

I, Maria Ester Salinas, am against the proposed rezoning of our precious agriculture zoning area to R-3 zoning. Our vibrant community has thrived on the foundations of agriculture for generations, and I firmly believe that preserving this heritage is essential for the well-being of our town.

By rezoning this area, we risk losing the very essence that makes our community unique. Our agricultural lands provide us with sustainable food sources, pristine landscapes, and a thriving ecosystem that benefits both humans and wildlife. Replacing this cherished landscape with R-3 zoning, which typically involves increased urban development and higher population density, would irreversibly alter the character of our town.

Furthermore, rezoning to R-3 could lead to numerous detrimental consequences. Increased traffic congestion, strain on local resources, and added pressure on our already overburdened infrastructure are just a few of the potential drawbacks. Let's not sacrifice our quality of life and the tranquility of our surroundings for short-term gains.

I urge our mayor and council to listen to my concerns which I share with many in our community and reject the proposed rezoning. Let's work together to explore alternative solutions that prioritize the preservation of our agricultural heritage while fostering responsible and sustainable growth.



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PRESS RELEASE

Texas Food Initiative to be Launched in Harlingen, Texas: New Farming Sites Funded by USDA

Harlingen, TX, May 16, 2024. – Rio Grande Valley residents who want to learn to farm but have no land will be able to do so at one of four sites in Harlingen, Santa Rosa, Donna, and Mission. High land prices even in the most rural areas of the Valley are discouraging people from buying land to start a new farm or ranch. The Harlingen-based nonprofit, HOPE¹ for Small Farm Sustainability, will be announcing a \$7.4 million grant award from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to address this lack of access to land and agriculture training in the Valley as well as future farming sites in Central and North Texas.

“We can encourage people to farm and grow their own food, but we kept hearing the same complaint that land was too expensive,” stated Diana Garcia Padilla, HOPE Founder and Executive Director, “We also see how land with great farming potential is being eaten up by urban growth and housing developments. We explained this to USDA and USDA responded with an incredible investment to take on this challenge in a big way.”

HOPE is a nonprofit 501c3 community-based organization and organic agricultural training center located in Harlingen, Texas. Since 2017, HOPE has received numerous USDA grant awards to deliver technical assistance to smaller-scale farmers including farming training, accessing market opportunities, and guidance on applying for USDA programs and services. HOPE operates adjacent to a private farm that Diana and Saul Padilla founded 18 years ago.

¹ Holistic Organic Practical Education (HOPE) for Small Farm Sustainability. <https://www.hopeforsfs.org/>

HOPE will partner with four community-based partners for the first phase of the project:

- Yahweh’s All Natural Farm & Garden, an urban farm in Harlingen;
- Plaza Amistad, a colonia community development initiative of the St. Joseph Catholic Church in Donna;
- St. Mary’s Catholic Church, a community garden in Santa Rosa; and,
- **Sunshine’s Bounty Farms, a Hispanic-owned farm in Mission.**

Each site will dedicate parcels to individuals to plant, manage, and harvest their products after completing a training program. During the 5-year apprenticeship program, participants will be expected to scale up their production at larger parcels. The goal is to have the ability and the means to lease or purchase their own land after completing the Texas Victory Farms program.

“HOPE has trained farmers – new and existing farmers – under different programs that USDA has funded since 2017. So, we will apply that experience under this new grant. This time, though, thanks to USDA we will remove the stress that they do not have land to practice what they learn,” explained Saul Padilla, Lead Trainer, **“People are really motivated to learn.** They want local people to have the choice to eat good healthy food that is grown here, not just food that was shipped from another state or another country.”

USDA representatives, community organizations, grant partners, food access stakeholders, farmers, and elected officials will be present.

EVENT SUMMARY

Background

USDA awarded approximately \$300 million for 50 selected projects in the United States. The projects were awarded under the Increasing Land, Capital, and Market Access Program. HOPE for Small Farm Sustainability was one of the 50 chosen projects; HOPE’s Victory Farms Project was the ONLY project funded in Texas.

Purpose

This grant symbolizes HOPE’s commitment to bridge the gap between local food producers and their communities, fostering a resilient food system that benefits all. This new and substantial USDA investment marks a new chapter for HOPE, a community-based hub for smaller-scale farmers and ranchers and socially and economically disadvantaged individuals who are motivated to contribute to the Texas and US food supply. Under this agriculture and food initiative, every seed sown will be a step towards sustainability and every harvest reaped will bring us closer to a community united by the bounty of the land.

Grant Award Announcement

- **Date:** *Wednesday, May 22, 2024*
- **Time:** *10:00 AM*
- **Venue:** *19833 Morris Road; Harlingen, TX 78552*

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