



## **FARFA Priorities for the 2025 Texas Legislative Session**

First COVID, then Winter Storm Uri, then food inflation, and now avian influenza. The current consolidated system for growing, processing, and distributing food in our country serves neither farmers nor consumers in times of crisis. Moreover, evidence is mounting that the current food system contributes heavily to the epidemic of chronic disease in our country.

In contrast, small farms and food producers provide their local communities with high-quality healthy food during both good times and bad. Yet they continue to be hampered by regulations written by and for large-scale, consolidated agriculture. It is time to develop regulations that support a resilient, diversified food system and small businesses.

### **Expand Options for Home-Based (Cottage) Food Businesses**

The current cottage food law has allowed thousands of Texans to start successful home-based food businesses, with zero reported illness outbreaks. The current law allows people to make non-potentially hazardous foods in their home kitchens and sell them directly to consumers at specific locations, up to \$50,000 annually. Expanding the cottage food law would support small businesses *and* provide more options for consumers. FARFA supports SB 541 & HB 520 to remove the requirement for individuals to list their home addresses, raise the sales cap, and allow sales through certain third parties so long as the cottage foods are kept segregated with clear signage for consumers. FARFA also supports HB 2588, which further expands the types of foods that may be sold by cottage food producers, indexes the sales cap for inflation, and simplifies provisions for sampling and donating cottage food items.

### **Provide Fair Property Taxes for Small Farmers**

When the principal use of a piece of land is agricultural, it is supposed to be taxed based on its agricultural value. The current statute works well for large producers and commodity crop growers, but no county has adopted guidelines as to what is needed for a small farm to qualify, including the many small farms growing fruits and vegetables for local markets. FARFA supports HB 2930, to direct the Comptroller to set guidelines for these properties, ensuring fair, statewide application of agricultural valuation provisions. Last session, an identical bill (HB 3857) passed the House by a vote of 137-5, but died in the Senate; FARFA urges both chambers to pass the bill this session.

### **Improve Access to Locally Raised Eggs**

Locally raised eggs are in high demand by consumers, but the requirement for “grading” creates unnecessary barriers for farmers. “Grading” involves weighing and measuring each egg, sorting them by size, and being licensed by the Department of Agriculture. **Grading is a marketing issue and provides no benefits from a health or food safety perspective.** Texas farmers can legally sell ungraded eggs directly to consumers, and do so at farmers’ markets all over the state – with no reported problems. But farmers can’t sell those same eggs to chefs or grocers without a grading license. The tiny profit margin on eggs is insufficient to cover the additional expense and hassle. FARFA urges the Legislature to allow farmers to sell eggs clearly labeled as “ungraded” and identifying their farm, so that consumers can make informed choices. Last session, HB 2945 passed the House 125-19, but died in the Senate; FARFA urges both chambers to pass the bill this session.

## **Protect Small Farmers and Food Businesses from Duplicative Permit Requirements**

Farmers and local food producers with a food manufacturer or food retailer permit from the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) can sell their products to consumers in diverse areas. But if there is a local health department, they must obtain a permit from the local department and pay additional fees, **even though the substantive regulations governing them are the same.** This is particularly challenging for farmers who sell at multiple farmers' markets or small venues, because they may need to obtain permits from 3 or 4 jurisdictions. FARFA urges the Legislature to pass a bill that allows small food businesses (under \$1 million in sales) to sell anywhere in the state if they have a permit from DSHS.

## **Allow Off-Farm Raw Milk Sales Direct to Consumers**

Currently, Grade A Raw for Retail dairy farms can sell raw milk to consumers only on their farm. The farmer may deliver the milk to the buyer anywhere in the state, but can't sell on-site even at a farmers' market. HB 1669 allows licensed farmers to sell their products directly to consumers anywhere in the state. It also specifically allows individuals and nonprofits to act as coordinators for people to buy raw milk as a group, a practice that is already occurring.

## **Improve Schoolchildren's Health**

Fresh fruits and vegetables are vital to children's health, yet in short supply in Texas school lunches. Sourcing local produce benefits both our children and our farmers, but the current sourcing system is aimed at mass sourcing through the conventional chains. FARFA supports a bill to create a pilot program to increase local sourcing of fruits & vegetables by schools through both increased funding and staffing support.

FARFA also supports HB 1637, which prohibits the use of glyphosate (a known carcinogen that damages the gut microbiome) on school grounds. The bill also bans several food dyes that have been linked to health problems from school lunches.

## **Transparency in Meat Labeling**

Americans deserve to know where their food comes from. FARFA supports HB 1374, HB 1385, and SB 823 to require meat to be labeled with its country of origin.

## **Protect & Improve Farmland Health**

FARFA urges the Legislature to provide state funding for the On The Ground Conservation Program at the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board, to help landowners implement "healthy soils" management on their properties. This helps both the farmers and the entire community by reducing runoff and flooding, reducing water waste, and ensuring that we have the soils necessary to raise food for decades to come.

FARFA also supports HB 1674 to protect farmers and ranchers from having their land contaminated by PFAS "forever chemicals."

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