

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

H.B. 2018

By: Ashby; Flores (Hinojosa, Adam)
Water, Agriculture and Rural Affairs

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Engrossed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Texas is experiencing a rapid loss of agricultural land due to residential, commercial, and infrastructure development. Since 1997, the state has lost nearly 3.7 million acres of working farmland and ranchland, with over 68,000 acres lost in the Rio Grande Valley alone. The most consistent loss has occurred in grazing lands, which are crucial to Texas' cattle industry.

Several factors are driving this trend: population growth, rising property taxes, and increasing land values have made it difficult for families to start, maintain, or expand agricultural operations. In many cases, multigenerational ranches are being sold and subdivided for housing or retail development. When land is lost to non-agricultural use, it's not just farmers and ranchers who suffer—all Texans are impacted through reduced local food production, environmental degradation, and the loss of open spaces and wildlife habitats.

H.B. 2018 amends the Texas Farm and Ranch Lands Conservation Program to ensure that conservation easements supported by the program enable landowners to continue the agricultural use of their land.

H.B. 2018 amends current law relating to the Texas Farm and Ranch Lands Conservation Program.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Section 84.002(1), Parks and Wildlife Code, to redefine "agricultural conservation easement."

SECTION 2. Amends Section 84.009(a), Parks and Wildlife Code, to authorize the Texas Farm and Ranch Lands Conservation Council (council) to take certain actions, including ensuring that agricultural conservation easements purchased under Chapter 84 (Texas Farm and Ranch Lands Conservation Program) are not inconsistent with certain objectives, including the maintenance of the land's agricultural or timber use, and to make nonsubstantive changes.

SECTION 3. Amends Section 84.010, Parks and Wildlife Code, to require the council to give priority to applications that protect and maintain the agricultural or timber productivity of lands that are susceptible to development, including subdivision and fragmentation, and to adopt a scoring process to be used in evaluating applications that consider certain factors, including the land's agricultural or timber productivity, and to make a nonsubstantive change.

SECTION 4. Effective date: September 1, 2025.