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What office are you seeking?: County Council At-Large  
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**2 Someone new to Montgomery County may ask, "What's the Ag Reserve and why is it important?" What's your answer?**

The Montgomery County Agricultural Reserve is one of Montgomery County's most cherished natural resources. It is a gem! Comprising nearly one-third of the entire county, the Ag Reserve is comprised of more than five hundred farms and an impressive 93,000 acres of pastoral beauty...all situated less than an hour and a half away from Washington, D.C. From pick-your-own farms like, my favorite, Butler's Orchard, to magnificent, undeveloped land stretching out as far as the eye can see, this truly is a remarkable place.

This land is important because it reminds us of our agrarian roots. It gives Montgomery County residents an opportunity to step back from the hustle-bustle of their daily lives and rejoin with nature to find peace and tranquility. And, most important of all, it provides us with good, wholesome food that need not be trucked in from afar. It comes right from our proverbial back yard! Produced by hard working farmers!

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**3 What are your priorities regarding stewardship of the County's natural resources (water, forests, open spaces) and parkland?**

We must protect and preserve our natural resources for the use and enjoyment of future generations. Regarding water quality, only two candidates in the At-Large race for Montgomery County Council were at the Dickerson Coal Plant hearing on September 27, 2017, me and Melissa McKenna. As a citizen and Sierra Club member, I testified that we must encourage the Maryland Department of the Environment to maintain stringent water and air quality standards and not revert to pre-1980s levels. The amount of pollutants we currently allow to be dumped into the Potomac River, our main source of drinking water in Montgomery County, is staggering...as is the additional damage caused by releasing heated water into the river.

As for forests, open spaces, and parkland, we need to keep these areas of the Ag Reserve as they were in 1980. If not better!

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**4 What is your vision for the future of the County's Agricultural Reserve? Briefly, how would you achieve that vision?**

We need to make it even better: cleaner, more pastoral, and whenever practical, encouraging minimal use of pesticides and fertilizers. We need to encourage the use of alternative energy sources countywide so we can shut down the Dickerson Coal Plant. The amount of pollution this plant generates is staggering. Next, we should aim for loftier countywide recycling goals so we can greatly reduce the need for the Dickerson Incinerator.

My interest in encouraging, and not legislating, the most minimal use of pesticides and fertilizers is to challenge our farmers, extension agents, soil scientists, and others to get more creative about ways to enrich the soil and reduce the amount of pests using natural methods. This would in turn benefit the entire

community with less polluting runoff, improved soil and ground water quality, more organic produce, and a healthier lifestyle for those who farm.

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**5 Can you identify some of the top challenges to the Reserve's local agriculture and what actions you would take, if elected, to address them?**

The main concern is keeping farms in business. Aside from being a labor intensive process, even with modern farm equipment, the costs associated with farming are steep: machinery, seed, pesticides, fertilizer, fuel, maintenance and upkeep. It is hard to make a profit. We must figure out ways to help our farmers from a governmental standpoint.

I want to join with our farmers on an advocacy day on Capitol Hill to drive home the need and importance of keeping their interests at heart and to promote federal legislation to help them. Since our farmers know best, I would meet with them in advance of this advocacy day to listen to the issues important to them, and help craft specific advocacy points to bring their needs to our legislators. We should do the same thing in Annapolis.

We must also protect the Ag Reserve from development. I will do everything possible to prevent a second Potomac Bridge crossing through this wonderful land, and prevent further development.

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**6 What more can be done to support our local farm businesses and rural communities?**

Having a close working relationship with MCPS, I would encourage our Division of Food & Nutrition Services to buy more locally grown food whenever possible. I would also encourage the growth of more farmer's markets countywide and improved marketing to our restaurants to make sure they know about the great things grown here.

To better support our rural communities, I would continue my tradition of actually visiting these communities, talking to the residents, and finding out what their needs are. As the Immediate Past President of the 42,000+ member Montgomery County Council of PTAs (MCCPTA), I made a point of visiting schools and PTAs all across the county. And I have expanded upon that tradition during my campaign. Have visited Poolesville, Beallsville, Damascus, and other communities. I enjoy listening to what folks have to say, did that for years as a PTA leader, and it led to much advocacy success. I like to get the practical and important things done.

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**7 How should our County manage its solid waste? What role should incineration, composting and recycling play?**

We need to focus on reducing the amount of solid waste we generate in this county by recycling and composting more. Incineration should only be used as a last resort. We need to better educate our residents and businesses about the importance of reducing the generation of solid waste through a series of infographics, posters, and advertisements that drive home the importance of being more sensitive to our environmental footprint. For example, burning a plastic bottle will generate harmful air pollution. I was shocked to learn that nearly 10-15% of the materials burned in the Dickerson Incinerator are recyclable. We need to do a better job of getting these materials recycled. We also need to do a better job of educating our students in private and public schools about the importance of recycling and composting so they develop good habits early on.

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- 8 **How can we expand the role the County's schools play in the support of a healthy local food system and the success of local agriculture? Do you support a rural schools' policy that provides equity for Reserve cluster schools acknowledging the unique nature of schools in region set aside for farmland and open space preservation?**

As Past President of MCCPTA and a successful advocate for MCPS, I know effective advocacy works wonders. We need to work with MCPS to make sure they are purchasing as much locally sourced food as possible. I would encourage our farmers to meet with the Division of Food & Nutrition Services so they will know what types of food will be available from Ag Reserve farms, negotiate supplies early on, and the farmers will benefit from knowing what they should grow. We may also want to consider ways to get food baskets to families that would most benefit from them.

Schools located in the Poolesville and Damascus Clusters have a unique character. And, based on meetings with the community, if the rural schools' policy was something you would wish to pursue, I would work with you and MCPS to make this happen. Each school should meet the needs of the community it serves while assuring the students receive the first rate education necessary to meet or exceed local and statewide goals.

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- 9 **Currently the County is exploring how best to support a strong agricultural economy through agritourism and new farming enterprises such as on farm breweries and wineries. What are your thoughts about how best to advance on farm activities within the context of the master plan?**

This is an issue best decided by the community. I would enjoy sitting down with residents, farmers and agribusiness owners to discuss where they see us today and what they are envisioning for the future of the Ag Reserve. Part of the charm of the Ag Reserve is the diversity of the land. It is the spartan nature of the landscape in winter and the varied colors of spring and summer. It is the sight of rolling hills and grazing cattle. Am not sure how beneficial it would be to have hordes of buses ferrying people back and forth to countless breweries and wineries. Having a handful of wineries, breweries, and pick-your-own farms is fine. We also do not want to love our Ag Reserve to death by having thousands of additional vehicles traveling there each week. Having spent many a day on pick-your-own farms in Montgomery County, I have seen how these places can get crowded. We want the Ag Reserve to retain its rural character while also meeting the needs of the consumer.

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- 10 **What are your regional transportation priorities? Do you support M83 and an additional Potomac bridge and outer beltway through the Reserve or adjacent rural zones?**

As long as I am on the Council, we will not have an additional Potomac bridge crossing and/or outer beltway through the Reserve or adjacent rural zones. Period.

As for M83, we need to have a community discussion about this project. What would the impact be on our communities? What would the impact be on development pressures in the Ag Reserve?

My transportation priorities are to get Metro back to being a robust transportation option. We need intelligent traffic signals countywide. Main roads need to have green lights across the board for at least a minute and a half to allow for the proper traffic flow. We also need to move forward with BRT and CCT. Finally, thank you Montgomery Countryside Alliance for your support of the Ag Reserve. All of us owe you our gratitude for keeping this wonderful gem of land in fine shape for future generations to enjoy. All the best! With much admiration, Paul Geller, At-Large Candidate for your Montgomery County Council.