

FINAL BILL REPORT

HB 1556

C 137 L 07

Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Designating the Walla Walla sweet onion as the official Washington state vegetable.

Sponsors: By Representatives Walsh, Grant, Haler, Sells, Springer, O'Brien, Seaquist, Ahern, Takko, Williams, Ericks, Roberts, Strow, Linville, Ormsby and McDermott.

House Committee on State Government & Tribal Affairs
Senate Committee on Agriculture & Rural Economic Development

Background:

The Walla Walla Sweet onion is grown in Walla Walla County, but finds its origins on the island of Corsica. Over a century ago, a retired French soldier named Peter Pieri found a sweet onion seed there and brought it to the Walla Walla Valley. The sweet onion had impressive winter hardiness well-suited for the climate of southeastern Washington. Soon Pieri and many Italian immigrants in the area began harvesting the seed. Over several generations of careful hand selection, the sweet onion developed greater sweetness, size, and shape. Today, there are approximately 40 growers producing Walla Walla Sweet onions on 1,200 acres of farmland in the Walla Walla Valley. Sweet onion season is mid-June through September and, since 1984, Walla Walla has celebrated the Sweet Onion Festival every July.

Onions have been a food source for at least 5,000 years. There are ancient Chinese, Sumerian, Mesopotamian, and Egyptian references to the cultivation of onions. The onion was also an essential part of the Ancient Roman and Greek diet. In more recent times, the onion has been an essential part of classical French cooking in the *bourgeoise*, *nivernaise*, and *soubise* sauces. Today the onion crop is a \$400 million crop in the United States. Other sweet onion varieties are the: Texas Yellow Bermuda, White Bermuda, and Crystal Wax; the Vidalia Sweet from Georgia; Hawaii's Maui Sweet; and the Nevada Sweetie Sweet.

Summary:

The Walla Walla Sweet onion is designated as the official state vegetable.

Votes on Final Passage:

House	95	0
Senate	42	3

Effective: July 22, 2007