

Candidate Questionnaire: City of Austin City Council Race 2014

Response from Fred McGhee, District 3 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

No

Comments:

This is not just a City of Austin matter. Simplifying the regulatory maze will require education as well as better communication on the part of regulatory bodies at every level, including at the state and federal level. Federal cutbacks in particular have made things more challenging.

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:

The Sustainable Food Policy Board made similar recommendations back in February of 2011. I supported them then and do now. There are some challenges—Austin has multiple, often competing Farmers Markets—but with persistence and patience I believe we can make headway on this issue.

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 will be glad to work with the urban farm community on these matters but cannot commit to this at the present time.

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:

Dr. McGhee and Food

I wish the readers of this questionnaire to know that I take quality food seriously. My father was an Army cook and I worked at our family Pizzeria, the Broad Brook Pizza and Grinder Shoppe as a young teen growing up in Connecticut. I have an extensive work history in agriculture as well as in food service. During my time in the U.S. Navy in the early 1990's I worked as a Food Service Officer and implemented some of the earliest vegetarian menus in the history of the Navy, an advocacy stance that got me into considerable hot water at the time.

My Foodie wife Lisa Goddard works at the Capital Area Food Bank and is a former board member of the Sustainable Food Center. She is one of Austin's leading advocates when it comes to food. We are active horticulturalists and sustainability practitioners and are teaching our children the same.