

RÉSUMÉ DIGEST

HB 1194

2026 Regular Session

Terry Landry

Present law provides for legislative findings.

Proposed law would have added a legislative finding stating that limited access to food constrains public health, neighborhood stability, and local economic growth. Also would have provided that the provisions of present law also apply to food deserts.

Present law provides for definitions.

Proposed law would have defined a "food desert" as a low-income census tract in which at least 500 persons, or 33 percent of residents, reside more than one mile from a supermarket in an urban area or more than 10 miles from a supermarket in a rural area.

Present law requires the La. Dept. of Agriculture and Forestry (LDAF) to establish a financing program that provides grants and loans to healthy food retailers that increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables and other affordable healthy food in underserved communities to the extent funds are available.

Proposed law would have included other related food access projects in the program and expanded coverage to include food deserts.

Proposed law would have required the LDAF to prioritize projects that increased access to affordable fresh food and demonstrated community demand, implementation capacity, and long-term sustainability, to the extent funding was available.

Present law authorizes the LDAF to contract with one or more qualified nonprofit organizations or community development financial institutions to administer the program through a public-private partnership, to raise matching funds, market the program statewide, evaluate applicants, make award decisions, underwrite loans, and monitor compliance and impact. Requires the LDAF and its partners to coordinate with complementary nutrition assistance and education programs.

Proposed law would have provided that all or portion of the program be administered through grants, in addition to public-private partnerships. Also would have authorized the LDAF to operate a revolving loan fund to administer the program.

Present law requires the program to provide funding on a competitive, one-time basis for eligible projects.

Proposed law would have allowed funding on a competitive basis without limiting it to a one-time award.

Present law authorizes the program to provide funding for farmers' markets and public markets, food cooperatives, mobile markets and delivery projects, and distribution projects that enable food retailers in underserved communities.

Proposed law would have extended coverage to include food deserts.

Present law requires that, to be considered for funding, an applicant's project benefit an underserved community.

Proposed law would have extended coverage to include food deserts.

Present law requires that applicants be evaluated on criteria to determine funding awarded, including the degree to which the project will have a positive economic impact on the underserved community by creating or retaining jobs for local residents.

Proposed law would have required the LSU AgCenter to collaborate with the LDAF to provide data, research, and technical information relative to the identification and geographic distribution of food deserts across the state, from available sources.

(Proposed to amend R.S. 3:296(B)(4) and (5), (C), (D)(1) through (3), (4)(a)(iii), (6)(a), and (7)(e); Proposed to add R.S. 3:293(D)(11))

VETO MESSAGE: "House Bill 1194 purports to expand a program that has no funding. The bill expands the Healthy Food Retail Act by directing the Louisiana Department of Agriculture ("LDAF") to administer a financing program, yet it makes this mandate contingent on funding being available. No appropriation is made to cover either the originally created program, the expanded program, or the newly contemplated revolving loan fund. When the legislature expands an existing program in law, the public should be able to assume that the resources to fully implement the program exist. Here, they do not.

Beyond the funding problem, most of the bill is unnecessary. Should the legislature appropriate funds for grocery stores in food deserts, or should other funding later become available, nearly all of the bill's provisions can be implemented without this legislation. LDAF is already granted specific authority to implement the Healthy Food Retail Act, including the authority to adopt rules to implement the Act; to define what projects meet the intent of the Healthy Food Retail Act (LDAF has already defined eligible projects to include supermarkets and grocery stores in LAC 7:III.903), to create measurable standards that an applicant needs to meet to be considered for funding, and to establish the criteria for which applicants should be evaluated. *See* R.S. 3:296(D) and LAC 7:III.901-915. The Louisiana State University Agricultural Center likewise already has authority to conduct the research this bill describes under its general authority. R.S. 17:3215 and R.S. 3:1061.

Expanding a program through legislation without providing the funding for the expansion is poor public policy. Similar to HB 950, which I vetoed for similar reasons, the bill's use of mandatory language such as "shall administer" while also limiting implementation "to the extent funds are available," creates an unreasonable disconnect between what the law appears to promise and what the agency is actually expected to deliver.

For these reasons, I have vetoed House Bill 1194 of the 2026 Regular Session."