



SUSTAINABLE FOOD POLICY BOARD



MARLA CAMP, CHAIRPERSON

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April 19, 2010

City of Austin Water Utility
Attn: Rusty Cobern
625 E. 10th Street, Suite 500
Austin, TX 78701

Dear Mr. Cobern:

This document includes recommendations from the Sustainable Food Policy Board (SFPB) in response to your request for input regarding criteria for exemption from irrigation meter tap fees for community gardens and urban farms in reference to resolution 20091015-023.

We look forward to continuing to work together with Austin Water Utilities (AWU) on this resolution and welcome your feedback.

Sincerely,

Marla Camp, Chair
Sustainable Food Policy Board

cc: H.G. (Bert) Lumbreras, Assistant City Manager
David Lurie, Director, Austin/Travis County HHSD
Vince Cobalis, Asst. Director HHSD, Executive Liaison
Sherri Fleming, Executive Director, TC HHSD & VS

Sustainable Food Policy Board recommendations to Austin Water Utility

Requirements for Exemption from Irrigation Meter Tap Fees For Agricultural Customers (Urban Farms and Community Gardens)

March 5, 2010

Eligibility Guidelines for Fee Waiver

A. Size/land area requirements

Community Gardens

We recommend that all community gardens, regardless of size, be considered for the irrigation meter tap fee waiver if they are affiliated with an existing non-profit or community organization and have an established governing body.

Urban Farms

Farms operating within the City of Austin's Water Utility zone, whether on public or private land, are eligible to receive the fee waiver for all fees pertaining to an irrigation meter, and are exempt from wastewater charges, if they have a minimum of a half acre in food production. Vegetables, fruits, and herbs must be grown for commercial production. According to by AWU representative Rusty Cobern, the irrigation rate for agricultural customers will be the lower commercial water usage rate.

B. Longevity requirement

In order to ensure that the community benefits from urban food production, and to avoid potential misuse of the fee waiver, the Sustainable Food Policy Board recommends that fee waiver recipients commit to agricultural production for a minimum of three years. Reinforcement of this requirement, if adopted by AWU, could include any of the following methods:

1. The fee waiver recipient pays the fees initially, and receives reimbursement upon completion of the three year period
2. Fees are waived initially. If recipient does not use the land for agricultural production for the full three years, the meter installation fee will be charged retroactively.
3. A deposit of \$500 is due upon installation of the irrigation meter, and is refunded after three years of commercial food production.

C. Watering Methods stipulation

Community Gardens should follow best practices in water usage, including rainwater harvesting. In order to qualify for AWU's irrigation meter tap fee waiver, community gardens must adhere to strict water conservation practices, including the following:

- gardeners must remain on premises while garden is watered, and not leave water unattended
- garden or gardeners must maintain hose-end valves on all hoses
- minimize water loss due to evaporation by watering in the early morning or late evening
- mulching and hand-watering plants selectively as needed (not to exceed one hour)
- gardeners must only water within designated plot and must not allow excess watering that may result in run-off

Urban Farms receiving the irrigation meter tap fee waiver are expected to use conservative watering practices, including but not limited to the use of drip irrigation, early morning/night watering, mulching of the soil, etc. Hydroponic growers will be considered for the fee waiver as long as they employ conservative water usage.