



RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL

Joint Sustainability Committee

Recommendation 20251119-010: Support for investing in farmland preservation and access in Austin and Travis County

Date of Approval: November 19, 2025

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 pressure, underscoring the critical need for agricultural land preservation efforts; and

WHEREAS, farmland in Central Texas is continuing to increase in value and decrease in quantity, the opportunity to preserve a meaningful amount of farmland will disappear as development spreads and farmland is permanently converted to other uses; and

WHEREAS, it is recognized by the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact and demonstrated by the Carbon Cycle Institute that agricultural land managed according to regenerative principles is vital to local food security, watershed protection, emergency preparedness, and climate resilience; and

WHEREAS, farmland preservation supports multiple City priorities, including increasing local food production, improving water quality, wildlife habitat preservation, ecosystem biodiversity, stormwater management, carbon sequestration, and recreation; and

WHEREAS, the Austin/Travis County Food Plan, approved by Austin City Council in October 2024, includes strategic, measurable, and time-bound goals and strategies to strengthen food security, promote environmental sustainability, and address climate change; and

WHEREAS, Goal 1 of the Austin/Travis County Food Plan prioritizes expanding community food production, preserving agricultural lands, and increasing the amount of farmland dedicated to regenerative food production 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 of the Food Plan directs the City of Austin to pursue capital funding sources to finance the preservation of land for agricultural use through conservation easements or direct purchases; and

WHEREAS, preserving agricultural land also supports the goals of the Austin Climate Equity Plan by promoting sustainable land use and reducing carbon footprints through localized food production; and

WHEREAS, Natural Systems Goal 2 of the Austin Climate Equity Plan aims to protect 500,000 acres of farmland across the five-county region through legal conservation or regenerative agriculture programs by 2030; and

WHEREAS, the ATCFPB passed Recommendation Number: 20250310-06A: Support for Agricultural Land Acquisition and Preservation in March 2025 encouraging the city to increase staff capacity to work on land preservation, complete a full inventory of land that the city already owns that could be used for agriculture, and establish a revolving loan fund for farmland acquisition; and

WHEREAS, Travis County operates the Conservation Easement Program which has protected over 15,000 acres from development. With the capacity to hold conservation easements for no additional charge, the Conservation Easement 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 Wilbarger Creek Conservation Alliance, in partnership with Travis County and the Hill Country Conservancy, established a conservation easement for the Brockenbrough Ranch and Three Creeks Farm as part of Travis County's ongoing conservation efforts in the Wilbarger Creek area, demonstrating the effectiveness of regional partnerships in protecting working agricultural lands and advancing the goals of the Austin–Travis County Food Plan; and

WHEREAS, the low cost leases on conservation easement land at Three Creeks Farm have enabled the establishment of three distinct urban farming operations, including an organization that supports refugee farmers, a women-led farmers' cooperative, and a regenerative poultry operation that collectively produce over 80,000 pounds of food per year, providing local food access and affordable land access for emerging producers; and

WHEREAS, the Travis County Conservation Easement Program acquisitions, funded primarily through previous bond measures, has fully allocated its available bond funding and therefore currently lacks financial capacity to acquire new conservation easements without additional investment, it retains the administrative capacity to hold and manage easements established through external partnerships; and

WHEREAS, the City has a history of assessing the suitability of land for agriculture and leasing city-owned property to local organizations such as Urban Roots that has contributed to increasing local food production by an average of 20,000 lbs. annually; and

WHEREAS, preserving farmland across the region—not just within Austin and Travis County—will directly benefit Austin residents by increasing local food supply, improving resilience, and strengthening food security. This calls for a regional approach that leverages partnerships and shared resources.

WHEREAS, the Central Texas Food Bank (CTFB) is forming the Central Texas Regional Food Systems Council to support regional coordination on food related issues including farmland preservation; and

WHEREAS, federally funded programs such as the United States Department of Agriculture-Natural Resource Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) exist to invest in conservation easements through regional partnerships between municipal/county governments, nonprofits, and land trusts; and

WHEREAS, the Texas NRCS RCPP program has ten active agreements in effect in Texas including a \$23.2 million award for the Hill Country Headwaters Conservation Initiative (HCHCI), for which the City of Austin Watershed Protection Department and Travis County are partners; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board recommends that Austin City Council earmark a one-time allocation of \$15 Million in the 2026 General Obligation Bond to pilot a farmland preservation program for regenerative agriculture, facilitating farmland protection either through conservation easements or through fee simple purchase that could be leased to agricultural producers.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board recommends that Austin City Council direct city staff to work collaboratively with regional partners including Travis County, regional municipal and county governments, and local non-profit partners to pilot a regional approach to farmland preservation.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board recommends that Austin City Council direct city staff to establish an interlocal agreement with Travis County to designate Travis County's Conservation Easement Program as the administrator of conservation easements that the city acquires in order to reduce administrative costs for the city.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Austin-Travis County Food Policy Board recommends that Austin City Council direct city staff to collaborate with regional partners to apply for and secure funding through the USDA-NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) to leverage funding allocated in the 2026 General Obligation Bond for the purpose of preserving agricultural land.

Motioned By: Andrey Smith

Seconded By: Haris Qureshi

Vote: 9-0


For: Chris Maxwell-Gaines, Haris Qureshi, Anna Scott, Shelby Orme, Chris Campbell, Varun Prasad, Diana Wheeler, Rodrigo Leal, Andy Smith

Against: None

Abstain: Kaiba White

Off the dais: Chris Crookham, Charlotte Davis, Jon Salinas

Absent: Aaron Gonzales, Josh Hiller

Attest:  Rohan Lilauwala, Staff Liaison