

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SJM 8019

As Passed House - Amended:

April 5, 2001

Brief Description: Petitioning the secretary of agriculture to review certain policies of the conservation reserve enhancement program.

Sponsors: By Senators Rasmussen, Parlette, Spanel and Oke.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Ecology: 3/22/01, 3/29/01 [DPA].

Floor Activity:

Passed House - Amended: 4/5/01, 95-0.

**Brief Summary of Bill
(As Amended by House)**

- Requests the United States Secretary of Agriculture to allow the inclusion of perennial horticultural crop lands within the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & ECOLOGY

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 14 members: Representatives G. Chandler, Republican Co-Chair; Linville, Democratic Co-Chair; Cooper, Democratic Vice Chair; Mielke, Republican Vice Chair; B. Chandler, Delvin, Dunshee, Grant, Hunt, Kirby, Quall, Roach, Schoesler and Sump.

Staff: Kenneth Hirst (786-7105).

Background:

Agencies of the United States Department of Agriculture and the state of Washington have entered into an agreement for improving the water quality in streams crossing agricultural lands where the streams provide habitat for salmonids listed under the federal Endangered Species Act. The agreement is for a voluntary program for devoting up to 100,000 acres to tree planted riparian buffers. Under the agreement, the federal government and the state provide a substantial portion of the costs of establishing the

necessary conservation practices and certain other costs.

Among other eligibility criteria, the land enrolled in the program must be crop land that has been cropped two out of the last five years and must be physically and legally capable of being cropped.

Summary of Amended Bill:

The Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture is requested to review the department's policies for the conservation reserve enhancement program and to alter those policies to allow the inclusion of lands that are currently used to produce perennial horticultural crops in the program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

Testimony For: Including orchard lands within the program would allow some growers to keep their lands and provide valuable environmental benefits. Federal monies are available for the program in this state that are not being used; the policy change requested by the memorial would allow the use of these monies. Approximately half of the farm lands in this state, including hop and berry farms, do not qualify for the program because of the policy cited in the memorial.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Senator Rasmussen, prime sponsor; Leslie Emerik, Department of Agriculture; Chris Cheney, Hop Growers and the Agriculture Caucus of the Agriculture, Fish, and Water process; and Jim Halstrom, Washington State Horticultural Association.