

HOUSE BILL 595

By Clemmons

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 4;  
Title 43; Title 44 and Title 53, relative to  
sustainable agriculture.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

WHEREAS, Tennessee is one of the most agriculturally diverse states in the nation; and

WHEREAS, the importance of agriculture to the state's economy is evidenced on the State Seal, prominently displaying "Agriculture" above "Commerce" and below the images of a plow, sheaf of wheat, and a cotton stalk; and

WHEREAS, Tennessee is home to over 60,000 farms and 10,000,000 acres of farmland, approximately 58,000 acres of which are seeded, and annually grosses approximately \$3.5 billion in cash receipts from animals, products, and crops; and

WHEREAS, Tennessee boasts approximately 125 farmers' markets, with the value of local food sold from farms direct to consumers totaling in excess of \$58 million annually; and

WHEREAS, the rich agricultural tradition of Tennessee over the centuries has been highlighted by our farmers and foresters' desire and ability to find new and innovative ways to produce food and fiber, breed and raise livestock, and restore and protect the integrity of our soil and natural environment; and

WHEREAS, the agriculture community of Tennessee has always been a leader in, and remains open to, new farming methods as they have improved and advanced, with the continued commitment to agricultural advancement and the pursuit of sustainable solutions to agricultural, food, and natural resource challenges being led by the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, the Tennessee State University College of Agriculture Cooperative Extension

Program, the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture, and their respective administrators, faculty, students, programs, and services; and

WHEREAS, there is a growing movement in Tennessee and the nation to learn and adopt more resource-conserving, energy-efficient systems of agriculture, the objectives of which are to produce agricultural products that may reduce the use of petrochemicals, improve means of biological pest management, improve soil productivity, improve erosion control, and improve irrigation, cultivation, and harvesting techniques; and

WHEREAS, sustainable agriculture is growing in Tennessee, and many Tennessee farmers are members of the Southern Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (SSAWG) and benefit from the grants and educational programming available from Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SSARE); and

WHEREAS, Tennessee's commitment to sustainable agriculture is demonstrated and celebrated biannually at the internationally renowned No-Till Crop Production Field Day in Milan, the nation's largest field day devoted to improving the production of no-till crops and one of the most far-ranging agricultural field days in the nation; and

WHEREAS, the goal of sustainable agriculture is to meet society's food and textile needs in the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs by integrating three main objectives: a healthy environment, economic profitability, and social and economic equity; and

WHEREAS, every person involved in the food system, including growers, food processors, distributors, retailers, consumers, and waste managers, has a role to play in ensuring a sustainable agricultural and food system; and

WHEREAS, a systems perspective, in the broadest sense, from the individual farm to the local ecosystem and to communities affected by a farming system both locally and globally, is essential to understanding and attaining agricultural sustainability; and

WHEREAS, an emphasis on the entire, larger food system allows a larger and more thorough view of the consequences of farming practices on both human communities and the environment; and

WHEREAS, a systems approach provides the tools to explore the interconnections between farming and other aspects of our environment and communities and also encourages interdisciplinary efforts in research and education, requiring not only the input of researchers from various disciplines, such as biology, economics, engineering, chemistry, community development, and many others, but also farmers, farmworkers, consumers, policymakers, and others; and

WHEREAS, making the transition to sustainable agriculture is a process for farmers who choose to take a series of small, realistic steps, with family economics and personal goals influencing how fast or how far participants can go in the transition; and

WHEREAS, the adoption of more efficient resource-conserving systems of agricultural production, over the long term, can benefit both the producing and consuming public; and

WHEREAS, achieving the goals of sustainable agriculture ultimately requires the buy-in, willingness, and commitment of all participants in the food system, including farmers, laborers, policymakers, researchers, retailers, and consumers, with each group having its own part to play and its own unique contribution to make; and

WHEREAS, Tennessee recognizes that each small decision made by participants in the food and agriculture system can make a difference and contribute to advancing the entire system further for the benefit of future generations; and

WHEREAS, Tennessee should commit to achieving the goals of a sustainable agriculture and food system and lead by demonstrating its commitment to sustainable food and agriculture for the present and future benefit of Tennessee's farmers, families, local economies, and the environment; and

WHEREAS, the Tennessee Department of Agriculture is uniquely positioned to organize and coordinate the many ongoing efforts across Tennessee to advance sustainable agriculture, communicate with and provide information, resources, and assistance to all persons and organizations related to sustainable agriculture, and market the State's sustainable agriculture research, practices, and products to the national and international community; now, therefore,

SECTION 1. This act is known and may be cited as the "Tennessee Sustainable Agriculture Advancement Act."

SECTION 2. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 4-3-203, is amended by adding the following as a new subdivision:

(11) Encourage, assist with, and promote the advancement of sustainable food and agriculture and sustainable food and agriculture research, innovation, practices, and marketing.

SECTION 3. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 43, Chapter 1, Part 1, is amended by adding the following section:

(a) The definition of sustainable agriculture as set forth in subsection (b) applies to such term wherever it appears in the code, unless a different definition is specifically made applicable to the part, chapter, or section in which such term appears.

(b) "Sustainable agriculture" means an integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will, over the long-term, satisfy human food and fiber needs, enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agriculture economy depends, make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources, integrate natural biological cycles and controls, sustain the economic viability of farm operations, and enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole.

SECTION 4. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 43, Chapter 1, Part 1, is amended by adding the following section:

(a) The commissioner of agriculture shall establish and maintain an office of sustainable agriculture and employ at least one (1) sustainable agriculture specialist whose primary duties shall be the provision and coordination of technical assistance, support, and encouragement needed to promote and enhance research and statewide advancement of sustainable agriculture.

(b) To the extent feasible and within existing budgetary resources, the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture and Tennessee State University College of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Program shall assist and cooperate with the department of agriculture in the provision and coordination of technical assistance, statistical, marketing, and other information, educational programs, support, and encouragement necessary to promote and enhance research and statewide advancement of sustainable agriculture.

SECTION 5. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 43-1-106, is amended by designating the existing language as subsection (a) and adding the following as a new subsection:

(b) Prior to promulgating any rule or adopting any policy or standard, the commissioner of agriculture shall determine whether the application of the rule, policy, or standard is adverse to the advancement of sustainable agriculture. The commissioner shall strive to ensure that all rules, policies, and standards that the commissioner promulgates or adopts advance sustainable agriculture.

SECTION 6. This act takes effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.