September 2026

JOHNS HOPKINS
CENTER *for* A LIVABLE FUTURE

Delaware Farm and Food Council

Two factors do the most to drive the success of the Delaware Farm and Food Council (DFFC): political positioning and data.

A new political position

The DFFC received its biggest boost when it became nested within the Office of Governor Matt Meyer shortly after he was inaugurated in January 2025. Delaware's new governor has made food policy a priority, as evidenced by the fact that he signed Executive Order Number 5 just seven days into his term. The order shifted the DFFC's identity by making it a body that advises the governor directly on food systems and food security issues in the state.

In doing so, he elevated the DFFC to better reflect its statewide, cross-sector, and interagency scope. Compared with its first incarnation, when it was embedded in the State's Department of Agriculture, the council now has all members appointed by the Governor rather than by the Secretary of Agriculture.

Nikko Brady, the Governor's Deputy Chief of Staff for Climate, Food Systems, and Planning, has been with the council since the beginning.

"We started the council in 2018, and back then I was an advisor to the Secretary of Agriculture," said Brady. "I'm now on the Governor's team, and the council, as of 2025, advises the Governor."

Not surprisingly, positioning the council in the Governor's office means every cabinet secretary pays closer attention to its work, feels a stronger stake in the group, and has greater buy-in to accomplish shared goals.



The council's new status also gives it a broader government-wide identity and mandate. When it was nested within the Department of Agriculture, it may have given the impression that DFFC was primarily focused on agriculture and food production. Consequently, it was sometimes difficult for other cabinet secretaries to justify devoting resources to it, but that is no longer the case.

How did we get here?

The genesis of the council goes back to a 2016 report titled Connecting Healthy Farms to Healthy Delawareans: A Farm and Food Report. It was co-produced by the Delaware Department of Agriculture and the University of Delaware's Center for Research in Education and Social Policy. One of the report's recommendations was to:

> *"Establish a Delaware Farm and Food Policy Council, accountable to the governor, in order to further develop strategy and action plans, maintain annual progress toward objectives, prepare an annual progress report to the governor and support communication across partners."*

The report also recommended the makeup of the council, spanning every aspect of the state's food system in terms of stakeholders, and it stressed the importance of data collection.

The influence of this report can be seen in Executive Order Number 5, especially in terms of the makeup of the council and the emphasis on ongoing data gathering. The order mandates: "The [Food Policy] Council shall manage the Delaware Food Resource Connection, a data analytics platform for Delaware's food resources, created in 2021…"

The council's makeup is mentioned explicitly in Order Number 5, where seven state agencies are named as required members, along with members representing community development; food production and retail; higher education and research; and healthcare.

"Keepers of the data"

Data has been another crucial driver for DFFC. DFFC partners with the Biden Institute for Public Administration to lead robust data collection, geospatial analysis, and policy research. The Delaware Food Resource Connection is the backbone of the council's work and serves as a comprehensive data platform that informs the council's efforts in program implementation, resource allocation, and supply chain improvements.

If you read Executive Order Number 5, you will see the influence of the council, which has applied some stellar systems thinking to Delaware's food landscape. Systems thinking also shows up in the research it conducts and the data thereby generated. Quantitative and qualitative data give the council credibility with local and state policymakers.

"Our priority is engaging with members of the General Assembly and helping to provide them with relevant information as they draft legislation and with local governments to provide guidance on pilot initiatives to improve food access in their communities," Brady said. "As a body, we are very knowledgeable, and we have a series of experts across the entire sector. And in much of our data collection and analysis, we have a foundation for what food security looks like across the state. We look at ourselves as sort of the keepers of the data and information that can be used to inform decisions,

including during times of emergency."

Holistic thinking about food

The council's newest committee, the Food is Medicine Committee (FIMC), is chaired by Lt. Governor Kyle Evans Gay. It is building on work that has been underway in Delaware's health care sector since 2016, spearheaded by three health care systems: Christiana Care, Westside Health, and Beebe Health Care.

The FIMC's work manifests in three ways within health care: medically tailored meals (after diagnosis), food prescriptions, and home delivery of food for patients with mobility issues or transportation challenges.

Sustainability of the executive order

You might be asking, "What happens if there is a change in leadership and the new governor doesn't place the same value on the food system work of the council?"

Brady has given that question plenty of thought.

"We've been making sure that we are able to qualitatively and quantitatively convey what we're doing and continue to demonstrate the importance of the work, how it can influence other priorities, and show the real-world impacts," she said. "We have programs. We have data. We have metrics. We can show that things have worked. We can show that we've been feeding people. We can show that the system has improved capacity."

Despite all that due diligence, how great is the danger that some of this work will be reversed by a future administration?

"There has to be an active decision and action to remove an executive order that's on the books," Brady points out. "It is typical that executive orders do carry over administrations. Whether they carry over as they are, whether they carry over and the new governor makes amendments to it, or the new governor actively [decides] to get rid of it. So, that does give us some cover.

"But I think the most important thing is demonstrating that we serve a purpose. There's a value-add there by having the group around. We can point to real tangible outcomes on the ground."