

SUBJECT: Creating an Agriculture Policy Board.

COMMITTEE: Agriculture and Livestock — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 7 ayes — Swinford, Christian, Hardcastle, Miller, Brown, Green, Hupp

0 nays

2 absent — McReynolds, Kolkhorst

WITNESSES: For — Zach Brady, Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association; Matt Brockman, Independent Cattleman's Association of Texas; George Christian, Texas Forest Industries Council; Eddy Edmonston, Texas Nursery and Landscape Association; Denise Rhodes, Texas Agri-Women and Syngenta; Jerry Walzel, Texas Produce Association; Don Ward, Livestock Marketing Association of Texas; Tony Williams, Texas Cotton Ginners' Association; Ross Wilson, Texas Cattle Feeders Association

Against — None

On — Susan Combs, Texas Department of Agriculture

BACKGROUND: The 76th Legislature enacted HB 2 by Swinford, et al. which required the Legislature to conduct a comprehensive study of Texas' agricultural condition, Texas' current programs supporting agriculture, and the state's role in preserving the agriculture industry. Section 2.003 of the Agriculture Code lists 16 agricultural policy issues the state must consider and address. The creation of an Agricultural Policy Board stems as a recommendation from this study.

DIGEST: HB 453 would amend Chapter 2 of the Agriculture Code to create the Agriculture Policy Board. This board would be charged with conducting research and analysis to advocate and recommend agricultural strategies that enhance agriculture production, income, and employment; benefit consumers; and promote efficient use of natural resources.

The board would be required to continue the development of agriculture policy guidelines consistent Section 2.003 of the Agriculture Code. It would review for compliance with agriculture policy guidelines, all legislation with

an impact on agriculture, all agriculture-related budget issues, current statutes, and agency rulemaking authority. The board also would establish priorities for agriculture-related research and agency budgets.

The board would be composed of:

- ! the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) Commissioner;
- ! the chair of the House Agriculture and Livestock Committee;
- ! the chair of the Senate Natural Resources Committee Subcommittee on Agriculture;
- ! three members of the House of Representatives appointed by the speaker of the house, preferably with agricultural expertise or from predominately rural or agriculturally-oriented districts; and
- ! three members of the Senate appointed by the lieutenant governor, preferably with agricultural expertise or from predominately rural or agriculturally-oriented districts.

The board would elect a chair from its membership. Service on the board would be an additional duty of the members' public offices without compensation or reimbursement for expenses except in accordance with their public office. Legislative members would serve a two-year term on the board. Board vacancies would be filled in the same manner as the original appointment.

HB 453 would require the board's staff services be provided by employees of the House Agriculture and Livestock Committee and the Senate Natural Resource Committee Subcommittee on Agriculture. HB 453 also would allow the board to create a 15-member ad-hoc advisory committee to assist the board in carrying out its duties. The advisory committee members also would serve without compensation or reimbursement of expenses.

HB 453 would take effect September 1, 2001.

SUPPORTERS
SAY:

A legislative Agricultural Policy Board is needed to provide an ongoing examination of the state's agricultural policy and help to ensure that state agencies adhere to the agricultural policy in Section 2.003 of the Agricultural Code. The board would be a pro-active group that would give legislative clout and influence to the agricultural issues necessary for agriculture to succeed in an increasingly urban political environment.

Redistricting could lead to a decline in the representation of agricultural communities in the Legislature. A policy board established by statute would ensure that the interests and concerns of rural communities would continue to receive the attention they merit.

The policy board would provide an on-going vehicle to ensure that agriculture and rural interests are continuously represented in the Legislature. The board also would establish a formal structure to facilitate enhanced communication between the House, the Senate, and TDA to ensure that the concerns of the agricultural community are adequately and uniformly addressed. Other committees, such as Higher Education, have benefitted from the creation of a policy board.

The agricultural industry also would benefit from the creation of a policy board that addresses all types of agricultural-related issues, not just specific research issues such as those addressed by the Food and Fiber Commission. TDA can only act as a resource regarding agricultural issues. The board would be able to actively recommend, promote, and raise awareness of agricultural issues beyond what TDA can.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

Establishing a permanent agricultural policy board by statute is unnecessary. The concerns of the agricultural community already are adequately addressed by TDA, the House Committee on Agriculture and Livestock, and the Senate Natural Resources Committee Subcommittee on Agriculture and other state entities such as the Food and Fiber Commission, which can meet jointly as needed. Similar policy boards created by statute in the past, such as for criminal justice and health and human services, seldom met and ultimately were abolished.

NOTES:

A related bill, HB 499 by Swinford, et al. revising the state's agricultural policy, also is on today's calendar.