

Candidate Questionnaire: City of Austin City Council Race 2014

Response from Delia Garza, District 2 Candidate

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 ombudsman position to help producers understand the requirements?**

Yes

Comments: I support all initiatives that would streamline government processes as long as safety standards are not compromised. The City of Austin should provide resources for our local food producers to help them navigate the process, achieve success, and help us continue to grow the local food movement in Austin.

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

Comments: There have been discussions about ensuring that the permit fees charged are sufficient to cover the cost of inspections, but I believe we can do more to simplify that process while upholding safety standards to save our farmers overhead costs. We should do everything we can to nurture our local food culture, and create an environment that allows local growers to continue to serve our community while earning enough for their labor and products to encourage them to continue and expand their businesses.

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. I believe we should identify properties currently in the City's inventory that can be used for community gardens and small urban farms. Land that is currently in the floodplain is very limited in allowable uses, and provides a great opportunity to expand access for growing food. The City Council recently approved funding for buyouts in the Onion Creek area in my district. If elected, I'll personally advocate that we dedicate some of this land for growing food.

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.

Many parts of District 2 are in a food desert, and I would support any effort to get healthy food to those families. During the budget process this year, the Council approved additional funding dedicated to SNAP outreach and enrollment, in addition to significantly expanding our double dollars program. The double dollars program in particular is something I strongly support, in that it increases healthy options for our low income residents while also expanding the customer base for our local food growers.

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, health and wellness issues are very important to me, and as stated above, many families in District 2 live in food deserts. We have a high rate of childhood obesity which we must address, and I support any efforts to educate families on health eating. Our local farms are not simply part of our food supply system, they're part of our local culture, and I support policies that will allow them to continue to connect with our community through events and education.