

SUBJECT: Setting fees for certificates of veterinary inspection

COMMITTEE: Agriculture and Livestock — favorable, with amendment

VOTE: 7 ayes — Hardcastle, Anderson, B. Brown, Burnam, Farrar, Herrero, Olivo
0 nays

WITNESSES: For — Dan Dierschke, Texas Farm Bureau; Ed Small, Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers
Against — None

BACKGROUND: Animals being exported or transported to locations such as livestock shows must be inspected by an accredited veterinarian to ensure they are free of disease. The Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) issues health certificates to veterinarians, and the veterinarians fill in the relevant information upon inspection of the animals. Agriculture Code, sec. 161.081(d), sets the fee for a health certificate at 25 cents per certificate.

DIGEST: HB 1363, as amended, would repeal sec. 161.081(d) and authorize the Texas Animal Health Commission rulemaking to issue and to set the fee for a certificate of veterinary inspection for the transport of domestic and exotic livestock and fowl.
The bill would take effect September 1, 2005.

SUPPORTERS SAY: Because the current fee of 25 cents does not cover the cost of printing a health certificate, the TAHC should be given the authority reasonably to set the fee so that the cost of these certificates can be borne by those owners that benefit from the inspections.
The inspections directly benefit the livestock owners, to whom veterinarians often pass the cost for the fee. Much of livestock owners' livelihood depends on ensuring their livestock is healthy for selling and showing.

The inspection of animals is crucial to maintaining public health. When sick animals are transported, they may quickly spread diseases among other livestock. This risks the products of unhealthy animals reaching the food supply.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

Because animal health inspections are of such great benefit to public health, public funds should be used to pay for them. It is unfair for veterinarians to incur the initial cost of these certificates when their inspections so often provide a public service.

NOTES:

The committee amendment revised the original bill to apply the certificates to all affected animals, not just those in this state.

According to the fiscal note, the bill would have a net positive impact to general revenue of \$388,020 per year. The Legislative Budget Board made this estimate based upon a TAHC proposal to raise the fee to \$4 per health certificate and assumes that the TAHC would issue 4,400 books containing 25 health certificates each.

The companion bill, SB 590 by Jackson, was reported favorably, without amendment, by the Senate Natural Resources Subcommittee on Agriculture and Coastal Resources on March 21 and recommended for the Local and Uncontested Calendar.