

SUBJECT: Agriculture grant program for urban public elementary schools

COMMITTEE: Agriculture and Livestock — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 7 ayes — Swinford, McReynolds, B. Brown, Christian, Green, Hupp, C. Jones
0 nays
2 absent — Crownover, Hardcastle

WITNESSES: For — Susan Combs, Texas Department of Agriculture
Against — None
On — Jim Butler, Texas A&M System Agriculture Program

DIGEST: CSHB 2631 would direct the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) to create a program to award grants to public elementary schools for the purpose of establishing demonstration agricultural projects under a new Chapter 46 of the Agriculture Code. The grants would be available only to schools in large urban school districts with at least 49,000 students.

Under CSHB 2631, an eligible school would have to submit to TDA a proposal for a demonstration agricultural program that would include a description of the proposed project, a schedule of projected costs, and a statement of the educational benefits, including how the project would improve understanding of agriculture.

During a single school year, TDA could award a maximum grant of \$2,500 to any school and could not award a grant to more than one school within the same school district. Grants would be subject to available funds. TDA could solicit and accept gifts, grants, and other donations to fund the program.

The bill would require schools that receive grants to report the project results to TDA in a manner determined by the agency.

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CSHB 2631 would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house.

SUPPORTERS
SAY:

CSHB 2631 would help urban elementary school students better understand their connection to agriculture. Because some large school districts do not have the money to start agricultural programs, this bill would help at least 10 major school districts across the state begin educating some of the youngest Texans on where their food and clothes originate.

The bill would allow TDA to solicit donations, grants, and gifts. Such contributions would be an excellent way for hardware, home gardening, textile, landscaping, and similar businesses to become more involved with their communities and to educate young consumers.

With funding envisioned in the budget for fiscal 2000-01, TDA would be able to make up to ten \$2,500 grants a year. With additional grants, gifts, and donations from private industry, schools could receive much greater amounts.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

No apparent opposition.

NOTES:

The committee substitute would limit eligible schools to elementary schools. The substitute deleted a requirement in the original bill that a school be in a municipality with at least 1 million people and reduced the threshold number of enrolled students in the school district from 60,000 to 49,000. The substitute also would limit TDA to awarding only one grant per school district per school year.

An item in the Article 11 "wish list" in HB 1 by Junell, the general appropriations bill for fiscal 2000-01, which passed the House on April 13, would appropriate \$25,000 per year to TDA for this program, contingent upon enactment of CSHB 2631 or the companion bill, SB 1265 by Ellis. SB 1265 is pending in the Senate Natural Resources Committee after being reported favorably from the Agriculture Subcommittee.