Candidate Questionnaire: Texas Legislative Races 2014

Dear Candidate for the Texas Legislature:

Thank you for running for office. We know it is a time-consuming, energy-intensive process, and we appreciate your willingness to serve.

The Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance (FARFA) is a Texas-based national nonprofit that promotes common sense policies for local, diversified agricultural systems. We have both farmer and consumer members across the state who are passionately interested in the future of local foods in the community.

Below are a few questions about issues facing the local food system in Texas. We plan to publish the responses from all the candidates on our website, as well as through our mailing list and social media. FARFA may also decide to endorse candidates in some districts based on the responses and other available information.

Each question provides an option for comments to explain your views; however, we appreciate a simple yes or no response to each question before you explain. If you cannot give a yes or no, please provide a few words that best describe your position, such as "need more information" or "maybe," before providing an explanation in 250 words or less.

Please send your responses to Judith@FarmAndRanchFreedom.org by Wednesday, October 8, 2014. If you have any questions, please feel free to email us or call 254-697-2661.

Identifying information:

Candidate name: _____Daniel Behrman_____   District: __125_____

Counties within the district: _Bexar_____

Website: ___DanForTexas.org_____

Other contact information: _____

1. Many farmers and artisan food producers tell us that their biggest challenge is navigating the regulatory maze. **Would you support reforms such as simplifying the regulations imposed on small-scale producers and creating an ombudsman position to help producers understand the requirements?**

□ **Yes**

Comments:

2. While local, sustainable foods have gained a reputation for being higher priced than conventional foods, that is not always the case. And, even when the food is higher priced, it reflects higher production costs that the farmers pay in order to raise food in ways that are environmentally friendly and on a small scale. The result is that profit margins for our farmers are tiny. Yet numerous local health departments appear to view local farmers as an income source and have imposed numerous fees. **Would you support capping the fees imposed on small-scale local farmers and food producers?**

□ **Yes**

Comments:

I'd like to cut all taxes and fees down by a lot!

3. The Texas cottage food law allows individuals to produce specific, low-risk foods in their home kitchens and sell it directly to consumers at locations such as farmers markets. This law, adopted in 2011 and 2013, has been a very positive development for the local food movement. At the same time, however, the limitations on what can be produced and where it can be sold continues to limit its usefulness for many farmers and food producers. **Would you support a "home processors" bill to allow additional foods to be made in home kitchens, as well as allow for wholesale sales, such to a reasonable regulatory and inspection system?**

□ **Yes**

Comments:

4. Property taxes are a major cost for small-scale farmers. Under current state law, land that is used primarily for agricultural purposes is supposed to be taxed based on its agricultural value (known as "open space valuation") rather than its potential development value. Yet numerous farmers have faced problems in obtaining agricultural valuation, including farmers growing mixed vegetables, raising livestock using sustainable grazing methods, and those located in urban areas. **Would you support a**

bill to provide fair application of agricultural valuation laws to these farmers, subject to the normal requirements that the primary use of the property be agricultural and of the required intensity of use?

□ **Yes**

Comments: I would like to reduce the property taxes altogether, not for just farmers. But I don't see how the government has a right to add an additional tax to property, just because that property also produces an income.

5. Under current law, farmers can legally sell raw milk in Texas directly to consumers under a Grade A Raw for Retail license. Texas Grade A Raw for Retail dairies are subject to regulations that meet or exceed all regulatory standards for pasteurized milk. However, agency regulations limit the sales to "the point of production, i.e., at the farm." This marketing restriction burdens both farmers and consumers. Farmers, after investing significant resources to become licensed, are unfairly disadvantaged in selling their product. Consumers desiring whole, unprocessed food must unnecessarily expend significant time, gas, and money on long weekly drives to procure their food. **Would you support a bill to allow Grade A licensed farmers to sell raw milk directly to consumers at farmers markets, other direct farm-to-consumer locations, and by delivery?** *The bill would **not** allow sales of raw milk in grocery stores.*

□ **Yes**

Comments:

6. Poll after poll show that the majority of Americans want to have labeling of genetically engineered foods, also known as genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The only long-term study on feeding GMOs to animals resulted in animals with significantly increased incidences of kidney and liver damage, as well as an increased rate and size of tumors. The science is far from settled, and people want to be able to make an informed choice as to whether or not to eat GMOs and feed them to their children. <u>Accurate information is a vital component of a functioning free market.</u> Over 60 other countries already either ban or require labeling of GMO foods, and the major food companies are producing and selling labeled foods in those countries. **Would you support a bill to require labeling of GMO foods that are sold in Texas?**

□ No

Comments: I believe in small, limited government. Requiring producers to label their products means more government. What I would like to see, and what could easily come from the consumer's demand, is for non-gmo producers to label their products as such.