

RURAL TEXAS AND AGRICULTURE

Texas Democrats understand the obstacles faced in rural Texas, and we are committed to providing our rural communities with the tools necessary to maintain their quality of life and create enhanced opportunities for future generations of rural Texans. All areas of Texas need access to natural and economic resources to grow and thrive, yet rural communities' assets are under increased pressure from forces beyond their control. We support rural communities in their efforts to protect the materials necessary for their economic livelihood.

Water is a necessity for both the private individual, agricultural business, and emergency management. We believe that it is essential that Texas meet its citizens water needs, especially in the face of climate change, ongoing droughts, and threatened aquifers. In order to do so:

- create a substantive plan to mediate the threat of mega droughts that is plausible and environmentally sensible;
- create programs for both industry, agriculture, and individuals to ration water in times of extended drought;
- preserve our environment from damages from well development;

- establish sensible and effective water conservation districts in rural areas;
- create groundwater recharge programs, build and maintain desalination plants with proper salt water concentrate sequestration programs;
- promote rainwater reclamation programs to use in traditional gray water systems;
- control stormwater runoff in order to slow erosion and keep water systems healthy;
- recycle hydro fracking and other high volume industrial water use systems through subsidies if needed;
- provide grants-in-aid for rural communities to construct and maintain reverse osmosis plants, and train personnel to staff them.

Texas Democrats understand that the backbone of our food supply should be local farms, and not massive industrial farming. There can be a healthy balance between ensuring that our food is safe for consumers to eat without any long term health effects, and allowing farmers to use petrochemicals/pesticides/antibiotics to ensure good crop and livestock yields. There must also be a concerted effort by the Texas Department of Agriculture to support the local farmer over the industrial. In order to do so:

- decrease the cost and bureaucracy to small scale farming associated with becoming USDA Organic certified;
- strongly encourage large scale agribusiness to limit blanket use of petrochemicals on produce especially susceptible to absorption (strawberries, tomatoes, etc.);
- pass a farm bill that subsidizes the local farmer over agribusiness;
- support the legalization of hemp for agricultural purposes;
- establish consistent policy with respect to support for land conservation easements to allow rural landowners to access private foundations and government matching funds for preservation of open space and family land holdings;
- work with the Texas Parks and Wildlife to manage the wild hog population, and provide small scale farmers subsidies to construct deer/hog fences using local labor;
- in coordination with the TDA, establish effective global and local marketing programs using updated technology to sell products;
- offer GLOBAL G.A.P certifications to all Texas producers at a reduced rate;
- pass legislation to improve weights and measures at gas pumps and market scales;
- support USDA efforts to toughen meat industry antitrust laws to protect the small scale farmer from large scale agribusiness;
- pass federal farm legislation that establishes minimum price support levels and economic protections for family farms;
- strengthen and support OSHA health & safety regulations in the industrial meat-packing industry;
- protect family farms from predatory lending, and allow a greater ability for the individual to refinance farm related business debt;
- preserve proper use of agricultural property tax exemptions and restructuring the current land appraisal system to insure a fair property tax system for all Texans;
- demand the full cooperation by Texas state officials and agencies, including the TDA, in international agricultural activities;
- forbid the patenting of any genetic material;
- establish protections that safeguard small scale farmers from lawsuits filed against them for the accidental use of patented/proprietary seeds, and allow them to collect seed from season to season regardless of their proprietary nature;

- expand programs that allow consumers to use WIC/SNAP/ETB at local farmers markets;
- regulate the sale of horses to Mexico for the purpose of consumption, and ban the round-up of wild horses for slaughter;
- support the labeling of GMO products; and
- move to ban neonicotinoids, a pesticide chemical linked to massive honeybee die-offs. Loss of bees jeopardize one-third of the U.S. fruit and vegetable supply; some 140 fruits and vegetables depend on bee pollination.

Access to quality healthcare in rural Texas is critical; many areas in rural Texas are underserved because of budget cuts from the state legislature. In order to remedy this:

- move to construct level 2 trauma centers and hospitals, with women's health facilities, in underserved areas with a supporting populations;
- create programs to incentivize physicians, nurses, nurse practitioner, and EMT's to work and stay in underserved areas
- give grants-in-aid and zero interest loans to rural counties to construct public clinics and hospitals; and
- Encourage installation of video teleconference systems in public hospitals to allow specialist in higher level hospitals to quickly communicate to outlying facilities or to remote patients; and
- expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act guidelines, in order to alleviate the pressure to close additional rural hospitals.

Education in Texas is an important priority in rural areas. Lack of jobs and economic opportunities has forced many talented young people to leave rural communities. To remedy this, Texas Democrats support policies that would:

- incentivize teachers to work in underserved communities;
- partner high schools with local business and community colleges to allow students to receive school credits and industry certifications from apprenticeships in vocational trade programs;
- oppose the Republican call for the consolidation of rural school districts;
- support community based schools over large, centralized school districts in rural areas;
- utilizing remote learning and distance education to facilitate learning in rural areas, within the public school system;
- free vaccinations for low-income families; and
- maintain the Top 10% rule that levels the opportunity playing field for rural kids.

The founders of Texas and America understood that the protection of personal property is a cornerstone of freedom and liberty. The use of eminent domain for the benefit of the corporation would be something that they would not stand for, and the Texas Democratic Party will not either. Texas Democrats understand that seeking personal property should be in cases where extreme action is needed. In regards to eminent domain:

- eminent domain should be used as a last resort, and only for programs such as public highways, hospitals, and other programs that serve the public interest;
- those facing condemnation must be provided with quality legal representation, and the process of said condemnation must be transparent;

- all pipeline requests to the Texas Railroad Commission need to be independently reviewed in coordination with the State Office of Administrative Hearings, with the right to appeal said findings to a local judge;
- amend the Texas Constitution and relevant laws to eliminate giving private entities commonly understood governmental authority to exercise the powers of eminent domain in condemnation of private property; and
- before eminent domain condemnation occurs, it must be shown in a state court proceeding that it is, in fact, a legitimate public use and public purpose underlying the proposed seizure of private property.