

BILL ANALYSIS

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Engrossed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Situated in Parmer County, on the high plains of the Llano Estacado, the town of Friona has thrived as an agricultural center since its founding a century ago.

To celebrate the community's notable ranching and farming heritage, civic leaders have inaugurated a highly successful annual event that showcases three of the area's primary agricultural products. Sponsored by the Friona Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture and the Texas Cooperative Extension of Parmer County, Friona's Cheeseburger Cook-Off and Festival brings together an appreciative throng to enjoy one of America's most popular meals, a hearty sandwich that reflects the area's bountiful harvests of wheat and its robust beef and dairy industries. Among the pillars that have supported the Parmer County economy, cattle raising was the first to be established; ranching was introduced within a decade of the county's creation in 1876, shortly after the Panhandle was opened for settlement. In 1882, the still-unpopulated county formed part of the 3 million acres of public land that was acquired by a group of private investors, the Capitol Syndicate, in exchange for financing construction of the new state capitol; until it could sell the land to settlers, the syndicate operated its vast holdings as a cattle ranch, the legendary XIT.

By the late 1890s, steps were being taken to foster permanent settlement in the county; in 1898, the Pecos and Northern Texas Railway Company was chartered to connect Amarillo and the Texas-New Mexico state line, and several switches and town sites were developed along the route of the new railroad. Friona, now the largest town in the county, originated as a shipping station and was subsequently platted in 1906. During the first three decades of the 20th century, Friona saw a growing influx of farmers and the conversion of much former rangeland into cultivated fields. Contributing to the success of ranchers and farmers alike was the ready availability of flat, affordable land, a surface soil of sandy loam, and a favorable climate; those who have made their living from that land have relied on both irrigation, which increased dramatically during the 1950s, and dry-land farming techniques. Since the 1980s, Parmer County has ranked as one of the leading agricultural counties in Texas, and its prominence has rested in fair measure on the contributions of dedicated, forward-looking farmers and cattlemen around Friona. In addition to well-established, mixed-crop production, this area enjoys a rapidly expanding dairy industry, with some seven dairies in operation and six more under construction as of June 2006. Area cattle- and farm-related businesses include one of the largest plants in the meat-packing industry and substantial feed-manufacturing and grain-storage facilities, as well as cold-storage plants, farm-equipment companies, and a newly opened cheese factory.

With such a history and economic foundation, citizens of Friona knew they had every ingredient they needed to host a classically American jamboree; when the town's Cheeseburger Cook-Off and Festival debuted at Friona City Park on July 15, 2006, during the community's centennial year, 16 teams took to their grills in a spirited contest for culinary laurels; in a show of broad-based support for the event, Cargill Meat Solutions donated beef for 1,000 patties, Mrs. Baird's donated the buns, the cheese factory donated the cheese, Spring Lake Farms donated potatoes for the fries, and members of the Lions Club cooked the fries. If the Cheeseburger Cook-Off and Festival serves as a cheerful salute to Friona's deep agricultural roots and thriving modern-day enterprises, it also typifies, in its character as a great, convivial backyard barbecue, the warm, neighborly spirit of this close-knit community, and it is fitting that the cheeseburger's symbolic value for Friona be appropriately recognized.

RESOLVED

That the 80th Legislature of the State of Texas hereby designate Friona as the official Cheeseburger Capital of Texas.