



BOARD/COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board

Recommendation Number: 20250210-04D: Support for Farmland Acquisition and Preservation in Travis County

WHEREAS, the 2022 City of Austin State of the Food System Report indicates that less than 0.6% of the food consumed in Travis County is produced locally, and that approximately 16.8 acres of farmland are lost daily to development pressures, underscoring the critical need for dedicated agricultural land preservation efforts; and

WHEREAS, land in Austin-Travis County is continuing to increase in value and decrease in quantity, it is imperative to act quickly as the cost of action will only increase over time; and

WHEREAS, agricultural lands are vital to local food security, environmental sustainability, emergency preparedness, and climate resilience; and

WHEREAS, the Travis County Commissioners Court passed a Resolution of Support for the Austin-Travis County Food Plan on October 29, 2024, whose goals and strategies prioritize addressing local food security and environmental sustainability; and

WHEREAS, the Austin/Travis County Food Plan's Goal 1 prioritizes expanding community food production, preserving agricultural lands, and increasing the amount of farmland dedicated to regenerative food production long-term in Austin and Travis County; and

WHEREAS, Strategy 1.1 of the Food Plan calls for the preservation of land for food production in Central Texas through conservation easements, fee-simple purchases, and land-banking, ensuring that farmland remains dedicated to agricultural use; and

WHEREAS, Strategy 1.2 directs the City of Austin and Travis County to pursue capital funding sources to finance the conservation of land for agricultural use through conservation easements or direct purchases; and

WHEREAS, Travis County has successfully managed agricultural leases on 845 acres of agricultural land through the Parks Land Stewardship Program; and

WHEREAS, Travis County currently operates a [Conservation Easement Program](#) allowing landowners to preserve agricultural, natural, or cultural resources while retaining ownership of their property. This program, funded by voter-approved bond funds and supplemented by donations, has successfully

preserved significant tracts of land and helps protect vital resources such as watersheds, wildlife habitats, and agricultural lands; and

WHEREAS, the Conservation Easement Program has been a key tool for Travis County in its efforts to protect land from development, with more than \$24.9 million approved by voters between 2011 and 2017 for the purchase of easements. The program prioritizes properties in conservation corridors and those with significant environmental or agricultural value, aligning with the broader goals of the Austin/Travis County Food Plan to protect farmland for regenerative agriculture and promote local food systems; and

WHEREAS, the success of the Conservation Easement Program demonstrates that Travis County has the infrastructure in place to effectively support farmland preservation initiatives. This program's focus on protecting working farms and ranches directly contributes to the County's goals of promoting sustainable agriculture, local food production, and climate resilience; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board recommends that Travis County expand and build upon the success of the Conservation Easement Program and the Parks Land Stewardship Program by establishing dedicated funding and a countywide land acquisition and preservation strategy. This strategy could prioritize the protection of agricultural lands at risk of development, with a focus on supporting farmers and ranchers who employ sustainable and regenerative practices; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board recommends Travis County create a revolving loan fund or other funding mechanism to further support the purchase of conservation easements and agricultural land preservation, similar to existing bond-funded initiatives, to preserve agricultural land in perpetuity through either simple fee purchase or conservation easements. The County's leadership in helping create a working lands fund could also attract private investment and philanthropy funds, with the potential to scale the impact of the County's investments; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board encourages Travis County direct County staff to undertake an inventory of land that could be targeted for acquisition, preservation, and used for agricultural purposes. Acquired lands could be protected in perpetuity through conservation easements and then sold or leased to farmers or organizations producing food for the community, prioritizing those that utilize regenerative production practices; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that the Board recommends identifying existing County-owned lands that could be converted to agriculture. This land could include public right of way, floodplain buyout, or land that is slated for long-term development.

Date of Approval: February 10th, 2025

Record of the vote: 11-0-0

Vote in Favor: Andrea Abel, Lisa Barden, Marissa Bell, Mark Bethell, Joi Chevalier, Beth Corbett, Hilda Gutierrez, Kacey Hanson, Natalie Poulos, Matt Simon, Andy Smith

Vote Against: none

Abstaining: none

Absent: Larry Franklin

Attest:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edwina Martinez". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.

City of Austin, Office of Climate Action and Resilience, Food Policy Manager/ ATCFPB Staff Liaison