

Name: **David Blair**
Address: Potomac
What office are you seeking?: County Executive
Where can voters learn more about your positions?: <https://blairformontgomery.com/>

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

Having grown up just outside the Agricultural Reserve in Darnestown, I appreciate the beauty and access to locally sourced food that the Reserve provides to us.

The Agricultural Reserve is a nationally recognized model for environmental preservation that provides countless benefits to the DC area. Our county's unique agricultural sector is important because it employs 10,000 people and contributes nearly \$300 million to our local economy while preserving over 90,000 acres of land for farming, open space, and historical sites. People come to the reserve to enjoy recreational activities and the outdoors. They also come to learn more about the historical sites that have been preserved due to the restrictions on development. It is also a great resource for children in our public schools that have field trips to local farms. Education on food resources is especially important for children so they can learn about where food comes from and the importance of sustainable practices.

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

The county has done a good job on environmental policy but it's time to move to the next level. Environmental groups say that we are not on track to meet our ambitious climate goals. I find that alarming. With our proximity to streams that feed into the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay, it is important that we have a comprehensive flood and stormwater management plan to prevent stream erosion and water quality issues. The county should continue to support buffer zones and stormwater runoff projects surrounding up-county watersheds and not support environmentally harmful developments like Ten Mile Creek.

As County Executive, I'll appoint a climate official to oversee the County's efforts and will call for an increase in staff at the Department of the Environment focused solely on sustainability efforts. A clean and healthy environment is necessary to sustain our thriving community and economy. As County Executive, I'll always make the protection of our natural resources a priority.

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

I've met with several business owners in the food industry and it's clear we need to make it easier to sustainably buy local here. We need to invest in our county's unique agricultural sector. What I have found from speaking to Montgomery County residents is that there are a number of small, specialty food producers in the County who are eager to expand their customer base and product offerings in the County. Additionally, I'll create an ecosystem that ties our tourism efforts to our incredible wineries and microbreweries and taps into the farm-to-table movement that has flourished in Loudoun County. And I'll conduct an aggressive marketing campaign to encourage businesses to also procure more goods and services from businesses in the County. Des Moines, Iowa embarked on a similar initiative and discovered shifting 5% of spending to local businesses and vendors it could generate more than \$1 billion in economic benefit and as many as 6,500 jobs. If they can do it, so can we.

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?

A common theme I have been hearing as I talk to residents is that they feel they are not being heard. To run a business, you need transparency from your government to properly prepare for the future. As County Executive, I will make sure that leaders have a voice on issues affecting the Agricultural Reserve. Other challenges are also residential development and transportation. Part of the reason why I am running for County Executive is that we do a poor job of planning in the county. I'll review our planning process to ensure we have a proactive, transparent planning process that involves discussions between stakeholders, government officials, and community members to lessen the burden on our infrastructure and schools. Another area of concern are property taxes and increased costs relating to land ownership. We cannot continue to increase taxes to fund our programs and I would not support new taxes moving forward -- we must expand the tax base through economic growth and new jobs.

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

As County Executive, I'll support our farms by finding ways to source more of their products here and get their products in our public buildings and schools. Des Moines launched its Look Local First Campaign and discovered that by shifting 5% of spending to local businesses it could generate more than \$1 billion in economic benefit and generate as many as 6,500 jobs. They had an aggressive direct mail and advertising campaign to raise awareness of the economic benefits that shopping local provides. This resulted in more than 5,000 businesses committing to reevaluating their procurement practices and shifting more of their purchases to local businesses. I'll increase the percentage that county departments procure goods, services and construction from local and small businesses from 20% to 35% through the Local Small Business Reserve Program. I'll implement an aggressive marketing and outreach campaign to increase the number of residents and businesses that buy from local businesses.

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

As County Executive, I'll work to develop a bold Zero Waste Plan that promotes composting initiatives and reduces the use of single-use plastics. As County Executive, I'll propose a ban on single-use plastic bags and implement a straw reduction plan, so we can reduce the amount of non-recyclable plastics in the County and reduce our reliance on the trash incinerator. Part of this plan is to focus on food rescue projects with the help of non-profits like the Montgomery County Food Council, that work to make connections between food resource centers and ensure that food is accessible to our most needy residents and not wasted. We must also move toward a green economy to remain competitive in the future. My jobs plan calls for creating more incubators, such as one focused on green tech industries, to accelerate growth in this area. I'll also increase investment to support our unique Green Bank so that we can make energy improvements across all sectors of the County.

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?

Agriculture is a growing industry in Montgomery County, contributing \$287 million to the County's economy. While many of our farms are family-run operations, there are plenty of opportunities to expand or start an agribusiness from jam production and organic farming to food delivery and sustainable farm consulting, among other exciting professions. As County Executive, I'll work with Montgomery County and the farming community to create a two-year agriculture entrepreneurship program to provide basic training about what's needed to start an agribusiness and to support agriculture production in our area. Representation among underserved groups is something I will be pushing for as County Executive. When discussing equity for Reserve cluster schools, I can make sure you have a voice. I will make sure that the decision makers continue to hold transparent discussions with organized leaders on issues affecting schools within the County Agricultural Reserve.

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?

We can't expect to increase our brand image nationally or globally on a \$1 million marketing budget. Any multi-state or multi-national CEO will tell you that \$1 million isn't enough, especially when Fairfax County, Virginia spends five times as much as we do on marketing nationally and internationally. Fairfax County Economic Development Authority (FCEDA) even has an international marketing division to help companies locate to Fairfax. It's no wonder they promote business better than Montgomery County. As County Executive, I'll work to increase this budget by reprioritizing our economic development efforts. Montgomery County needs to support and market an ecosystem that ties our tourism efforts to our incredible wineries and breweries and taps into the farm-to-table movement that has flourished in neighboring localities such as Loudoun 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?

To address our transportation issues, I believe there are short-term and long-term solutions. Some of the short-term solutions include free Ride-on service, reversible lanes on I-270, adaptive traffic lights, and creating a local emergency quick action response unit to manage traffic accidents and keep residents moving. The long-term solutions include following through on our transportation Master Plans and creating new transit options for Clarksburg residents, who have been struggling with severe traffic due to the county's inability to follow through and M83 is a solution that I would support funding while we properly address the environmental concerns. We are not going to solve all our transportation needs by adding more lanes or roads like a second Potomac bridge. For the future, we need to promote jobs and smart growth here in Montgomery County - to help ease traffic congestion and reduce the number of commuters going to Virginia or DC for work.