already implementing a values-based food procurement framework known as the Good Food Purchasing Program (GFPP) in school meals. The GFPP prioritizes five core values: local economies, environmental sustainability, valued workforce, animal welfare, and nutrition. The District should extend this framework to all food contracts to reduce the carbon footprint of the District's food procurement while also maintaining nutritional quality.

C

Fully implement the Green Food Purchasing Amendment Act. Passed in 2021, this law requires the District to reduce GHG emissions associated with its food procurement by 25% by 2030. To achieve these reductions, DOEE is tasked with conducting a baseline assessment of GHG emissions and establishing best practices for sustainable food procurement to be implemented by meal-providing agencies such as DC Public Schools and the Department of Corrections. These best practices should include plant-forward menus featuring smaller portions of animal proteins, as well as expanded use of meat-free meals and plant-based alternatives to meat dishes.

Conclusion

Increasing awareness of the climate impact of food, reducing GHG emissions from food waste, making dedicated use of public land and infrastructure, and reducing meat consumption are the four key areas of investment that will enable the District to achieve its commitment to the Glasgow Declaration.

Rapid implementation of these policies and programs will establish the District as a climate leader among the hundreds of subnational government signatories to the Declaration, across the nation and the globe.

About this Policy Brief & Working with Redstone

This policy brief was prepared by the **Sumner M. Redstone Global Center for Prevention and Wellness** at the request of the DC Food Policy Council and with input from the [Sustainable Supply Chain Working Group](#).

Located within the Milken Institute School of Public Health at The George Washington University, the Redstone Center works within the University and with community partners to support research, share expertise, and advance evidence-based solutions to promote health equity and mitigate the harmful effects of climate change. Due to its location in the nation's capital, the Redstone Center is uniquely positioned to influence local, national, and global policy, fostering innovation that can be replicated in other places.

The policies outlined in this brief will require adopting new policies and practices, legislative initiatives, and budget investments, and the Redstone Center is available to offer technical assistance and support in the pursuit of these ambitious goals.

