

Candidate Questionnaire: City of Austin City Council Race 2014

Dear City Council Candidate:

Thank you for running for office. We know it is a time-consuming, energy-intensive process, and we appreciate your willingness to serve.

The Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance (FARFA) is a Texas-based nonprofit that promotes common sense policies for local, diversified agricultural systems. We have both farmer and consumer members in Austin who are passionately interested in the future of local foods in the community.

Below are a few questions about issues facing the local food system in Austin. We plan to publish the responses from all the candidates on our website, as well as through our mailing list and social media. FARFA may also decide to endorse candidates in some districts based on the responses and other available information.

Each question provides an option for comments to explain your views; however, we appreciate a simple yes or no response to each question before you explain. If you cannot give a yes or no, please provide a few words that best describe your position, such as “need more information” or “maybe,” before providing an explanation in 250 words or less.

Please send your responses to Judith@FarmAndRanchFreedom.org by Friday, September 19, 2014. If you have any questions, please feel free to email us or call 254-697-2661.

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?**

X Yes

No

Comments: It makes sense that we should encourage an easy regulatory process for local producers as we strive to increase local food sources and distribution systems. I would need some education on what roadblocks may exist, but I am committed to furthering the local farm-to-table movement.

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 city can find other sources of revenue that make more sense for the health and well-being of our community.

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: The city owns a lot of land that is currently under-utilized, and we should promote more operations like the Sunshine community garden, but also allow access for free to responsible organizations on certain plots of 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: There have been issues with some "urban farms" hosting events. Like so many issues in this City, we need nuanced and balanced solutions to real world conflicts. "One size fits all solutions" are not always appropriate. We need a reasoned and vetted resolution

that involves the stakeholders and we need to avoid policy decisions made and ordinances drafted from the dais. We need reasonable requirements imposed so there are not inappropriate commercial uses or burdens in the middle of neighborhoods. There is a difference between having limited events at a farm and having a farm at a commercial event venue. I believe that, working with the owners, the neighborhoods and the surrounding families, we can work out problems and find equitable solutions that accommodate concerns and allow a policy to be implemented that provides future guidance, certainty and protections.