TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
COMMISSIONER SID MILLER

Texas Agricultural Finance Authority Board Meeting
Meeting Minutes
December 18, 2025
9:30 AM

Board Members Present:
Ted Conover, Chairman
Sarah Burnett (virtual)
John Crew (virtual)
Craig Davis
Georgina Macias (virtual)
Barry Smith (virtual)
Aaron Wiechman (virtual)

Guests Present:
Lee Deviney, Texas Public Finance Authority
Kody Bessent (virtual), Plains Cotton Growers
Cary Eubanks (virtual), TX Star Coop Gin
Kelley Green (virtual), Texas Cotton Ginners
Aaron Nelson (virtual), Texas Cotton Ginners
Jeff Nunley (virtual), South Texas Cotton & Grain Association
Steve Olson (virtual)
Andy Prahoda (virtual), Bracewell LLP
Greg Taylor (virtual), D. Williams and Co., Inc
Tracy Tomascik (virtual), Farm Bureau

TDA Staff Present:
Karen Reichek
Kat Neilson
Mindy Fryer
Susan Maldonado
Emily Daly
Julia Rico
Bradine Griffiths
Kelly Sara
Zona Martin
CJ Balderama
Marios Parpounas

I. **Welcome.** Chairman Ted Conover welcomed everyone to the meeting.

II. **Call to Order.** The meeting was called to order at 9:34 am.

III. **Roll Call and Confirmation of Quorum.** Mindy Fryer called roll and confirmed a quorum.

   a) 12:07 Barry had to leave the meeting.

IV. **Opening Remarks.** Chairman Conover thanked everyone for participating and noted that it would potentially be the last meeting for several Board members as their terms expire at the end of the calendar year.

V. **Discussion and Possible Action relating to approval of meeting minutes for the November 20, 2025 board meeting.** Ted Conover called for edits to the previous meeting's minutes. Hearing none, Barry Smith motioned to approve the minutes, and Craig Davis seconded it. The motion passed unanimously.

VI. **Discussion and Possible Action relating to Board guidelines for public comment.** The TAFA Board currently has no policy governing public comment. TDA staff presented examples from other state boards for consideration. Chairman Conover noted the value of taking public comment early in the agenda and emphasized the importance of stakeholder input during current program development. Mr. Davis added that visitors should identify themselves before speaking. No action was taken.

VII. Public Comment.

Kody Bessent, CEO of Plains Cotton Growers, thanked the board for work on HB43 and emphasized the importance of the funding. He commented that the ag industry is hurting and would like to see the program launched as soon as possible. The longer the delay, the increased the financial severity of the industry.

Greg Taylor, CPA with D. Williams and Co., Inc. in Lubbock who works with over 100 entities in the ag section, stated that the last several years have been very difficult for gins, and other processors and handlers across the state. They are looking forward to this program to shore up their operations. This is going to be an important program for this industry.

Cary Eubanks, General Manager of TX Star Coop Gin, shared that the gin has experienced hard times due to the drought. He is very thankful for this program and the board. He stressed the assistance is needed as soon as possible and vital to the survival of gins.

VIII. **Discussion and Possible Action relating to State of Texas Fiscal Year 2026 Budget for the Board, including proposed modifications and potential adjustments.** Karen Reichek presented budget previously approved and adopted during the July 2025 TAFA Board meeting. She highlighted a few changes based on accounting code reclassifications as well as some contract expenses that were higher than originally budgeted for. Salaries are below expectation due to agency reorganization and attrition. Barry Smith moved to approve changes to budget and allow staff to hire as needed. Craig Davis seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

The TAFA Board went into executive session at 10:04 AM to receive advice from TDA's Office of General Counsel and outside legal counsel concerning legal matters subject to the attorney-client privilege related to Agenda Items IX and X. The Board reconvened in public meeting at 11:10 AM.

IX. **Discussion and Possible Action relating to TAFA bonding authority, including the Following Items.** Mr. Lee Deviney, Executive Director for the Texas Public Finance Authority (TPFA), stated that TPFA serves as a central issuer of debt for state agencies. He explained the process required to create bond financed program and reminded the Board that the Bond Review Board expressed concerns in the past about the lack of a project pipeline. It would be important to have a solid plan in place, with a pipeline of projects that show the need. In regards to timing, the whole process takes at least 90 days but more likely 120 days or more.

Barry Smith requested the staff continue to update program documents to comply with new definitions and begin to build a pipeline of projects. Karen Reichek stated that staff will bring additional documentation, application, etc. for next meeting related to a loan program for Board consideration.

X. **Discussion and Possible Action relating to House Bill 43 and TAFA programs, such as program development, application and other program-related documents, key definitions, funding parameters, eligibility requirements, and evaluation.**
In regard to the new Pest Disease Control and Depredation Program, Barry Smith moved that no match should be required, maximum funding requests should be limited to $250,000, and indirect costs will not be allowed. John Crew seconded to motion. The motion passed with Georgina Macias abstaining.

Georgina Macias raised a concern that program deadlines may not be aligned with the pest or disease outbreaks and industry needs.

Sarah Burnett moved to allow letters of support to be included as optional, but applicants will be limited to attaching a maximum of three letters of support to the application. Craig Davis seconded the motion and it passed with Georgina Macias abstaining.

Public comments were provided by Tracy Tomascik, Associate Director of the Commodity and Regulatory Activities division with Farm Bureau, and Kody Bessent, CEO of Plains Cotton Growers in support of the Pest Disease Control and Depredation Program.

The TAFA Board provided directions to the staff relating to details of the AgLink program which will focus on providing financial assistance to critical agriculture infrastructure. It was noted that principal owners of the business must be US citizens or resident aliens, the funding range should mirror statute with a minimum of $5,000 and maximum grant request of $500,000, and all travel expenses should be unallowable. Craig Davis motioned for staff to continue to move forward with the development of the AgLink program based on these comments. Aaron Wiechman seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

The Board reviewed draft application materials related to the AgPro program focused on production agriculture grants. After various discussions, the Board directed staff to ensure projects were limited to commercial production agriculture, not gardens for self-consumption, hobby farmers, or businesses focused on processing or value-added end products. Non-profits who produce commercially could be eligible. The funding range should mirror statute with a minimum of $5,000 and maximum grant request of $500,000 and all travel expenses should be unallowable. Financial statements should also be requested, similar to AgLink. Craig Davis motioned for staff to continue to move forward with the development of the AgPro program based on these comments. John Crew seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

The TAFA Board discussed concerns about the scope of AgBoost, which is proposed to focus on agribusiness and agriculture service providers. Sarah Burnett commented that small businesses are the backbones to the communities and they are the ones that need the support. John Crew motioned to postpone AgBoost and Aaron Wiechman seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

XI. **Discussion and Possible Action relating to other business raised at meeting to be placed on next agenda.** No business or topics were identified to be placed on future agendas. No motion or vote was taken by the Board on this agenda item.

XII. **Discussion and Possible Action relating to scheduling future meeting date(s) and time(s).** After discussion of availability, January 15, 2026 was tentatively proposed for the next Board meeting. Ted Conover requested Mindy Fryer conduct a poll with the Board to finalize a date. No motion or vote was taken by the Board on this agenda item.

XIII. **Executive Session.** Information provided above.

XIV. **Adjourn.** John Crew moved to adjourn the meeting and Sarah Burnett seconded the motion. Chairman Conover adjourned the meeting at 12:59 PM.