

Mayoral Food Questionnaire

In 2026 food organizations local to the District convened to elevate food issues in the Mayoral election.

The [DC Food Forum](#) exists to ensure candidates engage deeply with the realities of food access, equity, and sustainability in DC. We seek to elevate the voices and lived experiences of residents, surface the root causes of food inequities, and secure clear commitments to addressing them. Through a united, nonpartisan coalition, we aim to make candidate priorities transparent and advance accountability for a more just food system.

Partners:

- Dreaming Out Loud
- DC Green Scheme
- DC Jail Food Working Group
- DC Hunger Solutions
- FRESHFARM
- DC Greens
- DC Good Food Purchasing Program



Candidate Name

Ernest E. Johnson

Food Access & Retail

The Nourish DC and Food Access Fund programs distributed \$23 million to food retail in Wards 5, 7, and 8, but FY2026 is the last year of federal funding. Do you commit to funding these programs to sustain food retail in low-access areas?

- Yes
- No
- Other: _____

Existing District incentives have not yet addressed the grocery gap in Wards 7 & 8 east of the river. How would you expand and sustain full-service food retail in these communities? What concrete commitments will you make to ensure that community-rooted groups—like our Ward 7 and 8 [Community Advisory Board](#)—have real authority and influence in shaping the District’s food and health equity agenda?

I would treat food access east of the river as a core infrastructure issue, not a side program. First, I will make Nourish DC and the Food Access Fund permanent, with multi-year local funding dedicated to Wards 5,7, and 8 so grocers, co-ops, and corner stores can plan and invest confidently after federal dollars end. I will pair these grants and tax incentives with requirements for affordable pricing, culturally relevant foods, and local hiring. Second, I will support community owned and locally models--co-ops, urban farms, mobile markets, and small grocers-by expanding technical assistance, startup capital, and low-cost leases in District-controlled properties and new developments. We will also align transportation (shuttles, transit routes) and public-housing policy so seniors and families can actually reach full-service stores. To ensure community-rooted groups have real power, not just a voice, I will: Establish a formal Ward 7 and 8 Food & Health Equity Council, building from your Community Advisory Board, with a defined role in reviewing and recommending all major food-access investments east of the river.

Federal Food Benefits & the Safety Net

Would you guarantee a multi-year commitment to DC's participation in SUN Bucks, ensuring SNAP- and Medicaid-eligible families can access federal funds for groceries during the summer?

- Yes
- No
- Other: _____

Federal changes through H.R. 1 will expose approximately 140,000 DC SNAP clients to new work requirements and time limits for the first time in over 27 years, shift significant administrative and benefit costs to the District, and cut eligibility for asylum seekers and refugees. DC food prices have also [risen 4%](#) over the past year. How would you protect DC residents' access to food benefits, and how would you use the District's local supplement authority to address gaps in federal coverage?

H.R. 1 is an attack on food security in DC, and I would treat protecting SNAP as a top priority. I would: Maximize exemptions and waivers. Fund local supplements. Create a local food benefit for excluded groups. Invest in outreach and legal support. Fight back federally.

Institutional Food — Schools & Agencies

Do you support expanding Universal School Meals — covering breakfast and lunch at no cost — to all DC schools participating in the National School Lunch Program, including public, charter, and private schools?

- Yes
- No
- Other: _____

The Secure DC Act directed the Department of Corrections to improve nutrition standards and create workforce opportunities around food, but implementation has gone nowhere due to lack of funding. Do you commit to funding these reforms?

- Yes
- No
- Other: _____

From school cafeterias to jails to homeless shelters to DC agencies, the District serves food to thousands of residents every day. How would you raise the quality and nutritional standards of that food, expand the [Good Food Purchasing Program](#) to all DC agencies, and ensure that public food dollars support both local businesses and community values?

I would use DC's purchasing power to push for healthier food, better jobs, and stronger local businesses everywhere the District serve meals. Raise standards in all settings. Expand Good Food Purchasing citywide. Support local businesses and workers. Make it accountable and affordable. Would you rather the District phase GFPP expansion in over 3-5 years starting with the highest-impact agencies, or move to an all-agencies requirements on a faster timeline if the budget allows?

Food, Health & Community

DC's urban farms serve as both critical food sources and community gathering spaces. Do you commit to robust support for urban agriculture, including working directly with growers to reduce the regulatory barriers that make it difficult to sell food locally and regionally?

- Yes
- No
- Other: _____

Fresh produce and food access are increasingly recognized as clinical interventions that reduce health disparities. How would you embed "Food is Medicine" programs into DC's budget and healthcare systems, and what steps would you take to ensure that a resident's health is no longer largely determined by their race or zip code?

I would treat "Food is Medicine" as core health infrastructure in DC, not a side pilot, and use Medicaid and local dollars to expand it while attacking the racial and neighborhood inequities driving our health gaps. Building food is Medicine into the budget. Integrate with Medicaid and clinical care. Target racial and neighborhood inequities. finally, Support community-based providers and accountability.

Composting & Food Waste

Do you commit to expanding residential curbside composting to all DC households, including multifamily buildings, and requiring District agencies that serve food to compost their organics?

Yes

No

Other: _____

What timeline would you set for expanding composting to multifamily homes:

I would set a clear, aggressive but realistic timeline: Within 2 years, I would require that large multifamily buildings (80+units) submit and implement source-separation plans that include organics collection, leveraging the existing Zero Waste and CLEAN Acts framework, and provide DPW technical assistance and startup grants. Ensuring all multifamily properties citywide have access to organics service--either on-site or via shared/nearby collection points--by tying composting requirements to hauler contracts and the broader Zero Waste DC goal of 80% diversion by 2040.

What timeline would you set for expanding composting to food businesses:

I would move quickly, with the biggest generators going first and a clear path to full coverage. Within 2 years require organics diversion for large food businesses and institutions already covered or eligible under DC's commercial food waste law, using the Mayor's rulemaking authority to expand those requirements and offering technical assistance. Next, within 5 years, phase in requirements for all remaining food-serving businesses--small restaurants, cafes, caterers, and markets--paired with affordable hauling options, standardized signage, and enforcement that starts with education rather than fines, so that by around 2032 nearly all commercial food scraps are composted instead of landfilled.

What timeline would you set for expanding composting to DC agencies:

I would move fastest on DC agencies, since the District controls these operations directly and should lead by example. Within 1 year; Require all DC agency offices and facilities to have a three-bin system wherever food is served or consumed, starting with agencies that already have some organics collection through DGS and DPW. Ensure all DC-run or DC-funded facilities that serve food--schools, rec centers, shelters, DC jail, senior centers, and cafeterias in government buildings--are fully composting organics, with clear diversion targets tied to the Zero Waste DC goal of 80% waste diversion by 2032.

Your Food Vision for DC

The Mayor's Proposed FY27 budget cuts the Food Policy team. If elected would you continue to invest in our city's food needs by supporting this work in the budget and the Food Policy Council?

Yes

No

Other: _____

In your first year in office, will you personally taste-test food served at DC agencies — including schools, shelters, and the Department of Corrections?

- Yes
- No
- Other: _____

Will you commit to holding a roundtable with this coalition before taking office to discuss resident-driven priorities around food access, nutrition, and food systems?

- Yes
- No
- Other: _____

What food-related priorities — not covered above — would define your administration, and what would you want DC's food system to look like by the end of your term?

Two additional priorities would define my administration: 1- treating food workers as essential public-interest workers, and 2- using food policy as a tool for safety, climate, and economic justice, not just hunger relief. By end of my term, I would want DC's food system to be one where your income, race, immigration status, or ward no longer predicts whether you can eat well every day--and where public food dollars are clearly building community power, not just filling contracts. Priority #1: Center food workers and small food businesses. Priority 2: Make food core to safety, climate, and economic justice. By the end of my term, I would want residents to recognize concrete changes in daily life, not just policy documents.

Is there anything you would like to expand upon?

I like to briefly expand on two pieces that are especially important to me: co-governance and accountability. First, on co-governance: throughout my answers I've talked about roundtables, grower-led task forces, and centering community organizations. In practice, that means building formal, ongoing structures where residents and frontline workers share real power over decisions—things like setting nutrition standards, choosing which programs get scaled, and deciding how food dollars are invested in their neighborhoods. It also means compensating community members for their time and expertise, not just asking them to volunteer input. Second, on accountability: I've mentioned annual public reports and scorecards; I want to stress that I see these as tools residents can actually use. That would look like simple dashboards showing, ward by ward, whether agencies are meeting Good Food Purchasing benchmarks, where Food is Medicine benefits are available, which schools and shelters are fully composting, how much is being spent with local businesses, and how this lines up against racial and neighborhood health disparities. If those metrics aren't improving, my commitment is to adjust funding and policy in real time, not wait until the next election.

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