



Support SB 776

Help Small Farmers & Food Businesses Grow

Texas farmers and small-scale food producers must navigate a convoluted regulatory landscape in order to legally operate their businesses. Confusion over ambiguous regulations and unintentional violations of regulations impose costs not only on the producer, but also on the agencies in lost time and unnecessary expense.

SB 776 would provide much-needed assistance for small farmers and producers to legally operate their businesses by creating an agriculture and rural ombudsman office within the Texas Economic Development and Tourism Office.

Navigating the regulatory maze is complicated by several factors:

- 1) **Multiple agencies:** the Department of State Health Services (DSHS), Texas Department of Agriculture, and the Texas Animal Health Commission each separately regulate aspects of farming and food businesses.
- 2) **Multiple jurisdictions:** Many farmers sell their food in multiple cities or counties. As a result, they have to comply not only with DSHS regulations, but with the patchwork of requirements from local health departments.
- 3) **One-size-fits-all regulations:** The regulations that have been written for large-scale producers, and it is often far from clear what a small-scale producer must do to comply;
- 4) **Piecemeal regulation:** While many farmers are producing multiple products for both environmental and economic reasons, the regulations are designed for single, large-scale product lines. Many farmers are required to get multiple permits from different sections or divisions of various agencies, multiplying both their costs and the potential for confusion.

Farmers and small-scale food producers do not have the legal training to sort through these issues, and their businesses are not large or profitable enough to hire staff or legal counsel to help. The overwhelming majority (over 90%) of Texas farms gross less than \$100,000 in sales per year, and hundreds of these farms begin new operations every year. *See 2012 USDA Census of Agriculture.* The profit margins for these small farms are extraordinarily slim, and many are only able to operate by relying on income from a second job.

SB 776's ombudsman would encourage the establishment and growth of Texas agricultural and food businesses, reduce their expenses, and improve regulatory compliance and consistency. A single ombudsman who is familiar with all regulations and their application will provide a much-needed resource for the businesses that are providing food -- and jobs -- for Texans.

Providing an ombudsman service for farmers and other food businesses would help numerous farmers and food businesses across the state, benefiting local economies, reducing food deserts, and improving consumer access to locally produced foods.

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