

Candidate Questionnaire: City of Austin City Council Race 2014

Response from Matt Lamon, District 10

1. Many farmers and artisan food producers tell us that their biggest challenge is navigating the regulatory maze. **Do you support reforms at the health department such as simplifying the regulations imposed on local producers and creating an omnibudsman position to help producers understand the requirements?**

Yes

No

Comments:

Absolutely. This question speaks to a larger problem we have at City Hall, which is a lack of customer service. When elected, I will institute a culture of customer service so that whether you are building a house, remodeling a bathroom, or contributing to our local food supply, you can easily navigate the regulatory structure. As a management consultant, I worked with public sector agencies on projects like this frequently.

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 local farmers are tiny. Yet the City of Austin has some of the highest permit fees in the state for producers selling at farmers' markets. **Do you support reducing fees to support small-scale local farmers and food producers?**

Yes

No

Comments:

We have got to support our farmers, ranchers and food suppliers by creating a reasonable fee structure. I come from a family of farmers. My dad, grandfather and great-grandfather all farmed, but like many family farms, we are no longer in operation. Government should encourage, not restrict this contribution to our economy, culture and food supply.

3. Access to land is another major challenge for people seeking to bring back locally raised foods. **Do you support measures to improve access to land for growing food, such as allowing public property to be used for nonprofit community gardens and working with County officials to reduce property tax burdens on small urban farmers?**

Yes

No

Comments:

I serve on nonprofit board called The Welcome Table. We're a faith-based nonprofit with health and wellness initiatives in underserved areas of town, primarily Northeast Austin. One of our most popular programs provides grocery and food assistance to families. Last year, we began to partner with a local farm to give our clients farm-fresh, locally raised produce. They absolutely love this food. This experience, along with my family's agriculture background, has made me an advocate for ensuring access to land.

4. Sustainable farming methods allowed under the city's code provide not only nutritious food, but also support a clean, healthy environment for our communities. Selling locally raised food provides income (either the primary income or supplemental) for growers, improves access to healthy local foods for consumers, and promotes local economic development. **Do you support people's ability to grow food and sell food in residential areas, subject to reasonable requirements (such as available parking) to protect neighbors' interests?**

Yes

No

Comments:

5. The interest in local foods goes beyond simply purchasing food. Re-connecting people with where and how their food is grown has many benefits. It promotes healthier eating; it creates transparency and encourages farmers to practice environmentally sound agriculture; it builds a sense of community and increased local economic development. An important aspect of rebuilding a local foods community is having people on farms for a wide range of events, including classes on cooking or canning; birthday parties for children that engage kids with their food; and weddings and other celebrations that recognize the vital role that food and our environment play in our lives. **Do you support urban farms' ability to host such events, subject to reasonable requirements (such as available parking and music restrictions) to protect neighbors' interests?**

Yes

No

Comments: