

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6122

As Passed Senate, February 11, 1998

Title: An act relating to the inspection and certification of horticultural products.

Brief Description: Inspecting horticultural products.

Sponsors: Senators Morton and Rasmussen; by request of Department of Agriculture.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture & Environment: 1/14/98, 1/20/98 [DP].
Passed Senate, 2/11/98, 48-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & ENVIRONMENT

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Morton, Chair; Swecker, Vice Chair; Fraser, McAuliffe, Newhouse, Oke and Rasmussen.

Staff: Vic Moon (786-7469)

Background: The Fruit and Vegetable Inspection Program of the Department of Agriculture provides for orderly marketing of fresh fruits and vegetables by establishing uniform grades and standards. The state government requirements and the needs and businesses practices of the program's customers have changed over the last 35 years. The last revision was in 1963. The program currently provides inspection services to more than 350 growers and/or shippers, processors and handlers throughout the state of Washington. The department provides onsite inspections which include sampling of commodities such as apples, pears, cherries, potatoes, onions and asparagus to determine compliance with grade, quality, size, labeling and sanitary requirements. The program ensures that all growers and shippers selling fresh fruits and vegetables meet either state or federal standards.

Sanitary certificates issued by the department's program are required by most foreign countries for the importation of fresh fruits and vegetables from Washington State. The program is headquartered in Olympia and has district offices in Yakima, Wenatchee and Moses Lake, with 13 field offices located throughout the state. The program is self supported and has a fee for service program with an annual expenditure of approximately \$9 million.

Summary of Bill: The state's Fruit and Vegetable Inspection Program statutes are updated to provide modern language. The program's operating authority is altered to reflect current practices. Redundant language is removed and similar provisions are consolidated.

The statutes are updated to give the department authority to adopt rules for mandatory inspection of apricots, apples, Italian prunes, peaches, sweet cherries, pears, potatoes and

asparagus. The department is given specific authority to enter into certificate of compliance agreements as provided in department rules.

Outdated provisions requiring financial reports to counties are removed. The director's authority is clarified to adopt standards of any other state, as well as federal standards. The late fee for penalties is increased to 1 and « percent of the base amount per month. Criminal penalties are removed and civil penalties are provided for up to \$1,000 for each violation of compliance agreements. A new chapter in Title 15 for ginseng certification is recodified.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: None requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: The present fruit and vegetable program is working well but the law supporting it needs to be updated and adjusted to fit with current practice. The whole industry strongly supports this redrafting of the Department of Agriculture's authority.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Mary Beth Lang, Jim Quigley, Department of Agriculture; Kirk Mayer, Washington Growers Clearinghouse; Brad Barnes, Washington Horticulture Association.

House Amendment(s): A technical amendment decodifies a section rather than repealing it.