

Testimony of Melinda Goodman

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Marketing Professional – 28 Years in the Fresh Produce Industry

Supporter of Proposed Amendments to the South Texas Onion Committee Marketing Order

Good afternoon,

My name is Melinda Goodman, and I am the Principal of FullTilt Marketing, a national marketing and communications firm that works exclusively with the food and agriculture industry. For the past 28 years, I have had the privilege of helping farmers, cooperatives, and commodity boards across the country build stronger brands, connect with consumers, and increase demand for U.S.-grown products.

Early in my career, I managed marketing for the Texas Citrus Industry, and through that role, our team, that was co-located in the same offices, supported some of the first South Texas Onion Committee promotional efforts more than 20 years ago. Since then, I've worked with more than ten different commodity organizations, from sweet potatoes to watermelons to avocados and onions on everything from education and research to advertising campaigns and retail promotions.

I am offering testimony today in support of the proposed changes to the South Texas Onion Committee marketing order, including:

- Adding a Public Member to the Committee,
- Allowing the Committee to accept outside funding,
- Allowing the use of assessment funds for paid advertising, and
- Updating the Continuation Referendum threshold to 51% approval rather than a supermajority.

Why These Changes Matter

In my nearly three decades of experience, I've learned that effective marketing programs are not created in isolation, they require flexibility, public trust, and the ability to evolve alongside consumer behavior and marketplace dynamics. These proposed changes are not only logical; they are necessary for the Committee to continue serving the South Texas onion industry effectively.

1. Adding a Public Member

Including a public member brings valuable outside perspective and transparency. Consumers increasingly want to know where their food comes from, how it's produced, and who is behind it. A public member helps strengthen trust and accountability while reflecting the industry's commitment to serving both growers and the buying public.

2. Accepting Outside Monies (Grants and Partnerships)

Marketing and research dollars are limited, and leveraging outside resources, whether from USDA grants, state programs, or private partnerships, amplifies impact. The ability to accept outside funding would allow the Committee to modernize its efforts, invest in data-driven marketing, and partner on initiatives that extend beyond the scope of traditional assessments.

3. Using Assessment Funds for Paid Advertising

Retail promotions and consumer advertising remain the single most effective tools for increasing consumption of fresh produce. The opportunity to use assessment funds for paid marketing will give the Committee the ability to drive real marketplace results—supporting retailers, strengthening the category, and returning value directly to growers and handlers.

4. Adjusting the Continuation Referendum Threshold

A 68% supermajority sets an unnecessarily high bar for continuation. Shifting to a simple majority (51%) aligns with how most democratic processes function and reflects the practical reality of industry participation. This change would help ensure stability and consistency in program management while still maintaining fair representation of the grower and handler community.

The Bigger Picture

The South Texas onion industry is built on generations of hardworking families and dedicated businesses who take pride in producing a high-quality product that competes on both flavor and freshness. Yet, today's marketplace is more competitive than ever. To remain relevant, marketing orders like this one must have the tools, flexibility, and funding to respond quickly to change and be on par with competitors like the Vidalia Onion Committee.

These proposed amendments will not only modernize the Committee's structure but will also make it more responsive to the needs of both the marketplace and the producers it represents.

I have seen firsthand how strategic marketing, especially when fueled by collaboration between producers, marketers, and the public—can transform a commodity into a brand that consumers recognize, trust, and choose repeatedly.

That is why I strongly support the USDA's consideration of these updates, and I encourage their full adoption to help ensure the continued success of the South Texas onion industry.

Thank you for your time and for your service in supporting American agriculture.