

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6471

As Passed Senate, February 14, 2002

Title: An act relating to labeling of agricultural products by place of origin.

Brief Description: Requiring labeling of the origin of fruits and vegetables grown in the United States or grown in Washington state.

Sponsors: Senators Honeyford, Rasmussen, Johnson, Sheahan, Stevens, Swecker, Shin, Parlette, Deccio, McCaslin, Hochstatter, Gardner, Hewitt, Spanel, Kastama, Regala, Eide, Oke, Hale and Keiser.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture & International Trade: 2/1/02, 2/8/02 [DP].

Passed Senate: 2/14/02, 46-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Rasmussen, Chair; Shin, Vice Chair; Parlette, Snyder, Spanel and Swecker.

Staff: Bob Lee (786-7404)

Background: Some states have enacted labeling requirements for fresh fruits and vegetables.

Summary of Bill: Stores and other businesses offering fresh fruit and vegetables for retail sale must place a placard on the bin, shelf or other location where the product is displayed that informs the consumer if it was grown either in the United States or grown in Washington.

Placards are not required if the product was grown outside of the United States, or if each item in the bin or shelf contains a sticker or label that indicates where the fruit or vegetable was grown.

The Department of Agriculture is designated as the enforcing agency. The department issues a warning for the first violation, a civil fine of up to \$250 for a second violation at the same location and in the same calendar year, and a civil fine of up to \$1,000 for a third or subsequent violation at the same location in the same calendar year.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: The bill is being proposed for two reasons: to promote Washington grown products and to allow consumers to have a choice. Not much of the food produced in foreign countries is inspected and may not be grown under the same high standards as those produced in the United States. Enforcement actions will be complaint driven and can be done when the store scales are being checked. Commodity commissions would likely be a good source of placards for products grown in Washington. There is concern about the health ramifications of foods produced in other countries where pesticides are not tightly regulated. The markup from the farm to the consumer in many cases is very high. The additional cost of the placard requirement would be small as compared to the benefit of providing support for domestic agricultural producers and informed choice for consumers.

Testimony Against: Some grocery stores stock as many as 370 fruits and vegetable items in their produce department. There is a concern that the requirement to place placards will be costly. Retailers have been working with producers on the "Buy Washington" campaign and believe the "Buy Washington" program is a better approach and should be given time to work.

Testified: Linda Johnson, Farm Bureau (pro); Doug Henken, WA Food Industry (con); Charlie Brown, WA State Potato Commission, WA State Asparagus Commission (pro); Jim Halstrom, WA State Horticultural Assn. (pro).