

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2397

As Reported by House Committee On:
Agriculture & Ecology

Title: An act relating to organic food products.

Brief Description: Regulating organic food products.

Sponsors: Representatives Linville, Schoesler and Hunt; by request of Department of Agriculture.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Ecology: 1/29/02, 2/1/02 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Changes the state's standards for food sold, represented, or labeled as "organic" to the standards developed by the United States Department of Agriculture.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & ECOLOGY

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 13 members: Representatives Linville, Chair; Hunt, Vice Chair; Schoesler, Ranking Minority Member; Chandler, Cooper, Delvin, Dunshee, Grant, Holmquist, Kirby, Quall, Roach and Sump.

Staff: Jason Callahan (786-7117).

Background:

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates that the value of retail sales of organic foods in 1999 was approximately \$6 billion and the number of organic farmers nationwide is increasing by about 12 percent per year and now stands at about 12,200. According to a recent USDA study, certified organic cropland more than doubled from 1992 to 1997.

The U.S. Congress enacted The Organic Foods Production Act (the Act), as part of the 1990 Farm Bill. This act established uniform national standards for the production and handling of foods labeled as "organic." It also authorized a USDA national organic

program to set national standards for the production, handling, and processing of organically grown agricultural products. The National Organic Standards Board was also created by the Act. This board advises the secretary of agriculture in setting the national organic program standards. Producers who meet these standards may label their products as "USDA Certified Organic." The final national organic standards rule took effect on December 21, 2000. Those who grow or market "organic" products must comply with the rule by October 21, 2002.

The Act permits the secretary of agriculture to allow each state to implement a state organic certification program for producers and handlers of agricultural products that have been produced using organic methods as provided for by the USDA. State standards may be more restrictive than the federal standards, but may not be less restrictive.

Washington adopted statewide organic standards in 1992. Any food labeled or represented as organic must be produced in accordance with the standards set by the Washington Department of Agriculture (department). The director of the department has the authority to establish a list of approved substances that may be used in organic food production. This list must approve the use of most natural substances and prohibit the use of most synthetic substances.

Summary of Bill:

The director of the Washington Department of Agriculture (department) shall adopt the standards developed under the national organic program for food labeled, represented, or sold as organic. The standards developed by the department independent from the federal standards are repealed. The intent and definition sections of RCW Chapter 15.86 are updated to reflect the national standards, and technical changes are made.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

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

Testimony For: The market for organic foods has been consistently increasing over the past two decades. Today the organic market is a \$9 billion industry nationwide, and has a \$1.5 million impact in Washington. Producers and consumers both rely on the state's organic program to provide consistency and assistance for the organic market. The standards in Washington need to be updated to mirror the federal standards. Washington's accreditation is critical for maintaining access to the national and international organic foods market.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: (In support) Leslie Emerick, Washington Department of Agriculture