

## Candidate Questionnaire: City of Austin City Council Race 2014

Response from Kathie Tovo, 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 omnibudsman position to help producers understand the requirements?**

Yes

No Comments: The Urban Farms ordinance made strides in improving the City's policies to support local farmers; but there is obviously more room for improvement. It is important that we stay engaged in conversations with the local producers so we understand the challenges that arise as the industry continues to grow. Appointing a liaison or ombudsman that focuses on two-way community engagement with producers makes sense, and I am interested in discussing how best to fund such a position or to designate those responsibilities within the existing staff.

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 am generally supportive of finding ways to reduce the costs of market access for local food producers, but any talk of specific adjustments to fees must be made in the context of comprehensive budget discussions. I am supportive of continuing to waive fees for the Downtown Farmer's Market.

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: Underused right-of-way and city lots are great opportunities for nonprofit community garden space. On a related topic, I believe an immediate asset to our urban farmers would be to identify public land for a distribution hub for wholesale marketing of local food to retail establishments.

Relieving the property tax burden on small urban farms will require creativity and collaboration. What a municipality may do with regard to property taxes is heavily regulated by the state; however, I have set forth a plan to restore balance to our appraisal system with respect to residential development. I am supportive of working in how best to address urban farms within this conversation.

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:

I supported the Urban Farms ordinance, which maintains urban farm uses in every zoning category and establishes market gardens to enable small growers to be able to sell directly to customers. There are still some issues associated with composting and animal processing within neighborhood areas. Since composting of certain items, such as processed animalwaste, is regulated by the TCEQ due to contamination concerns, it is important that the City foremost ensures the health and safety of its citizens and water quality. The City should

expand education and opportunities for local composting and should collaborate with urban farmers to find ways to safely locate and support centralized processing and composting facilities of greater scale.

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: I supported the Urban Farms ordinance, which allows urban farms within neighborhoods to apply for up to six temporary use permits per year. And, without a temporary use permit, urban farms may engage in agricultural education activities, including volunteer programs, farm tours, youth programs, and farming classes.