



## Audit Request

# The Use of Selected State Funds by the Department of Agriculture

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State Auditor

May 14, 2025

Members of the Legislative Audit Committee:

The State Auditor's Office analyzed the Department of Agriculture's (Department) use of state funds for the Commissioner of Agriculture's travel and the operation of the Biosecurity Inspection Program (Program). The scope of this audit was limited to the Department's use of funds authorized by Riders 26 and 31 in the General Appropriations Act (88th Legislature).

As of April 30, 2025, the Department:

- Spent more than \$2,500 in state appropriated funds for the Commissioner's travel in fiscal year 2024. The Commissioner's travel has not exceeded \$2,500 for fiscal year 2025.
- Spent 52 percent of the funds appropriated by Rider 31, and it had hired fewer than the 60 full-time equivalent employees (FTEs) authorized for the Program.
- Spent or has committed to spend Rider 31 funds of \$822,869 to purchase 11 vehicles, 3 mobile inspection units, and 4 multi-use light equipment vehicles, and to lease 4 vehicles for the Program. (See the Attachment for photographs of those vehicles).
- Coordinated with the Animal Health Commission for the operation of the Program's inspection stations and allowed the Commission to conduct livestock inspections at those stations.
- Operated three regional agricultural biosecurity inspection teams in fiscal years 2024 and 2025.

### Summary of Objective and Scope

Senator Robert Nichols requested this audit. The Office conducted this audit pursuant to Texas Government Code, Section 321.0135.<sup>a</sup>

The audit objective was to determine whether the Department spent funds as authorized by Riders 26 and 31 in the General Appropriations Act (88th Legislature).

We conducted this limited scope audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

<sup>a</sup> Section 321.0135 states that "a special audit is a financial audit of limited scope."

## Commissioner of Agriculture's Travel

The Department spent \$3,124 in state funds for the Commissioner's travel for fiscal year 2024, which was \$624 more than the \$2,500 limit in Rider 26 (page VI-11, the General Appropriations Act, 88th Legislature). As of April 30, 2025, the Department spent \$1,703 for the Commissioner's travel expenses for fiscal year 2025.

These costs were associated with the Commissioner's hotel and airfare expenses. The Department's financial records did not show that state funds were used to reimburse the Commissioner for expenses related to meals, ground transportation, or other incidentals. However, the Commissioner did accompany other employees in their reimbursed rideshares.

## Regional Agricultural Biosecurity Inspection Teams

As of April 30, 2025, the Department spent \$3.2 million in appropriated funds under Rider 31<sup>1</sup> for the Program. This includes salaries for the Program’s staff, which totaled 31 FTEs as of May 1, 2025.

In addition, the Department committed \$501,816 in Rider 31 funds for future payments. This includes a \$24,000 future commitment for moderator costs at a Department food and nutrition conference. According to the Department, this cost is fully related to biosecurity. However, Rider 31 funds are restricted to operating costs for the regional agricultural biosecurity inspection teams.

As of April 2025, the Program had approximately 48 percent of Rider 31 funds remaining (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

### *Rider 31 Funds Appropriated and Expended As of April 2025*

Fiscal Year	Amount Appropriated	Spent	Committed for Future Payments	Appropriated Funds Remaining
Fiscal Year 2024	\$3,881,003	\$1,624,058		\$2,256,945
Fiscal Year 2025 (through April 30, 2025)	\$3,256,003	\$1,587,159	\$501,816	\$1,167,028
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$7,137,006</b>	<b>\$3,211,217</b>	<b>\$501,816</b>	<b>\$3,423,973</b>

Source: The Department’s financial records.

The Department operated regional agricultural biosecurity inspection teams based in Orange, Tyler, and Mount Pleasant in fiscal year 2024. Beginning in October 2024, it moved the inspection team from Tyler to Terrell.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the Animal Health Commission was allowed to conduct livestock inspections at those locations.

<sup>1</sup> Rider 31, page VI-12, General Appropriations Act (88th Legislature).

<sup>2</sup> For September 2024, teams were based only in Mount Pleasant and Orange.

Of the Program's 31 FTEs, 27 were assigned to the inspection stations in Orange, Terrell, and Mount Pleasant (see Figure 2). The outreach specialist in Laredo and the outreach liaison in Houston were appointed to their positions on April 21 and May 1, 2025, respectively. As of May 12, 2025, the Department did not have documented job descriptions for those two positions.

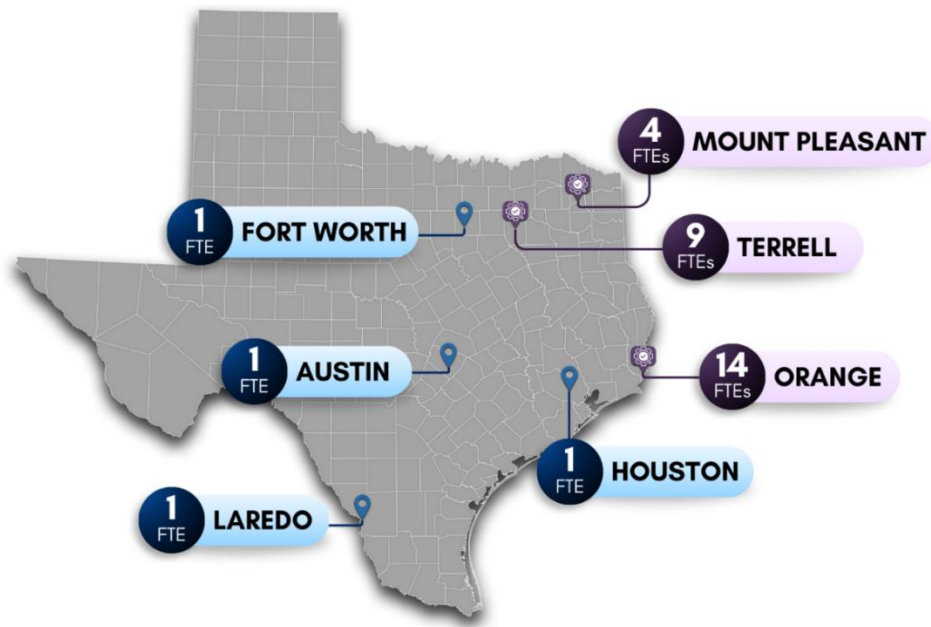
#### Total Appropriated FTEs

The Department was appropriated a total of 60 FTEs each fiscal year to operate 5 regional agricultural biosecurity inspection teams.

Source: Rider 31, page VI-12, General Appropriations Act (88th Legislature).

Figure 2

### *The Program's Distribution of FTEs As of May 1, 2025*



Location	FTE Job Titles <sup>a</sup>
Austin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Administrative Assistant</li> </ul>
Fort Worth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Administrator</li> </ul>
Houston	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Outreach Liaison</li> </ul>
Laredo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Outreach Specialist</li> </ul>
Mount Pleasant (Inspection Station)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4 Flagmen</li> </ul>
Orange (Inspection Station)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7 Flagmen</li> <li>3 Shift Leads</li> <li>2 Senior Investigators</li> <li>1 Scheduler</li> <li>1 Director</li> </ul>
Terrell (Inspection Station)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5 Flagmen</li> <li>3 Senior Investigators</li> <li>1 Assistant Director</li> </ul>

<sup>a</sup> The flagmen's job duties include conducting roadside biosecurity inspections and investigations.

Source: The Department's records.

## Vehicles and Mobile Inspection Units

As of April 2025, the Department spent or had committed to spend \$822,869 for vehicles and mobile inspection units to operate inspection stations. Details about the vehicles (the number, type, and cost) are listed in Figure 3.

Figure 3

### *Rider 31 Funds Spent for Program Vehicles and Mobile Inspection Units As of April 2025*

Description	Vehicle Purchases	Vehicle Lease Payments	Committed for Future Payments	Totals
Three Mobile Inspection Units	\$170,000		\$143,012 <sup>a</sup>	<b>\$313,012</b>
Nine Toyota RAV4 Vehicles	\$273,210			<b>\$273,210</b>
Two Chevrolet Silverado Vehicles	\$103,277			<b>\$103,277</b>
Four Chevrolet Tahoe Vehicles		\$52,677	\$20,232	<b>\$72,909</b>
Four Multi-use Light Equipment Vehicles			\$60,461	<b>\$60,461</b>
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$546,487</b>	<b>\$52,677</b>	<b>\$223,705</b>	<b>\$822,869</b>

<sup>a</sup> This includes \$8,652 for two vinyl wraps for the mobile inspection units (see Pages 4 and 5 in the Attachment).

Source: The Department's financial records.

Auditors traveled to all 3 inspection locations to verify that the Department had possession of the 11 vehicles and 2 mobile inspection units purchased as of April 30, 2025, as well as the 4 leased vehicles. Pictures of those assets are in the Attachment. The Department had not yet received one mobile inspection unit and four multi-use light equipment vehicles at the time of the auditors' site visits.

The State Auditor's Office appreciates the Department's cooperation in quickly providing financial information related to the audit.

Sincerely,

Lisa R. Collier, CPA, CFE, CIDA  
State Auditor

Attachment





## ATTACHMENT

### Vehicles and Mobile Inspection Units

As of April 2025, the Department of Agriculture's biosecurity program used state appropriated funds to purchase or lease 15 vehicles and 2 mobile inspection units.

#### Purchased Vehicles

##### Toyota RAV4s



Asset #29465 (Mount Pleasant Station)



Asset #29470 (Mount Pleasant Station)



Asset #29463 (Orange Station)



Asset #29464 (Orange Station)



Asset #29466 (Orange Station)



Asset #29467 (Orange Station)



Asset #29468 (Orange Station)



Asset #29469 (Terrell Station)



Asset #29471 (Terrell Station)



## Chevrolet Silverados



Asset #29431 (Mount Pleasant Station)



Asset #29430 (Terrell Station)

## Purchased Mobile Inspection Units

### Mobile Inspection Unit 1



Asset #29445 (Mount Pleasant Station)



## Mobile Inspection Unit 2



Asset #29444 (Terrell Station)

## Leased Vehicles

### Chevrolet Tahoes



Asset #29441 (Mount Pleasant Station)



Asset #29442 (Orange Station)



Asset #29443 (Orange Station)



Asset #29440 (Terrell Station)

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The Honorable Robert Nichols, Member, Texas Senate

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The Honorable Morgan Meyer, House Ways and Means Committee

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## **Department of Agriculture**

The Honorable Sid Miller, Commissioner

Mr. Terry Keel, Deputy Commissioner





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