



February 5, 2021 | Regular Session, Issue 4 | 87th Regular Session

Every Friday, this newsletter will keep you up to speed on some of the legislation important to Texas Farm Bureau members that Austin staff are following.

Please do not hesitate to contact the appropriate staff with any questions.

2021 Texas Farm Bureau Virtual Leadership Conference: Grassroots Advocacy Persists Through COVID Restrictions

Texas Farm Bureau (TFB) conducted its Virtual Leadership Conference on Tuesday, Feb. 9. The leadership conference, hosted by TFB President Russell Boening, was different from typical leadership conferences during past sessions. Regardless, it served as a testimony to our resilience and determination to continue advocating for TFB members, its beliefs and the rural way of life.

During the webinar, attendees heard from several legislators on a variety of topics affecting agriculture and rural communities in Texas. Discussion covered eminent domain reform, broadband access for rural Texas, groundwater and questions raised by the more than 200 attendees across the state. Legislators also shared their personal perspectives and hopes for the 87th legislative session.

The TFB Legislative team in Austin shared updates on legislation regarding TFB's priority issues. Also presented was information regarding COVID-19 procedures and protocols for visiting the Capitol.

The leadership conference left all with a sense of excitement and anticipation for this most unique legislative session. TFB is thankful for the visits with the legislators and for their continued support and role in echoing the voice of Texas agriculture.

[CLICK HERE](#) to view the video of the Virtual Leadership Conference.

Legislative Update

Water

SB 601: Relating to the creation and activities of the Texas Produced Water Consortium.

[Sen. Perry, Charles \(R\)](#)

Perry's SB 601 proposes the creation of the Texas Produced Water Consortium, which would unite state and private resources to study the economics and technology of *produced water*—which is water that emerges from the ground during oil and gas production.

The Consortium would be made up of a board, a host university and private entities. The bill proposes that the board be composed of representatives from:

- the Railroad Commission of Texas,
- the State Energy Conservation Office,
- the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality,
- the Texas Economic Development and Tourism Office and
- the Texas Water Development Board.

The host university position would be assigned to Texas Tech University, which would be responsible for providing staff and resources to the Consortium and soliciting participation from

- the oil and gas industry,
- water transport and storage companies and
- agricultural, municipal and other water users.

Private entities would be involved by providing sponsorships and funding in exchange for the Consortium's research and development data. The remaining funding would come from gifts and grants. The bill specifically prohibits the Consortium from receiving state money.

An initial report from the Consortium must include recommendations to the legislature to enable use of produced water, a pilot project for a state produced water facility and an economic model for using produced water in Texas.

TFB **supports** SB 601. (TFB 2021 Policy: Water Management 155, Page 78, Lines 146 – 147.)

Rural Connectivity

[HB 1511](#): Relating to the creation of a connectivity office within the Office of the Governor.

[Rep. Button, Angie Chen \(R\)](#)

Button's HB 1511 proposes creating a "Connectivity Office" within the Office of the Governor to assist the governor's broadband development council with statewide planning. The bill proposes that this office's main purpose and responsibility is to create and maintain a map that shows a full picture of our state's high-speed internet capability. Based on existing and planned infrastructure, the map would show areas that have high-speed internet, those areas that do not have high-speed internet and those areas that will have infrastructure capable of supporting high-speed internet.

Although this bill does not propose funding or solutions for rural connectivity inequality, it focuses on creating a fair and efficient plan before our state devotes resources into the issue.

TFB **supports** HB 1511. (TFB 2021 Policy: Rural Living 183, Pages 116-117, Lines 47-54.)

[SB 618](#): Relating to the creation of the Texas Telecommunications Infrastructure Board.

[Sen. Gutierrez, Roland \(D\)](#)

Gutierrez's SB 618 proposes the creation of a new state agency: the "Texas Telecommunications Infrastructure Board." The proposed board would be required to create and consult with an advisory council on rural broadband service. The board would also be required to make formal recommendations in a report to the governor every other year. The first report to the governor must include:

- recommendations for rural broadband infrastructure,
- an analysis and model of high-cost infrastructure issues,
- an analysis of statewide coordination of broadband infrastructure and
- a plan to increase rural utilization of current and planned broadband service.

TFB **supports** SB 618. (TFB 2021 Policy: Rural Living 183, Pages 116-117, Lines 47-54.)

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