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What office are you seeking?: State Senate District 18
Where can voters learn more about your positions?: michellecarhart.com

2 Someone new to Montgomery County may ask, "What's the Ag Reserve and why is it important?" What's your answer?

The Ag Reserve of MoCo is critical for preserving agricultural land for the benefit of its neighbors and beyond. By dedicating nearly 100,000 acres for rural use, MoCo maintains nature and serves as a "green lung" to balance the damaging effects of pollution that occur down county, promotes locally-grown produce, dairy and meat purchasing, and maintains green space for recreation. The Ag Reserve creates a critical balance necessary for environmental equilibrium in MoCo.

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

As a graduate of UMD's Agricultural & Resource Economics program, nothing is closer to my heart than nature. I have lived in MoCo my entire life and appreciate our commitment to parks, preserving our waterways, open spaces and parks. Maintaining our integration of natural green spaces, watersheds, and tree systems with the need for development is critical for maintaining an equilibrium between nature and development as well as to retaining our history as a state that values our natural resources. Urban sprawl is a significant threat to our environment and I am a strong proponent of securing the Ag Reserve and other nature areas. In addition to our farmlands and nature trails, I believe it is critical to integrate nature in our developed community through rooftop farms and green spaces.

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

My vision is to promote economic exchange between Ag businesses in the reserve with down county stores, restaurants and residents. I also believe that we could do a better job of marketing the green activities available in the reserve to increase value to down-county residents. By leveraging the utility of the Ag Reserve, we can ward of others who argue that the land could be better used for other purposes.

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?

When land is affordable, businesses and residents will seek to buy it. The desire to buy land in the Ag Reserve for churches, businesses and residencies needs to be weighed against its benefit. Too many people see the value of housing without recognizing the detrimental impact on a nature reserve. By supporting small farms to increase their sales to down-county customers, we can increase their profits and become sustainable. I would fight to maintain Ag- and nature-compatible businesses such as wineries, farms and nature activities to boost the economic value of the Ag Reserve in its natural condition.

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

We need to promote more economic exchange between the rural and urban communities. By helping rural businesses market and develop more efficient logistical systems, we can bridge the distance between these two largely disconnected communities. More can be done to bring agricultural commodities from the up-county farms to the residents near D.C., and in turn, attract down-county residents to appreciate the Ag Reserve.

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

MoCo needs to do more to incentive recycling and composting. Private-public partnerships between MoCo and environmentally-friendly stores such as Mom's Market can help provide residents with drop-off sites for recyclable items such as corks, shoes and other items that currently end up in the incinerators. Education and availability of recycling will increase environmentally-responsible behaviors among MoCo residents.

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?

Building on the work of Michelle Obama, I believe in exposing more students to the origins of food. By bridging the gap from farm to table through educational initiatives, the next generation will gain an appreciation of organic and locally-grown food. I would also look at best practices of partnerships between schools (like Barnesville) and integrate the mobile Ag labs into the STEM curriculum throughout the County.

I am supportive of fair allocation of resources for all MoCo schools. Part of my platform is to bridge the achievement gap among MCPS schools. We need to look at the system as a whole and provide more resources where needed to ensure quality education for all students.

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?

Agritourism and new farming enterprises are the key to preserving the Ag Reserve. We need to leverage the best practices that currently protect and expand businesses (such as the Land Link program and the New Farmer Project) that make it easier for new farmers to build businesses and teach young farmers how to utilize these programs to promote new wineries and breweries. Developing an infrastructure of bikeways, trails and other nature pathways that link breweries, farm and wineries will bring more people to the Ag Reserve for daytrips that will in turn enhance the local economy.

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?

I live in North Bethesda less than a mile from the proposed M83 project and I do NOT support it. All my life, I have been a steward of the land. I spent weekends and summers as a child with my grandparents on the Wicomico River. When Virginia allowed dredging of crabs in the winter which diminished the populations, we stopped eating crabs until the populations grew. I strongly believe in preserving green space and do not believe that we have done enough to limit urban sprawl and develop of walkable communities. Studies show that building roads only creates more traffic. I will fight to incentivize residents to live closer to work, businesses to allow more telecommuting, and government to improve transportation infrastructure which would lead to fewer cars on our roads. We need to look at the bigger picture and how our choices today impact future generations.