

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 3088

As Reported by House Committee On:
Agriculture & Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to farms for the future of Washington.

Brief Description: Preserving farms.

Sponsors: Representatives Linville, Schoesler and Morrell.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 2/3/04 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates the Farms for the Future Account in the state treasury.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Linville, Chair; Rockefeller, Vice Chair; Schoesler, Ranking Minority Member; Eickmeyer, Grant, Hunt, McDermott, Orcutt and Quall.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Holmquist, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Kristiansen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chandler and Sump.

Staff: Caroleen Dineen (786-7156).

Background:

The Growth Management Act (GMA) requires all counties and cities to identify natural resource lands such as agricultural, forest, and mineral resource lands. The counties and cities that plan under the major GMA requirements also must conserve natural resource lands with long-term commercial significance.

Conservation districts conduct activities related to conservation of renewable natural resources. Some conservation district programs and activities include research, surveys,

investigations, educational programs, and technical assistance. Conservation districts are assisted and their programs are coordinated by the Conservation Commission, a state agency.

Numerous programs address conservation of agricultural lands. For example, the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a voluntary federal program offering rental, incentive, and maintenance payments and cost-share assistance to establish long-term, resource conserving cover on eligible land crop land and pasture land. In addition, the state Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a voluntary program designed to establish forested buffers along eligible streams to address salmon habitat, improve water quality, and increase stream stability. Land enrolled in CREP is removed from agricultural production and grazing according to 10-15 year contracts. In exchange, land owners may receive annual rental, incentive, maintenance, and cost-share payments.

State law allows local governments and certain public and private entities to acquire interests in land to protect, improve, restore, maintain or conserve certain open space, farm or agricultural, and timber land for public use or enjoyment. These entities are specifically authorized to acquire development rights in certain open space, farm or agricultural, and timber land (conservation futures) for conservation purposes.

In 2002 the Legislature established the Agricultural Conservation Easements Program in the state Conservation Commission and an Agricultural Conservation Easements Account in the state treasury. Chapter 280, Laws of 2002 (SHB 2758). Funding for this program was specified to include legislative appropriations and funding from other public and from private sources.

Summary of Bill:

The Farms for the Future of Washington Account is created in the custody of the State Treasurer. Revenues to the account include federal, state, regional, or local appropriations or suitable private funds. Only the WSDA Director or his or her designee may authorize expenditures from the account. Up to 5 percent of funds from this account may be used for administrative costs.

Legislative findings recognize the competitive market for agricultural products and cite the need for the state to position itself to take maximum advantage of all available programs and funding sources to promote a viable agricultural sector in the state. Legislative findings also recognize the need to establish accommodation between agriculture and other societal, environmental, and economic goals affecting farmland and farming operations. In addition, legislative findings recognize the availability of federal, regional, state, local, and private funding to support continued farming operations and provide enhanced habitat on private lands.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: This bill is the product of a Growth Management Act working group that met during last interim. The concept in this bill flows from the Agriculture-Fish-Water (AFW) process. The bill sets up a placeholder account to allow acquisition of funding for voluntary habitat riparian work. The account in this bill is similar to one that has been established in Florida. The intent section is vague because the specifics regarding the funding are not currently known.

(Concerns) The intent section is too vague. There is a concern that the vague intent may allow these funds to be used to purchase buildable lands and development rights.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Jay Gordon, Washington State Dairy Federation and Washington State Farm Bureau.

(Concerns) Andy Cook, Building Industry Association of Washington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.