

**SUBJECT:** Defining and directing study of state agricultural policy

**COMMITTEE:** Agriculture and Livestock — committee substitute recommended

**VOTE:** 8 ayes — Swinford, McReynolds, B. Brown, Christian, Green, Hardcastle, Hupp, C. Jones

0 nays

1 absent — Crownover

**WITNESSES:** For — George Christian, Texas Council of Forest Products Manufacturers; Wil Galloway, Texas Agricultural Aviation Association; Foy Gibson, Texas Wheat Producers Association; Bill Powers, Texas Farm Bureau

Against — None

**DIGEST:** CSHB 2 would add a chapter to Title 1 of the Agriculture Code concerning state agricultural policy. This chapter would be known as the Agriculture and Rural Development Act of 1999.

CSHB 2 would direct the Legislature to conduct a comprehensive study of current agricultural support programs and the state's role in preserving the agriculture industry. The lieutenant governor and the House speaker, assisted by the Texas Department of Agriculture, the comptroller, the Texas Department of Economic Development, and other agencies and institutions of higher education, would determine how to conduct this study.

The bill would define agriculture to include cultivation of the soil to produce crops, horticulture, floriculture, viticulture, forestry, or raising or keeping livestock or poultry.

CSHB 2 would establish seven findings of the Legislature:

- ! agriculture has been a critical element in Texas' economic, cultural, and historical development;
- ! the impact of agriculture in Texas is declining because of urbanization, economic changes, and changes in agriculture;

- ! the effects of those changes are not limited to rural areas and the agricultural community but affect citizens throughout the state;
- ! agriculture is a vital component of a diversified state economy and creates numerous businesses and job opportunities;
- ! agriculture is affected by factors beyond the industry's control, including adverse weather conditions and changes in world commodity markets;
- ! agriculture renews Texas' natural resources through the annual production of crops and livestock; and
- ! to ensure that agriculture remains a vital force, the state must assess the condition of agriculture and the role of state government and develop an agricultural policy to guide governmental actions.

CSHB 2 would set forth 16 policy issues the state would have to consider and address:

- ! water availability, including planning for water supplies and drought preparedness and response;
- ! transportation issues, including the farm-to-market road system and intermodal transportation;
- ! state regulation;
- ! state tax policy;
- ! availability of capital, including state loans or grants authorized by the Texas Constitution;
- ! promotion of Texas agricultural products, including development of domestic and foreign markets;
- ! eradication or control of injurious pests and diseases that affect crops and livestock;
- ! research and education efforts, including financial risk management and education of consumers and public school students;
- ! promotion of efficient use of soil and water resources;
- ! rural economic and infrastructure development;
- ! protection of property rights and the right to farm;
- ! preservation of farmland;
- ! food safety;
- ! efforts to participate in the formulation of federal programs and policies;
- ! promotion of rural fire service; and
- ! promotion of value-added agricultural enterprises.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

Agriculture represents a major segment of Texas' economy, but the state has no clear agenda for agriculture. CSHB 2 would solidify the state's agriculture policies and would require a study of these policies to see what areas need improvement. CSHB 2 would require major state agencies to come together under the leadership of the speaker and the lieutenant governor to study these pressing agricultural issues.

Texas agriculture is in a fragile condition from drought, floods, pests, crop losses, changing federal agriculture policy, lack of marketing, and a general disconnection of urban centers from agriculture. Formulating an agriculture policy similar to the state water policy developed last session would be the best way to guide the industry through these rocky times.

Texas relies on agriculture to provide jobs and an economic base for its citizens. Agriculture is the state's second largest industry and, according to the Texas Department of Agriculture, generates 16 percent of the gross state product or \$45 billion per year.

The proposed agricultural policy study would guide the Legislature's future decisions. Each of the findings and policies in CSHB 2 would address broad concerns in the agriculture industry. It is vitally important for the state to establish and examine its agricultural policy now.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

No apparent opposition.

**NOTES:**

The committee substitute added some definitions of agriculture that were not in the original bill and reworded some findings and policies. The original bill would have required studies by the Texas Department of Agriculture, the Texas Department of Economic Development, and each public senior college and university. The substitute would leave the coordination of the statewide study to the lieutenant governor and the speaker.