

SUBJECT: Establishment of an interagency farm-to-school coordination task force

COMMITTEE: Agriculture and Livestock — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 9 ayes — Gonzalez Toureilles, Anderson, B. Brown, Crabb, Hardcastle, Heflin, Kleinschmidt, Rios Ybarra, Swinford

0 nays

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 16 — 31-0, on Local and Uncontested Calendar

WITNESSES: *(On House companion bill, HB 1840:)*

For — Ken Hodges, Texas Farm Bureau; Linda Murphy; Ronda Rutledge, Sustainable Food Center; *(Registered, but did not testify:* Andrea Abel, Sustainable Food Center; Rob Borowski, Texas Impact; Greg Herzog, Texas Medical Association; Marshall Kenderdine, Texas Pediatric Society; Lisa Lewis-Nourzad, Texas PTA; Ray Prewett, Texas Citrus Mutual, Texas Vegetable Association; Chris Riley; Joel Romo, American Heart Association, Partnership for a Healthy Texas; Jessica Winslow, Sustainable Food Center; Katherine Zackel, Texans Care for Children)

Against — None

On — Maria Guzman, Texas Department of State Health Services; Catherine Wright Steele, Texas Department of Agriculture

DIGEST: SB 1027 would require the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) to establish an interagency farm-to-school coordination task force, which would develop and implement a plan to facilitate the availability of locally grown food products in public schools by December 1, 2009.

The task force would be composed of representatives of TDA, the Texas Education Agency, and the Department of State Health Services, each appointed by its respective commissioner. The agriculture commissioner would appoint a representative from each of several related organizations and groups.

A member would serve at the will of the official who appointed the member, and appointments would have to be made by February 1, 2010. The TDA representative would serve as the presiding officer, and the task force could elect other officers as necessary.

An agency would be responsible for the expenses of a member's service on the task force, and each agency or organization would provide the personnel and resources necessary for its representative. A member of the task force would not be entitled to additional compensation for serving on the task force.

The task force would promote a healthy diet for schoolchildren and the business of small to mid-sized local farms and ranches. Task force duties would include:

- design, review, or updating of education resources on nutrition and food education to be used by schools;
- expanding food-focused experiential education programs;
- identifying funding sources and grants that would allow schools to recover the costs associated with purchasing locally grown food;
- developing a database of available locally grown food products for school food service agencies;
- identifying, designing, or making available training programs to enable local farmers and ranchers to market their products to schools;
- advising schools and school districts on methods by which they could improve facilities to allow for the use of minimally processed, fresh, and locally-produced foods in school meals;
- providing technical assistance to school food service agencies to establish procedures, recipes, menu rotations, and other internal processes that would accommodate the use of locally grown foods; and
- offering skills-development training for school food service employees regarding proper methods of handling, preparing, and serving locally grown foods.

The task force could solicit and accept gifts, grants, and donations from public and private entities, and could use any existing program or procedure to perform its duties.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2009.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

SB 1027 would help connect schools and local farms to improve student nutrition and educate students about the food industry. The bill would promote farm-to-school programs that would increase the quantity of fresh produce and sustainable food products for children, address our children's health issues, and increase the overall demand for fresh, locally grown produce. A task force would be the first step toward removing the many obstacles Texas schools face in providing quality meals and in utilization of local producers.

The bill would help to combat obesity by increasing the quality of healthy food served in schools. Obesity and diet-related diseases are one of the greatest threats to children's health today and are caused in part by a lack of fruit and vegetable consumption. Meals served in schools lack nutrition and often fail to incorporate fresh produce. Forty-two percent of fourth graders in Texas are either obese, overweight, or at risk of becoming overweight, and 70 percent of overweight children will become overweight adults.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

No apparent opposition.

NOTES:

The House companion bill, HB 1840 by Kleinschmidt, was considered in a public hearing by the House Public Education Committee on March 24 and left pending.