

Candidate Questionnaire: City of Austin City Council Race 2014

Response from Chris Riley, District 9 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: An ombudsman is needed to help users navigate a number of the City's permitting systems. The scope of that position could include the regulations affecting farmers and artisan food producers.

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: I have sponsored or co-sponsored a number of measures to waive or reduce fees at Farmers' Markets.

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 sponsored a resolution in November 2009 directing the City Manager to identify and map public lands that would be appropriate for urban agriculture and qualified community gardens. I have also undertaken efforts to reduce wastewater fees and other costs for small urban farmers. I'd be glad to consider measures to reduce property tax burdens on small urban farmers, but I'd also want to consider all the impacts of such measures on residents.

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: An urban farm can be a great asset for a neighborhood, and the ability to sell food on the farm can add greatly to its appeal, convenience, and viability. As the most recent revisions to the urban agriculture-related code provisions were developed, my office worked closely with city staff and the SFPB working group to ensure that market gardens (small amounts of food on residential lots that could be sold) were included in the code.

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: An urban farm can be a wonderful place for events, including cooking classes, birthday parties, and weddings. When the Council considered the Urban Farm Code Amendments last November, I supported allowing an urban farm to seek a Conditional Use Permit to be able to host such events. I would also support a code amendment allowing for a standing permit that's subject to periodic review – i.e., a CUP with accountability built in by way of periodic review.