

BRIDGING BORDERS AND HARVESTING OPPORTUNITIES

FOOD SYSTEMS & ECONOMIC IMPACT



FEB 19-21
2026

LAREDO
TEXAS

**MOVING TEXAS
FORWARD**

POWERED BY



**Texas Lyceum 2026
Quarterly Meeting 1
Laredo, TX
Feb 19th-21st**

**“BRIDGING BORDERS
AND HARVESTING
OPPORTUNITIES:
FOOD SYSTEMS &
ECONOMIC IMPACT”**

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

BRIDGING BORDERS AND HARVESTING OPPORTUNITIES:
FOOD SYSTEMS & ECONOMIC IMPACT

Welcome to Laredo, Texas — one of America's leading ports by total trade value, processing more than \$339 billion in trade in 2024. Laredo exemplifies how geography, partnership, and innovation can move economies — and people — forward. Its unique connection to two Mexican states makes it a critical gateway for binational trade and a fitting setting for this conference.

Bridging Borders and Harvesting Opportunities: Food Systems & Economic Impact invites us to examine the systems that sustain our communities, strengthen our economy, and shape our future. Food systems are more than supply chains; they are engines of economic growth, pillars of national security, and foundations of community health. As Texans, and as Lyceum members, understanding how these systems work — and how they can work better — is essential to **Moving Texas Forward**.

Our discussions will explore Laredo's central role in the food supply chain, the connection between food security and economic resilience, and the importance of building healthier, more self-reliant communities. True to the Texas Lyceum tradition, we will look beyond headlines to engage the policies, partnerships, and people that drive real impact, embracing thoughtful dialogue across perspectives in pursuit of practical solutions.

I extend my sincere thanks to Lyceum Directors **Josh Winegarner '21, Sandra Martinez '24, and Marissa Marquez '25** for their leadership in curating our off-the-record conversations and elite access. To our association managers **Logan Beszterda** and **Marine Bibes** for their careful orchestration of this conference to provide everyone a unique experience. Lastly thank you to our generous sponsors whose support makes this all possible.

We invite you to engage fully, think boldly, and contribute to the civil discourse that has defined this organization for nearly five decades. Together, through informed conversation, shared purpose, and your engagement, we will continue **Moving Texas Forward**.

Yours in service,



2026 President



MEETING CHAIRS' MESSAGE

BRIDGING BORDERS AND HARVESTING OPPORTUNITIES:
FOOD SYSTEMS & ECONOMIC IMPACT

Dear Directors, Alumni, and Guests!

Welcome to Laredo, Texas!

This is where we gather at the true crossroads of North American commerce to explore how food systems shape opportunity, resilience, and regional prosperity. This conference, *Bridging Borders and Harvesting Opportunities: Food Systems & Economic Impact*, invites you to look beyond the headlines and into the real machinery that puts food on our tables: the policies, partnerships, logistics, and people who keep a binational supply chain moving.

Across our sessions, we'll examine Laredo's indispensable role as the nation's premier gateway for food trade. Laredo is an economic engine that creates jobs, stabilizes prices, and strengthens communities on both sides of the border. We'll also confront a defining reality of our time: food security is national security. Even with America's agricultural strength and Texas as a leading agricultural powerhouse, imports are essential. Together, we'll dig into what we grow, what we import and export, and how strengthening local and cross-border production can serve as a first line of defense against insecurity while advancing a more self-reliant, equitable food economy.

Finally, we'll connect systems to outcomes by linking diet, health, and economic mobility to the strength of our neighborhoods. From community-based initiatives to urban farming and local production, we'll spotlight practical models that keep capital closer to home, create opportunity, and make healthy food a lived reality rather than a privilege.

On behalf of the directors and alumni of the Texas Lyceum, we welcome you to share in our long history of big ideas, bold solutions, and civil discourse.



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MARTINEZ '24

MEETING CHAIR



MARISSA
MARQUEZ '25

MEETING CHAIR



JOSH
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UPCOMING 2026 CONFERENCES

PUBCON - SAVOR THE STATE: WHERE HOSPITALITY SPURS PROSPERITY

San Antonio | April 23-25

LOOK FOR THE HELPERS: DISASTER RESPONSE AND RECOVERY IN TEXAS

San Juan, Puerto Rico | June 3-5

CLASSROOM TO COMMERCE: FUELING THE TEXAS WORKFORCE PIPELINE

Sherman | September 24-26

CONSTRUCTING OUR PATH FORWARD: HOW WE BUILD, FUND, AND SUSTAIN THE INFRASTRUCTURE THAT KEEPS TEXAS MOVING

Galveston | November 12-14

THANK YOU TO THE CONFERENCE PLANNING COMMITTEE

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AGENDA

BRIDGING BORDERS AND HARVESTING OPPORTUNITIES:
FOOD SYSTEMS & ECONOMIC IMPACT

THURSDAY FEBRUARY 19, 2026

Laredo Center of Arts

5:30 PM — **Welcome Reception and Maker's Market**

6:15 PM — **Welcome Remarks**

Guided Discussion

Speakers:

- Henry Cuellar, U.S. Congressman - District 28
- Richard Raymond, Texas State Representative
- Don McLaughlin, State Representatives
- JR Treviño, Texas Lyceum President

7:00 PM — **Class Dinner or on your own**

Hotel La Posada

9:00 PM — **Hospitality Suite**

FRIDAY FEBRUARY 20, 2026

Hotel La Posada

8:00 AM — **Breakfast**

8:45 AM — **Welcome Session and Overview**

8:55 AM — **Spotlight IBC Bank**

Speaker: Gerry Schwebel, IBC Bank

9:10 AM — **Crossroads of Trade: Laredo's Role in the Food Supply Chain**

Moderator: Josh Winegarner, Texas Cattle Feeders Association,

Lyceum Class of 2021

Speakers:

- Dante Galeazzi, Texas National Produce Association
- Skip Hulett, NatureSweet
- Brian Jones, Texas Farm Bureau

10:00 AM — **Spotlight TAMIU - Building Forward: USMCA 2.0 and the Future of Trilateral Integration**

Speaker: Daniel Covarrubias, TAMIU

10:15 AM — **Feeding Resilience: Building Healthier, Self-Reliant Communities**

Moderator: Jesse Ozuna, Texas Regional Bank, *Lyceum Class of 2024*

Speakers:

- Marcella Juarez, Palo Blanco Farm and Ranch
- Stephen Lucke, Gardopia Gardens

11:15 AM — **Food Security is National Security**

Moderator: Neel Gonuguntla, SriSN Services, LLC, *Lyceum Class of 2025*

Speakers:

- David Austin, 100 Billion Meal Challenge & Keelpoint Advisors
- Jeremy Everett, Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty (BCHP)

12:15 PM — **Lunch**

12:45 PM — **Fellow Session: Food Access in Texas: Understanding Food Deserts and Local Solutions**

Speaker: Henry Flowers, Texas Tech University

2:30 PM — **Departure for excursions - ID is mandatory**

- **Port of Laredo**
- **L&F Tour**

At L&F Distributors you will get to meet the famous Budweiser Clydesdales, followed by a warehouse tour and Q&A with one of the owners, Steve LaMantia. During the tour you will see a variety of alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages including perishable items and learn about the importance of the three-tier system in Texas and how it regulates the way alcoholic beverages are transferred throughout the area.

- **Mission Produce**

Mission Produce is a leading distributor of avocados and mangoes and provider of warehousing services to NatureSweet, a major greenhouse vegetable company. Participants will tour Mission Produce's cross border operations and value add-services, which include ripening, bagging and repackaging operations.

Guidelines:

- A light jacket is advised (temperatures range between 40-55 degrees)
- No shorts, capri pants, skirts, high heels or open toe shoes.
- No acrylic nails, jewelry or watches
- PPE (vests, hairnets and beard nets) will be provided prior to entry into food safe spaces.

6:00 PM — **Departure for dinner and Fireside**

LaMantia Ranch

6:45 PM — **Dinner**

7:15 PM — **Fireside Chat**

Moderator: Josh Winegarner, Texas Cattle Feeders Association, *Lyceum Class of 2021*

Speakers:

- Dan Hunter, Farm Service Agency
- Al Zapanta, US Mexico Chamber of Commerce

La Mina

9:30 PM — **Hospitality Suite**

**SATURDAY
FEBRUARY 21, 2026**

Abrazo Ceremony - Registration Mandatory

Hotel La Posada

7:00 AM — **Badges Distribution - PASSPORT IS MANDATORY**

7:15 AM — **Departure for Abrazo Ceremony**

7:30 AM — **Abrazo Ceremony**

Directors & Alumni only

Hotel La Posada

8:30 AM — **Breakfast**

9:00 AM — **Board Meeting**



DAVID AUSTIN

STRATEGIC CONSULTANT

100 BILLION MEAL
CHALLENGE & KEELPOINT
ADVISORS

David Austin spent the majority of his 35 year career working in the humanitarian and development sectors, serving first in non-profit, then in business, the State Department and the UN World Food Program. He currently advises families and governments on investments into systemic changes that create greater market opportunities and political freedom.

David holds degrees from the University of Washington, St. John's College and the University of Portland. He is a strong believer in the soft-power investments that have resulted in freer societies and greater human flourishing. He lives with his wife and five children in Oregon.



DR. DANIEL COVARRUBIAS

DIRECTOR

TEXAS A&M INTERNATIONAL
UNIVERSITY

Daniel Covarrubias is the Director of the Texas Center for Border Economic and Enterprise Development at Texas A&M International University (TAMIU). The Center supports socio-economic development in border areas and features the TAMIU Logistechs Living Lab, which enhances cross-border trade through innovative technologies and public-private partnerships. Prior to this role, he directed the Centro de Innovación Socioeconómica y Tecnológica, aiding businesses in innovation and competitiveness.

He serves on various committees related to international trade and transportation and focuses his research on Cross-Border Regional Development and Logistechs, which leverage technologies like AI and blockchain to improve logistics. Daniel is a recognized expert in his field, contributing to major media outlets.

He holds a Ph.D. in Business Competitiveness and Economic Development, along with multiple degrees in Political Science, Business Administration, and related fields.



JEREMY EVERETT

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

BAYLOR COLLABORATIVE ON
HUNGER AND POVERTY (BCHP)

Dr. Jeremy Everett is the founder and executive director of the Baylor University Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty, which integrates research, policy, and practice through various projects aimed at combating hunger. With nearly 80 staff and 28,000 partner organizations, the Collaborative has facilitated the distribution of millions of meals through innovative interventions. Dr. Everett has raised over \$300 million for research and public service during his tenure.

Before his current role, he worked as a teacher, religious leader, community organizer, and farmer, and frequently speaks on hunger and poverty. He holds degrees from Samford University, Baylor University, and Duke University and has served on various boards, including the National Commission on Hunger. He is an author of several books on hunger and social justice, including the upcoming *The Litmus Test*.

Dr. Everett is married to Reverend Amy Miley Everett, and they have three sons.



HENRY FLOWERS

STUDENT

TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

Henry J. Flowers Portillo is a Ph.D. student in Agricultural and Applied Economics at Texas Tech University. His research lies at the intersection of international trade, causal policy evaluation, and forecasting, with a focus on U.S. meat exports and policy shocks affecting global agricultural markets.

His dissertation combines econometric and machine-learning methods to examine export recovery following food-safety crises and the economic impacts of public security reforms. Henry has presented his work at national conferences and has teaching experience in agribusiness marketing, statistics, and applied economics.



DANTE GALEAZZI

PRESIDENT & CEO

TEXAS INTERNATIONAL PRODUCE ASSOCIATION

Dante Galeazzi graduated from CSU Monterey Bay in 2006, and immediately went to work with CH Robinson's perishable transportation division. In 2010, he changed roles and began working fresh produce sales and special projects roles which would span several South Texas grower-shipper-importers prior to assuming the position of President & CEO for the Texas International Produce Association in 2017.

Today, the association represents nearly 450 member companies throughout the fresh produce supply chain, as TIPA educates, advocates, promotes and represents the more than \$13 billion in fresh produce that is either grown in the state of Texas or considers Texas its first point of domestic arrival for North American distribution.



HILDA GUTIERREZ

VP OF PARTNERSHIPS AND STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

FEEDING TEXAS

Hilda Gutiérrez is the Vice President of Partnerships and Strategic Initiatives at Feeding Texas, where she leads neighbor engagement strategies and cross-sector partnerships to strengthen regional food systems and address root causes of hunger. She previously directed food access initiatives at Sustainable Food Center, expanding programs that helped thousands of Central Texans access fresh, local food and scaling Double Up Food Bucks statewide. A native of the Rio Grande Valley and daughter of Mexican immigrants, Hilda's early experiences as a farmworker shape her commitment to building equity in the food system. She holds degrees from Southwestern University and the University of New Mexico.



SKIP HULETT

CHIEF LEGAL OFFICER

NATURESWEET

Skip Hulett is the Chief Legal Officer at NatureSweet®, a leading controlled environment agriculture company in Texas, known for its Cherub® and Glory® snacking tomatoes. NatureSweet focuses on vertical integration and positively impacting communities, employing nearly 10,000 workers in Mexico and the U.S. Skip has a distinguished career as chief legal counsel for entrepreneurial firms, a state district court judge, and a law firm founder. After law school, he gained respect quickly and served as a judge appointed by the Texas Governor.

He later became General Counsel for a telecommunications company that grew from \$15 million to over \$1 billion in revenue. Since joining NatureSweet in 2018, he has led initiatives such as achieving B-Corp Certification, making it the largest CEA company to do so. He is active in various industry organizations and holds degrees from Lamar University and Texas Tech University School of Law, while being a member of the State Bar of Texas and the Association of Corporate Counsel.



BRIAN JONES

STATE DIRECTOR, DISTRICT 13

TEXAS FARM BUREAU

Brian Jones, of Edcouch, was elected to the Texas Farm Bureau board in December 2021. He grows irrigated cotton, corn, grain sorghum and soybeans in Hidalgo County. Jones has served several years in numerous roles, including president and vice president, on the Hidalgo County Farm Bureau board of directors.

He participated in TFB's leadership program, AgLead, and served on TFB's Feed Grains Advisory Committee. Jones also served as the state Young Farmer & Rancher Advisory Committee chair, as well as served on the advisory committee for three years. He was a member of TFB's 2020 Vision Committee and participated in the Food Dialogues panels to help foster communication between consumers and farmers. He and his wife, Lisa, have two grown children and two grandchildren.



DAN HUNTER

STATE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

FARM SERVICE AGENCY

Dan Hunter was appointed as the state executive director of the USDA Farm Service Agency in Texas by the Trump Administration in July 2025. Previously, he was the assistant commissioner for the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA), advising on economy, trade, and water issues, and overseeing rural affairs programs. His career includes roles as executive director of the Texas Institute for Applied Environmental Research, adjunct professor at Tarleton State University, and government relations representative for the National Cotton Council.

Hunter has served on various advisory committees and holds degrees from Texas Tech University, Tarleton State University, and Western Texas College. He was recognized as Outstanding Alumnus by Texas Tech. Raised on a family farm in Roscoe, Texas, he now resides in College Station with his wife Ana, has two children and four grandchildren, and enjoys hunting, golfing, and family time.



MARCELLA JUAREZ

OWNER/FARM MANAGER

PALO BLANCO FARM AND RANCH

Marcella Juarez is a farmer, rancher, and local food systems leader based in Laredo, Texas. She co-owns and manages Palo Blanco Farm and Ranch, a family-run operation launched in 2020 on land stewarded by her ancestors for over 160 years.

Her mission is to increase access to fresh, local, and healthy food that is produced sustainably. Marcella holds a master's degree in Agricultural Education with a specialization in hydroponics and sustainable agriculture and has over 13 years of agricultural production experience. Born and raised in Laredo, Marcella works at the intersection of food, health, economic opportunity, and environmental stewardship.



STEPHEN LUCKE

FOUNDER & CEO

GARDOPIA GARDENS

Stephen Lucke, Founder of Gardopia Gardens, is food systems expert, activist, and professor focusing on health and environmental justice who educates and empowers communities on how to lead healthy and sustainable lifestyles through urban agriculture.

He became aware of San Antonio's obesity epidemic and climate crises in his college years, sparking his journey to help find a solution to declining planetary and population wellness that disproportionately impacts BIPOC communities. In 2015, Stephen founded Gardopia Gardens to help solve the challenges facing his community by working with educational and community institutions to ensure current and future generations have the knowledge and skills to cultivate a high quality of life for themselves and society, fighting against malnutrition related diseases and environmental degradation.



GERRY SCHWEBEL

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

IBC BANK

Gerardo (Gerry) Schwebel is the Executive Vice President of the Corporate International Division at IBC Bank, part of International Bancshares Corporation. He is a leading expert on North American trade and finance, frequently testifying before Congress on U.S.-Mexico trade issues, including NAFTA and USMCA. Since 1996, he has led the International Division and has held key positions in various organizations, including former chair of the Border Trade Alliance and the North America Strategy for Competitiveness. Schwebel is involved with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the U.S.-Mexico Economic Council, focusing on trade policy and facilitation.

He has received numerous awards for his contributions to economic development and transportation, including the Russell H. Perry Award in 2019. Schwebel is a Texas A&I University graduate with further studies in banking and finance, and he served as an Army Field Artillery Officer in Korea and Germany.



**AL
ZAPANTA**

PRESIDENT & CEO

US MEXICO CHAMBER OF
COMMERCE

Mr. Zapanta is the President and CEO of the United States-Mexico Chamber of Commerce, overseeing 9 U.S. and 8 Mexican regional offices. He is also the Founder and CEO of PAZ Resources, managing executive staff and business strategy. Previously, he was CEO of PAZ Energy and worked at ARCO Oil & Gas, where he negotiated with U.S. and Mexican governments and helped deregulate the natural gas market. He has held several Presidential appointments, including White House Fellow and Assistant Secretary of the Interior.

Gen. Zapanta led a UN peacekeeping mission and was appointed by the Secretary of Defense as Chairman of the Reserve Forces Policy Board. His military honors include the Silver Star and multiple Bronze Stars for Valor. He serves on various boards and foundations, including Tyson Foods and the Gerald R. Ford Foundation. Mr. Zapanta holds a BA in Industrial Psychology, an MA in Public Administration, and has pursued a PhD in International Political Economics from USC, along with completing graduate studies at Harvard and the Inter-American Defense College.

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MEMBERS AS OF DATE OF PRINTING

2/1/2026

NOTES

THIS DISCUSSION WILL EXAMINE THE LINKS BETWEEN DIET, HEALTH, ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY, AND COMMUNITY STRENGTH, AIMING TO ESTABLISH A FOOD SYSTEM WHERE HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS IS A RIGHT. KEY TOPICS INCLUDE COMMUNITY-BASED INITIATIVES, URBAN FARMING, AND LOCAL PRODUCTION TO COMBAT FOOD INSECURITY. THE FOCUS WILL SHIFT FROM MERE ACCESS TO ENSURING WELLNESS AND NOURISHMENT FOR ALL. WE'LL EXPLORE MODELS THAT CREATE JOBS, RETAIN CAPITAL LOCALLY, AND ENHANCE COMMUNITY RESILIENCE, HIGHLIGHTING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN FOOD CHOICES, AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES, AND COMMUNITY ECONOMIC VITALITY.



THE TEXAS LYCEUM