



Support HB 809

Fair Representation for Small-Scale Farmers



The Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) does not adequately represent the interests of the regulated community, which includes everyone who owns even one livestock or poultry animal. To address the problem of regulation without representation, **HB 809, by Representative James White**, would designate two seats to represent the interests of small-scale producers.

The TAHC consists of thirteen appointed Commissioners, each designated to represent a different segment of the livestock industry. Although theoretically some of the Commissioners could be small-scale producers, in practice they consistently, if not uniformly, represent large-scale business interests. The three members designated to represent the general public are also consistently drawn from large-scale agricultural business interests.

None of the current thirteen seats on the TAHC represent the largest and fastest-growing group of livestock owners: small-scale producers. The vast majority of Texans who own livestock or poultry own just a few animals. According to the 2012 USDA Census of Agriculture:

- 90% of the farms with sheep have fewer than 100 head (9,600 farms),
- 93% of the farms with hogs have fewer than 100 head (2,715 farms),
- 97% of the farms with poultry have fewer than 100 birds, and over 99% have fewer than 10,000 birds (19,596 farms);
- 56% of the farms with cattle have fewer than 20 head (122,217 farms), and
- 97% of the farms with horses have fewer than 25 head (62,196 farms).

Moreover, these very small farms are the fastest growing segment of the industry. For example, farms with fewer than 20 head of cattle increased by 16% between 2007 and 2012, while farms of all other sizes of cattle herds went down. Farms with fewer than 100 head of sheep increased by 29% in that time period, while farms of all other sizes of sheep herds went down.

These census numbers underestimate the number of small-scale livestock owners in this state, because the census only includes “farms,” which are defined as having \$1,000 or more of product to sell. The TAHC’s jurisdiction extends beyond the census, to cover **every** person who owns a backyard chicken, pet pony, or pygmy goat. **The TAHC’s regulatory reach is not limited to commercial entities.**

CSHB 809 designates two seats for small-scale producers, one for small-scale livestock and one for small-scale poultry. The Committee Substitute replaces two of the general public seats with these two new designations, maintaining one seat for the general public. Since the general public members are currently drawn from large industry interests, this will **not** reduce the public input to the agency in practical terms.

This change will help ensure that the Texas Animal Health Commission hears from a broader range of the stakeholders who are affected by the agency’s regulations.

HB 809 is supported by the Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance, Texas Certified Farmers Market Association, Texas Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association, Sustainable Food Center, Food Policy Council of San Antonio, Slow Food Austin, Farm and Food Coalition (East Texas Community Food Coalition), Farm-to-Consumer Legal Defense Fund, Weston A. Price Foundation, and Homegrown Revival.

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