



HOUSE BILL 1536

By Shaw

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 4 and Title 43, relative to the Tennessee Agricultural Innovation and Education Initiative.

WHEREAS, agriculture remains one of this State's largest economic sectors, sustaining rural communities, small producers, and family-owned farms across all ninety-five counties; and

WHEREAS, the agriculture industry is increasingly shaped by digital technology, emerging workforce needs, and new consumer expectations regarding education, market access, transparency, and local food systems; and

WHEREAS, modern agriculture requires not only production knowledge, but also skills in technology, communications, e-commerce, logistics, and entrepreneurship; and

WHEREAS, there is a growing need to connect rural producers, urban and suburban consumers, students, educators, and workforce partners through accessible, technology-enabled learning platforms; and

WHEREAS, public-private partnerships can accelerate innovation, expand statewide outreach, and deliver measurable returns for this State's agricultural economy; and

WHEREAS, it is the intent of the General Assembly to establish a coordinated initiative to support agricultural education, digital innovation, marketplace access, and workforce development, positioning this State as a national leader in modern agriculture and media-driven education; now, therefore,

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

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 43, Chapter 1, is amended by adding the following as a new part:

43-1-901. Short title.

This part is known and may be cited as the "Tennessee Agricultural Innovation and Education Initiative."

43-1-902. Part definitions.

As used in this part:

(1) "Department" means the department of agriculture; and

(2) "Initiative" means the Tennessee Agricultural Innovation and Education Initiative created by this part.

43-1-903. Creation.

(a) There is created the initiative to be administered by the department.

(b) The initiative must:

(1) Support statewide outreach, education, and storytelling related to agriculture in this state;

(2) Expand digital access to agriculture-focused workforce and learning resources;

(3) Promote market access and economic opportunity for farmers and agricultural businesses of this state;

(4) Encourage collaborations that prepare the next generation of agricultural leaders; and

(5) Strengthen this state's position as a model for agriculture-centered technology and innovation.

43-1-904. Public-private partnership model.

(a) The department is authorized to contract with one (1) or more qualified private, nonprofit, or academic partners to design, operate, or administer components of the initiative.

(b) In awarding contracts pursuant to this section, the department shall consider:

(1) Demonstrated experience operating agriculture-focused digital or media platforms;

(2) Capacity to deliver statewide educational programming accessible to rural and underserved communities;

(3) Evidence of partnerships with this state's farmers, schools, workforce organizations, or agricultural institutions;

(4) Documented analytics demonstrating audience reach, user engagement, or marketplace participation;

(5) Ability to support small, minority, and beginning farmers; and

(6) Experience managing multi-partner, public-private initiatives.

(c) The department shall give preference to partners who have previously deployed within this state:

(1) Agriculture-focused media, including on streaming platforms;

(2) Online workforce or educational tools; and

(3) Producer-driven marketplace solutions.

(d) This part must not be construed as restricting competition for state-issued contracts, nor as naming or designating any single private entity as an exclusive partner.

43-1-905. Intellectual property and creative control.

(a) All intellectual property, software, trademarks, content libraries, platforms, and creative materials owned or developed by private partners before, during, or after participation in the initiative must remain the exclusive property of those partners.

(b) The state shall not claim ownership of, or editorial control over, creative content produced by contracted partners, except to ensure alignment with the purposes of this part and applicable state and federal law.

43-1-906. State-first benefits and regional collaboration.

(a) The initiative must prioritize benefits to:

- (1) State farmers and producers;
- (2) State students and workforce participants; and
- (3) State consumers and communities.

(b) Partners may collaborate with agriculture organizations or platforms in other states when collaboration enhances market access, workforce readiness, or innovation opportunities for agriculture in this state.

43-1-907. Program activities.

Activities under the initiative may include, but are not limited to:

- (1) Development and distribution of agriculture-focused educational programming;
- (2) Workforce training modules aligned with agriculture technology, logistics, media, and entrepreneurship;
- (3) Digital tools promoting statewide agricultural literacy;
- (4) Producer onboarding to e-commerce marketplaces;
- (5) Youth engagement and career-path exploration in agriculture;
- (6) Marketing and outreach efforts promoting state-grown products; and
- (7) Technical assistance for rural communities adopting digital agricultural tools.

43-1-908. Annual independent evaluation.

(a) The comptroller of the treasury, or an independent evaluator approved by the comptroller, shall conduct an annual evaluation of the initiative.

(b) The evaluation must assess:

- (1) The number of participating farmers and businesses;
- (2) Workforce and education outcomes;

- (3) Audience engagement;
- (4) Marketplace revenue opportunities supported; and
- (5) Return on investment to the taxpayers of this state.

(c) Results must be submitted to the governor and the speakers of the senate and the house of representatives, and be posted publicly.

43-1-909. Reporting requirements.

Contracted partners shall submit annual performance reports to the department summarizing:

- (1) Program activities;
- (2) Measurable outcomes;
- (3) Financial stewardship; and
- (4) Recommendations for improvement.

43-1-910. Funding.

(a) Subject to appropriations, it is the legislative intent that the general assembly authorize a recurring annual appropriation of two million dollars (\$2,000,000) to the department to implement this initiative.

(b) Funds may be used for:

- (1) Partner contracts;
- (2) Outreach and training;
- (3) Technology and platform integration;
- (4) Program administration; and
- (5) Evaluation and reporting.

(c) The department is encouraged to pursue matching contributions from private, federal, philanthropic, and regional partners when feasible.

43-1-911. Rulemaking authority.

The department is authorized to promulgate rules to effectuate this part. The rules must be promulgated in accordance with the Uniform Administrative Procedures Act, compiled in title 4, chapter 5.

SECTION 2. The headings in this act are for reference purposes only and do not constitute a part of the law enacted by this act. However, the Tennessee Code Commission is requested to include the headings in any compilation or publication containing this act.

SECTION 3. This act takes effect July 1, 2026, the public welfare requiring it.

Amendment No. 1 to HB1536

Lafferty
Signature of Sponsor

AMEND Senate Bill No. 1645

House Bill No. 1536*

by deleting "shall" in § 43-1-904(c) in SECTION 1 and substituting "may".

AND FURTHER AMEND by deleting ", or editorial control over," in § 43-1-905(b) in SECTION 1.

AND FURTHER AMEND by deleting § 43-1-908 in SECTION 1 and substituting:

43-1-908. Evaluation and report.

(a) After the conclusion of the third fiscal year of the initiative, the comptroller of the treasury shall conduct an initial evaluation of the initiative and report its findings to the governor and the general assembly.

(b) The evaluation must assess:

- (1) The number of participating farmers and businesses;
- (2) Workforce and education outcomes;
- (3) Audience engagement;
- (4) The return on investment to the taxpayers of this state; and
- (5) In the comptroller's discretion, any other data and information.

(c) The report must be accessible on the comptroller's website.

(d) After the comptroller has completed the initial evaluation and reported its findings pursuant to subsection (a), the department must evaluate the initiative biennially and report its findings to the governor and the general assembly by the following January 1. The department's evaluations must assess the topics in subdivisions (b)(1)-(4) and any other relevant data and information.

Amendment No. 2 to HB1536

Hicks G
Signature of Sponsor

AMEND Senate Bill No. 1645

House Bill No. 1536*

by deleting the language "a recurring annual appropriation of two million dollars (\$2,000,000)" in § 43-1-910(a) in Section 1 and substituting "a recurring annual appropriation of one million dollars (\$1,000,000)".

Amendment No. 3 to HB1536

Todd
Signature of Sponsor

AMEND Senate Bill No. 1645

House Bill No. 1536*

by deleting "Tennessee Agricultural Innovation and Education Initiative" from § 43-1-901 of SECTION 1 and substituting "Representative Johnny Shaw Tennessee Agricultural Innovation and Education Initiative".

Amendment No. 4 to SB1645

Watson
Signature of Sponsor

AMEND Senate Bill No. 1645

House Bill No. 1536*

by deleting § 43-1-902(2) in Section 1 and substituting the following:

(2) "Initiative" means the Representative Johnny Shaw Tennessee Agricultural Innovation and Education Initiative created by this part.