



TEXAS ASSOCIATION OF DAIRYMEN

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DAIRY INDUSTRY WILL BE WATCHING LEGISLATURE CLOSELY

By John Cowan

Now that the curtain has risen on the 79th Texas Legislature, the state's dairymen will be among those watching closely to see how their profession could change in the course of 140 days.

During that relatively short period of time – the length of a regular legislative session – the 181 state lawmakers will consider upwards of 5,000 pieces of proposed legislation. Although much fewer will survive to become law, any one of those could have a profound impact on the way the dairy industry operates in Texas.

And that could have a tremendous impact on dozens of local communities across Texas that depend on the dairy industry and its related businesses.

If you live in one of those communities, what happens to dairies in the coming months at the Capitol should be as much a concern to you as to the state's 800 dairy operators themselves.

After all, it's the Legislature that governs taxes, environmental regulations and many other issues that profoundly impact how milk, ice cream, butter and other dairy products are produced in Texas.

Because the Texas Association of Dairymen recognizes the power of the Legislature, its representatives are on-the-ground year-round advocating on behalf of the industry. TAD's presence in the halls of the Capitol has intensified in recent weeks in preparation for the legislative session, and we won't rest until June 19, the last day Gov. Rick Perry can sign or veto any bills passed during the session which ends May 30.

At this time, it's too early to know which specific pieces of legislation will affect the dairy industry. But we are keeping our eyes on a few issues.

First, school finance reform. Lawmakers have been ordered by a state judge to find a new way to pay for our state's public education system, which currently is financed through property taxes. All industries – not just ours – are watching to see whether they will be the target of new taxes as lawmakers reduce the school finance system's reliance on residential property taxes.

At the same time, lawmakers will be on the lookout for new money, definitely for education and perhaps for other budgetary needs. Last session, Texas faced a \$10 billion budget shortfall. At this time, the comptroller has not yet released her revenue outlook for the upcoming biennium.

TAD and other agriculture industries will be vigilantly protecting existing agricultural exemptions that allow us to be able to afford to live and work on the land.

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Texas dairymen want to remain able to serve the people of Texas. In return, we hope Texas dairy consumers will come to our defense, if needed, during the legislative session.

TAD encourages all Texans to monitor the actions of the legislators they elected by visiting www.capitol.state.tx.us

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