

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

C.S.S.B. 1027
By: Watson
Agriculture & Rural Affairs
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Committee Report (Substituted)

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Obesity and diet-related diseases are one of the greatest threats to children's health today caused in part by a lack of fruit and vegetable consumption. Meals served in schools are lacking in nutrition and often fail to incorporate fresh produce. Further, Texas schools face many obstacles to improving the quality of meals and in utilizing local producers.

According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service, the small farm is the fastest growing segment in the Texas agricultural industry with farmers seeking new markets to ensure continued economic success.

Farm-to-school programs address our children's health issues and increase the demand for fresh, locally-grown produce.

C.S.S.B. 1027 establishes an interagency farm-to-school coordination task force chaired by representatives of the Texas Department of Agriculture, the Texas Education Agency, the Department of State Health Services, farm organizations, and other relevant public and nonprofit partners. The bill expands and coordinates current systems and creates mechanisms to facilitate local food purchases by school districts, expand food-focused experiential education, and assist farms and schools in overcoming barriers to increase the use of fresh fruits, vegetables, and health practices in school diets.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Chapter 12, Agriculture Code, by adding Section 12.0026, as follows:

Sec. 12.0026. INTERAGENCY FARM-TO-SCHOOL COORDINATION TASK FORCE. (a) Requires the interagency farm-to-school coordination task force (task force), to promote a healthy diet for schoolchildren and the businesses of small to mid-sized local farms and ranches, to develop and implement a plan to facilitate the availability of locally grown food products in public schools.

(b) Provides that the task force is composed of:

(1) a representative of the Department of Agriculture (TDA), appointed by the commissioner of agriculture; the Texas Education Agency (TEA), appointed by the commissioner of education; and the Department of State Health Services (DSHS), appointed by the commissioner of state health services; and

(2) at least one representative of each of the following groups, appointed by the commissioner of agriculture: fruit and vegetable producer organizations, school food service organizations, food distribution businesses, child nutrition and advocacy organizations, parent organizations, educational institutions that conduct research in the areas of

agriculture and nutrition, and health nutrition educators who serve school districts.

(c) Provides that a member of the task force serves at the will of the official who appointed the member.

(d) Provides that the representative of the TDA serves as presiding officer. Authorizes the task force to elect other necessary officers from its members.

(e) Requires the task force to meet at the call of the presiding officer.

(f) Provides that the agency whose commissioner appoints a member is responsible for the expenses of a member's service on the task force. Provides that a member of the task force is not entitled to additional compensation for serving on the task force.

(g) Requires each appropriate agency or group represented on the task force to provide the personnel and resources necessary to implement a task force measure under this section.

(h) Requires the task force, subject to available funding, to:

(1) design education resources, or review or update existing resources, on nutrition and food education to be used by schools and school districts;

(2) expand food-focused experiential education programs;

(3) offer assistance in identifying funding sources and grants that allow schools and school districts to recover the costs associated with purchasing locally grown food products;

(4) develop a database of available locally grown food products for school food service agencies that includes contact and purchasing information for the products;

(5) identify, design, or make available training programs to enable local farmers and ranchers to market their products to schools and school districts, including programs related to crop production, marketing of crops, postharvest handling of crops, food safety, business management, liability and risk management, and other topics deemed appropriate by the task force;

(6) advise schools and school districts on methods by which a school or school district is authorized to improve its facilities to allow for the use of minimally processed, fresh, and locally produced foods in school meals;

(7) provide technical assistance to school food service agencies to establish procedures, recipes, menu rotations, and other internal processes that accommodate the use of locally grown foods in public schools;

(8) offer advanced skills development training to school food service employees regarding the proper methods of handling, preparing, and serving locally grown foods; and

(9) conduct any other activity considered by the task force as necessary to achieve its goals under this section.

(i) Authorizes the task force to solicit and accept gifts, grants, and donations from public and private entities to use for the purposes of this section.

(j) Authorizes the task force to use any existing program or procedure that it determines to be useful in performing its duties under this section.

SECTION 2. (a) Requires TDA, not later than December 1, 2009, to establish the task force as required by Section 12.0026, Agriculture Code, as added by this Act.

(b) Requires the commissioners of TDA, TEA, and DSHS, not later than February 1, 2010, to appoint members of the task force, as required by Section 12.0026, Agriculture Code, as added by this Act.

SECTION 3. Effective date: September 1, 2009.