

- SUBJECT:** Continuing and revising the Boll Weevil Eradication Foundation
- COMMITTEE:** Agriculture and Livestock — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 7 ayes — Gonzalez Toureilles, Anderson, B. Brown, Crabb, Hardcastle, Kleinschmidt, Swinford
- 0 nays
- 2 absent — Heflin, Rios Ybarra
- WITNESSES:** For — (*Registered, but did not testify*, Ken Hodges, Texas Farm Bureau)
- Against — None
- On — Todd Staples, Texas Department of Agriculture; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Karen Latta, Sunset Advisory Commission)
- BACKGROUND:** The Texas Boll Weevil Eradication Foundation was created in 1993 as a non-profit, quasi-governmental entity charged with eliminating the boll weevil and pink boll worm from Texas cotton fields. The Foundation fulfills its mission by mapping cotton fields, setting and monitoring boll weevil traps, and arranging for aerial pesticide sprays of cotton crops.
- The Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) is responsible for overseeing the foundation. The foundation's board is composed entirely of cotton growers, who are elected from each of 16 cotton-producing zones in the state. The foundation's principal source of funding is from dues collected from an estimated 27,000 cotton growers around the state. Dues amounts are determined based on cotton acreage. The foundation also receives federal and state funding.
- The foundation is under sunset review this session and would be abolished after September 1, 2009, if not continued by the Legislature.
- DIGEST:** HB 1580 would continue the Texas Boll Weevil Eradication Foundation until September 1, 2021.

The foundation could use proceeds from dues collected in one zone to pay eradication-related expenses in another zone. Transfers of proceeds between zones would require the approval of the foundation's board and the TDA commissioner.

The bill also would allow the foundation's board to change the way dues were collected. The board would be required to consult with cotton growers and the technical advisory committee about any changes that would affect the collection of foundation dues. Changes in dues collection would require final approval from the TDA commissioner. Dues would not exceed a maximum amount proposed by the TDA commissioner and approved by a majority vote of cotton growers.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2009.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

Texas produces 30 percent of the cotton in the United States and ranks sixth globally in cotton production. In 2007 alone, the cotton industry contributed an estimated \$11.2 billion to the Texas economy. High yields in cotton production are directly related to the amount of boll weevil infestation in the state's cotton crops. Boll weevils feed on cotton seed and buds and can cause sharp drops in cotton production when they are allowed to multiply. HB 1580 would protect Texas' cotton from the ongoing threat of boll weevils by continuing the essential Texas Boll Weevil Eradication Foundation.

The Texas Boll Weevil Eradication program has been tremendously successful, reducing boll weevil and pink bollworm populations by more than 99 percent since its inception. However, recent hurricanes and tropical storms have led to a resurfacing of boll weevils in the cotton-producing zones along the Texas Gulf Coast. Similarly, the lack of eradication programs in Mexico has resulted in the spread of boll weevils into border regions of the state. Without action, boll weevils could wreak havoc on cotton crops all over the nation.

Current law does not recognize boll weevils as a statewide problem and does not allow for the transfer of fees collected from cotton growers in one area to be used for eradication purposes in another. HB 1580 would correct this short-sighted approach by allowing for more flexibility in the use of fees collected by the foundation. The bill would allow contributions

from farmers in boll weevil-free zones to be used toward eradication efforts in zones with high infestation rates. HB 1580 would grant the foundation the ability to use its funds to protect the state as whole, with the approval of the foundation board and the TDA commissioner.

HB 1580 would save the Foundation money by reducing the administrative and legal costs associated with dues collection. The foundation spends 20 percent of its administrative budget on collecting dues while other states spend less than 1 percent. This is because the foundation pays to mail bills to every cotton grower and pays legal fees for suits against growers who fail to pay. HB 1580 would allow the foundation to adopt a less costly collection system that collected at cotton gins and based amounts on production levels rather than acreage.

By helping to eradicate boll weevils, the bill would help reduce pesticide use around the state. HB 1580 also would save cotton growers money and protect the environment by decreasing the need for the use of pesticides.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

Cotton growers are happy with the current system of dues collection and are wary of the proposed changes in HB 1580. Cotton growers in the Panhandle are paying dues to support eradication efforts in their home zone, not to finance eradication efforts along the border or elsewhere in the state. A majority of the growers in a zone at least should have to approve transfer of assessment funds collected in that zone to another zone.

NOTES:

The companion bill, SB 1004 by Hegar, was reported favorably, without amendment, by the Senate Government Organization Committee on March 18 and recommended for the Local and Uncontested Calendar.