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## **Busy Legislative Session Includes Issues That Could Impact Dairy Industry**

By Darren Turley  
Executive Director, Texas Association of Dairymen

When the 82nd session of the Texas Legislature convenes in January, lawmakers' daunting agenda will include several issues of interest to the dairy industry. As an advocate for the industry and our state's dairy farmers for 20 years, the Texas Association of Dairymen (TAD) will be monitoring these issues closely.

Not only does TAD want to ensure the dairy industry continues to be a strong segment of state and local economies, but we want to support the more than 550 dairy farm families who work hard every day to feed their fellow Texans.

### **Budget**

The consuming issue of the 82nd legislature is expected to be how to make up a budget shortfall that Austin insiders believe could be as much as \$24 billion for the 2012/2013 biennium. The current state biennium budget totals \$182 billion. The shortfall stems from decreases in sales and franchise tax revenue matched with other structural issues such as the state's expenditures to provide for lower local property taxes. State leadership already has ordered agencies to cut 10 percent from their 2012/2013 budgets, on top of the 7.5 percent they asked to be cut from the current budgets.

Many industry specific tax exemptions are being reviewed and could be drastically cut or amended.

### **Raw Milk**

TAD will oppose bills filed by an East Texas senator and representative to ease restrictions on raw milk sales. Under current law, a producer cannot sell unpasteurized milk off his premises, meaning a consumer has to go to the farm. The bills would allow a producer who obtains a permit to sell raw milk or raw milk products at the permit holder's place of business; the consumer's home; or at a retail location such as a farmers' market where the producer sells directly to the consumer.

TAD believes that consuming raw milk or raw milk products is a serious health risk, a view supported by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other numerous notable scientific, government and health organizations. TAD has developed a raw milk fact sheet that can be found on our website, [www.milk4texas.org](http://www.milk4texas.org).

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## **Farm and Industry Practices**

A bill has been filed to create the Texas Livestock Care Standards Advisory Committee. The bill, similar to legislation introduced in other states, is aimed at developing standards governing livestock and poultry care, food safety, local food availability, food affordability and best farm management practices.

The Committee would have 15 members consisting of family farmers, veterinarians, food safety expert, local humane society member, statewide farm organizations, dean of a Texas agriculture college, Texas consumer representatives and representatives from the agriculture industry at large.

## **Texas Sunset Commission Reports**

Several policy change recommendations for state agencies are expected as the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission finalizes reports for several key agencies of interest to TAD, including the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board and Texas Water Development Board.

Under a Sunset review, an agency is abolished unless legislation is passed to continue its functions. This gives lawmakers the opportunity to closely examine each agency and make fundamental changes to its mission or operations.

## **Immigration Reform**

Several bills already filed address illegal immigration. Many of these bills either include or are expected to include e-verification of status and sanctions against an employer who knowingly hires an illegal alien.

You can learn more about TAD and its legislative agenda by visiting its website at [www.milk4texas.org](http://www.milk4texas.org) or by following TAD on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/texasdairy](https://www.facebook.com/texasdairy).

*Darren Turley is the executive director of the Texas Association of Dairymen, Inc. ([www.milk4texas.org](http://www.milk4texas.org)), a non-profit corporation comprised of dairy cooperatives whose members are individual milk producers in Texas. Follow TAD on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/texasdairy](https://www.facebook.com/texasdairy).*

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