

SUBJECT: Requiring honey labeled “Texas honey” to be exclusively Texas-made

COMMITTEE: Agriculture & Livestock — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 9 ayes — Cain, Anderson, Bernal, Goodwin, Harris, Kitzman, Rosenthal, Thimesch, Wilson
0 nays

WITNESSES: For — Judith McGeary, Farm and Ranch Freedom Alliance; Chris Moore
Against — Tim Burleson, Burleson’s Honey
On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Kevin Hale, Libertarian Party of Texas)

DIGEST: HB 590 would require any product labeled as “Texas honey” to be made exclusively from honey produced in Texas apiaries.
The bill would take effect September 1, 2023.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 590 would ensure transparency between honey producers and consumers by requiring labels to accurately reflect the components of a product labeled with “Texas honey.” Currently, honey producers can legally mislabel products that are not exclusively composed of Texas honey. This misleads consumers and can have health consequences, as some people use Texas honey to acclimate their bodies to local allergens. HB 590 would protect consumers by allowing them to confidently purchase Texas products and know what they are consuming. A more genuine label could increase the value of Texas honey and have a positive economic impact.
HB 590 would not prevent anyone from selling blended or foreign honey products in Texas but would preserve the integrity of the state’s brand by regulating what could be labeled as “Texas Honey.”

Concerns about enforcement of the bill could be addressed using DNA research to more accurately identify the honey's origin.

CRITICS
SAY:

HB 590 could damage Texas honey businesses by disrupting long-established business practices. The bill also would not account for the impact of the unpredictable and often restrictive conditions of Texas weather on honey production.

Honey produced in Texas can be high in moisture, making it more likely to spoil. Producers will sometimes blend Texas honey with other honeys, which helps to better preserve the product. Due to increasingly unpredictable weather in Texas, other honeys are sometimes unavailable within the state and have to be sourced elsewhere. HB 590 would penalize producers who use small amounts of honey from other states to avoid spoiling. Additionally, HB 590 would overregulate Texas agriculture and disrupt marketing practices which have been used by Texas beekeepers for generations. The bill also would not provide adequate time for producers to adjust their marketing, as most honey produced in Texas is not available until after July of each crop season, which is only a few months before the bill would take effect.

While HB 590 would not be beneficial to honey producers, the bill could be improved by amending the word "exclusively" to "predominantly," which would allow for small amounts of out-of-state honey to be used to preserve Texas honey.

OTHER
CRITICS
SAY:

HB 590 would not provide a method by which non-Texas honey could be identified. Although the bill would benefit the Texas honey industry, there should be specific enforcement mechanisms to ensure its effectiveness.