
**Agriculture & Natural
Resources Committee**

HB 1100

Brief Description: Regulating the sale, processing, or purchase of agricultural products.

Sponsors: Representatives Linville, Schoesler, Grant, Rockefeller and Sump; by request of Department of Agriculture.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Alters certain bonding and payment requirements under the commission merchant laws and increases penalties for violations of these laws.
- Authorizes search warrants to be sought in certain circumstances; and expands the commodities for which vehicles carrying commodities may be stopped by the Director of the WSDA or officers regarding violations of the commission merchant laws.

Hearing Date: 1/28/03

Staff: Kenneth Hirst (786-7105).

Background:

With certain exceptions, no person may act as a commission merchant, dealer, broker, or cash buyer for agricultural commodities. or as the agent of any of them, without being licensed by the Department of Agriculture (WSDA) under the state's commission merchant laws. (RCW 20.01.040.)

A "commission merchant" is a person who receives an agricultural product on consignment for sale on commission on behalf of the consignor, or for processing and sale. It is also a person who accepts a farm product in trust from a consignor for the purpose of resale, or who sells on commission an agricultural product, or who in any way handles an agricultural product for a consignor. In general, a "dealer" is a person other than a cash buyer who solicits, obtains, or contracts or agrees to obtain from a consignor the title, possession, or control of an agricultural product for resale, sale, or processing. (RCW 20.01.010.)

The Director of the WSDA or appointed officers may stop a vehicle transporting hay or

straw on a public road if there is reasonable cause to believe that the carrier, seller, or buyer is in violation of the commission merchant laws. A vehicle operator who fails to stop when directed to do so has committed a civil infraction for which the maximum penalty is \$1,000. (RCW 20.01.490 and 20.01.610.)

Under the theft and robbery statutes, the unlawful issuance of a bank check in an amount greater than \$250 dollars is a class C felony. The unlawful issuance of a bank check in an amount of \$250 dollars or less is a gross misdemeanor. (RCW 9A.56.060.)

Summary of Bill:

Penalties. Rather than being classified as a gross misdemeanor under the commission merchant laws, the unlawful issuance of a check or draft may be prosecuted in the same manner as prosecution for the unlawful issuance of a bank check under the theft and robbery laws which, in certain instances, is classified as a class C felony. (Section 8.)

The maximum monetary penalty for civil infraction under the commission merchant laws is now \$5,000 (rather than \$1,000). (Section 9.)

Search Warrants. If, in conducting an investigation regarding a transaction, the director is denied access to records or places agricultural products are kept, the director may apply to any court of competent jurisdiction for a search warrant authorizing access to the premises and records and the court may issue the search warrant . (Section 6.)

Stopping Vehicles. The authority of the director or the director's officers to stop vehicles transporting hay or straw on public roads regarding violations of the commission merchant laws is now extended to stopping vehicles transporting any agricultural commodity. (Section 10.)

Payment. The date on which default occurs for a payment to a consignor by a commission merchant or dealer (other than a limited dealer) in hay or straw is either the current statutory deadline of 30 days of the date the person took possession of the hay or straw or at a date agreed to by both the consignor and the merchant or dealer in a written contract. (Section 5.) The form of payment that a cash buyer may make is expanded to include credit card payment. (Section 1.)

Bonds. The criteria for the alternative bonding requirements available to certain dealers are altered. The bond must be in an amount equal to the dealer's maximum monthly purchases divided by 12 (rather than 15) and must be for at least \$10,000 (rather than at least \$7,500). (Section 4.)

The director is no longer required to demand payment of a claim by a licensee's surety regarding a default on such a payment for hay or straw within 10 working days of the filing of the claim, without regard to other potentially valid claims. The director is now to distribute on a pro rata basis the proceeds of all of the valid bond claims against a commission merchant or dealer regarding an agricultural product. (Section 5.)

Manifests. A bill of lading may be carried by a vehicle transporting agricultural products for

a commission merchant, dealer, or cash buyer in lieu of a manifest of cargo. The commission merchant, dealer, or cash buyer must retain a copy of the manifest or bill of lading for three years (rather than one year). A representative of the consignor may now sign the manifest for the consignor. The provisions regarding manifests for other agricultural products (but not bills of lading) expressly apply with regard to consignments of hay or straw to commission merchants or dealers. Manifests will be provided to licensees at actual cost plus necessary handling charges incurred by the department. (Section 7.)

Other. The agricultural commodities regulated under the commission merchant laws expressly include agricultural crop seeds and vegetable seeds. A limited dealer under these laws is defined as being a person operating under alternative bonding requirements who pays the consignor for the production or increase of an agricultural product when the person obtains possession or control of the product by paying the full agreed price of the product . (Section 1.) A change in the organization of a licensee that must be reported to the WSDA must now be reported within 30 days. (Section 3.)

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

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