

**SUBJECT:** Qualifying raising or keeping bees for agricultural use tax appraisal

**COMMITTEE:** Ways and Means — committee substitute recommended

**VOTE:** 6 ayes — Hilderbran, Christian, Gonzalez, Lyne, Murphy, Woolley  
0 nays  
5 absent — Otto, Elkins, Martinez Fischer, Ritter, Villarreal

**WITNESSES:** For — (*Registered, but did not testify:* Norman Garza, Texas Farm Bureau; Dennis M. Herbert)  
Against — None  
On — Jim Robinson, Texas Association of Appraisal Districts

**BACKGROUND:** Under Tax Code, sec. 23.51, “qualified open-space land” includes land that currently is devoted principally to agricultural use to the degree of intensity generally accepted in the area and that has been devoted principally to agricultural use for five of the preceding seven years.

**DIGEST:** CSHB 2049 would amend the meaning of “agricultural use,” to include the use of land to raise or keep bees for pollination or for the production of human food or other tangible products having a commercial value, provided that the land used was not less than five or more than 20 acres.  
  
The bill would apply to the appraisal of land for a tax year that began on or after the effective date of the bill.  
  
The bill would take effect January 1, 2012.

**SUPPORTERS SAY:** Honey bees are essential to the agriculture industry in Texas. They are responsible for pollinating many different species of plants and crops in Texas, and honey is designated as an agricultural product in the state. Without honey bees, many Texas crops would be at risk, and people who use their land to raise honey bees should be extended the same opportunity

for an agricultural tax exemption as those whose crops rely on honey bees for pollination.

In recent years a disease has wiped out a large part of the honey bee population in the U.S., so much so that some beekeepers now travel with their hives so that crops can be pollinated. CSHB 2049 could encourage more people to take up raising honey bees, for which there is a great need in our state.

The acreage parameters in the bill would help to ensure that people would not exploit the open-space land designation for tax purposes. A minimum of five and maximum of 20 acres were found to be the optimal parameters for a legitimate honey bee operation.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

Under CSHB 2049, the open-space land designation could be exploited for tax purposes. A person who had a single hive on their property should not be able to qualify for an agricultural tax exemption.

According to the fiscal note, the bill could result in reduced property tax appraisals, which would create a cost to local governments from reduced revenue and to the state through the school funding formula.