

Name: **Mila Johns**
Address: Chevy Chase
What office are you seeking?: Delegate, District 18
Where can voters learn more about your positions?: www.milajohns.com

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

I would say the Ag Reserve is an area of land within our County which we have chosen to protect in order to maintain the role of agriculture in our community. It preserves jobs, keeps families on their land, protects green space, and provides an intimate connection to the history of our county for folks in highly urban areas like my district. As a believer in farm to table eating and an advocate for healthier food in our schools, I would also say the Ag Reserve represents the kind of policy approach every suburban (and future suburban) jurisdiction in the country should be taking to protect agriculture and preserve a connection between the local economy and the food on our tables.

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

I prioritize preservation of existing open space and forests. Our watershed is threatened by runoff pollutants, some of which result from urban and industrial entronements, but others of which are tied to fertilizer used in industrial agriculture. I believe we must put protection of the watershed at the highest priority for Maryland.
I'm a conservationist, and will always be a reliable vote for those issues. The state plays a more limited role in County level land use issues, but I believe the future of MoCo depends on balancing high-density multi-use development in our most populated urban centers with strong preservation measures for the rural parts of the county (most importantly the Ag reserve).

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

I think we don't do nearly enough to promote agro-tourism. My husband grew up in New York's Mid Hudson Valley, where whole local economies are supported by weekend travelers from the City, who come to leaf-peep, pick apples, rock climb, and generally get away from the urban daily grind. Montgomery County has so many of the same types of agro-tourism resources, and so many people visit Washington, D.C. on an annual basis - I just don't see why we have not capitalized on this. In Annapolis, I would support tax credits and seed grant funding to support more agro-Tourism programs.
I am also a passionate believer in connecting our farms to our classrooms. We need to be creating more incentives and opportunities for Maryland produce to be getting directly to Maryland's public school kids, This is the kind of initiative that the state should be investing in, and one which would include a big role for the MoCo Ag Reserve.

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?

I cannot even begin to claim to know what the top challenges are from the perspective of folks who live and work on the reserve - but I can offer some observations on what I see as a few of the the big things:

- Economic viability: farming has to be sustainable. We are not doing enough yet to ensure that the Ag Reserve is a viable component of the economy and not just a 'nice idea.' I think some of the initiatives I have spoken about in previous questions are aimed in part to address this, but I also want to hear more from farmers in MoCo about what the state can do to support them.
- Abuse of the Child Lots Provision: I hear anecdotally that there are concerns this part of the law is being used to create de facto residential developments on protected land - rather than it's intended purpose, which was to provide a financially practical way to keep farms in the same family between generations. I would encourage a County level investigation into this issue.

-

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

We need to be doing more to ensure that the county is purchasing locally farmed goods - especially for schools.

We need to be doing more to educate our kids and our elected decision makers on the importance of the Ag Reserve. Agriculture provides hundreds of millions of dollars on economic activity to the county.

Rural communities have very different support needs than high density urban ones. We need a thoughtful and tailored approach to providing transit, elder care, and income based subsidy support to rural communities specifically.

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

Composting and recycling are important parts of the county's solid waste management strategy. Composting programs that involve MoCo farms can be especially beneficial by providing both a waste disposal service, and a source of potential economic activity to the farm.

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?

Yes, I support the rural schools policy. I also support funding more programs to connect Ag Reserve farms directly to the classroom.

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?

As detailed in my answer to Question 4, I am a strong proponent of agro-tourism for MoCo. I am also a supporter of our local brewing community and a proponent of alleviating the asphyxiating state restrictions

on craft beer and cider production and sale. I believe this could be a wonderful niche economic opportunity for the county.

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 do not support M83 or the addition of highway or bridges through the reserve or adjacent zones. We need to be strengthening downcounty transit and high density development to encourage folks commuting within the DC suburbs to live there as well - not to view Poolesville and Damascus as bedroom communities that the state should connect to DC with six lane highways...