

SUBJECT: Creating the Texas Organic Agricultural Industry Advisory Board

COMMITTEE: Agriculture and Livestock — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 6 ayes — Miller, Anderson, B. Brown, Aycock, Garcia, Heflin

0 nays

1 absent — Gallego

WITNESSES: For — James L. Wedel, Texas Organic Cotton Marketing Coop; Mason Arnold; Judith McGeary

Against — None

DIGEST: CSHB 2345 would establish the Texas Organic Agricultural Industry Advisory Board in Agriculture Code, Title 3, ch. 50C. The board would assist the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) in:

- assessing Texas' organic agricultural products industry;
- developing recommendations for the commissioner of agriculture and the Legislature to promote and expand Texas' organic agricultural products industry;
- identifying and obtaining funding to promote and expand Texas' organic agricultural products industry;
- developing a statewide organic agricultural products awareness campaign in conjunction with the Texas Cooperative Extension's educational programs and distribution channels; and
- reviewing the rules affecting Texas' organic agricultural products industry.

The board would be attached to TDA for administrative purposes. The department would provide the staff necessary for the board to perform assigned duties. The board would comprise 13 members serving staggered terms of four years. The commissioner would appoint the board's members, including:

- four representatives who produce organic agricultural products;
- two representatives who sell organic agricultural products;

- one representative who distributes organic agricultural products;
- one representatives who processes organic agricultural products;
- one representative of a trade association in the organic agricultural industry;
- one representative of the Texas Cooperative Extension;
- one representative of the general public;
- one representative from TDA; and
- one technical advisor with knowledge of organic agricultural products or technical expertise in soil biology, horticulture, or organic farming systems.

The board would elect a presiding officer from among its members. Members would not be entitled to compensation or expense reimbursement. Meetings would occur at least once a year and other times deemed necessary by the agriculture commissioner. The board would not be subject to rules in Government Code, ch. 2110 with regard to its size, composition, or duration.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2007.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

CSHB 2345 would boost the organic agricultural industry in Texas. Organic agriculture is one of the fastest growing segments in the nation's agricultural sector. Consumer sales of organic food reached \$13.8 billion in 2005, representing an annual growth rate of 16.2 percent. Despite escalating demand, however, the production of organic agriculture remains low. The establishment of a Texas Organic Agricultural Industry Advisory would help the state's agricultural industry capitalize on this market opportunity, which also would benefit consumers.

Texas currently is the second largest agricultural producing state. However, it does not rank among the top 10 states in terms of certified organic operations. Texas ranks sixth in terms of cropland acres devoted to organic agriculture. This information suggests that Texas has not taken advantage of the growth in this industry and its potential to serve as a leader. Other states, such as Minnesota and Wisconsin, have created organic agricultural advisory boards. By establishing the Texas Organic Agricultural Industry Advisory Board, the state would be poised to compete with other states, bringing Texas to the forefront of organic agricultural production.

As stipulated in CSHB 2345, the board would comprise diverse members with various interests and knowledge. The specifications in the bill would enable the board to adopt a coordinated approach to shape Texas into a better place to do grow, distribute, and process organic agricultural products. The board could best accomplish its stated duties by working in conjunction with TDA.

The high cost and risk of shifting to new farming systems poses an obstacle to the adoption of organic farming. Moreover, potential organic producers need education on the economic opportunities and marketing techniques required in this industry. Members of board created by CSHB 2345 would have the knowledge and experience to help Texas farmers transition into the organic food industry.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

In some other states, information issued by organic agricultural advisory boards serves to disparage traditional farming practices. With agricultural production ranking as Texas' second largest industry, much of the state's economy is reliant upon conventional agricultural production.

**NOTES:**

Unlike the bill as introduced, CSHB 2345 would include two additional members on the advisory board — a representative from the Texas Cooperative Extension and a technical advisor with knowledge of organic agricultural products or other technical expertise.

The companion bill, SB 866 by Watson, was reported favorably as substituted from the Senate Natural Resources Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Affairs, and Coastal Resources on March 21.