
SENATE BILL 5060

State of Washington

64th Legislature

2015 Regular Session

By Senators Honeyford, Schoesler, and Warnick

Prefiled 01/09/15. Read first time 01/12/15. Referred to Committee on Agriculture, Water & Rural Economic Development.

1 AN ACT Relating to improving relationships between agricultural
2 producers and state regulatory staff; adding a new section to chapter
3 89.08 RCW; creating a new section; and providing an expiration date.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds that relationships
6 between agricultural producers and personnel assigned to state
7 regulatory agencies are in need of improvement in a number of areas
8 in the state. The legislature further finds that many of the staff at
9 state regulatory agencies lack experience and background with
10 agricultural operations and producers. The legislature further finds
11 that tension is created because of a lack of clarity regarding agency
12 roles in addressing natural resources issues, particularly water
13 quality, involving agriculture. Furthermore, the legislature finds
14 agricultural producers lack familiarity with the expectations placed
15 upon state regulatory personnel.

16 The legislature finds the state conservation commission includes
17 representatives of state regulatory agencies and conservation
18 districts, but does not have representatives of general agricultural
19 organizations or commodity groups. However, the legislature finds
20 that the state conservation commission and local conservation
21 districts have had a long-term experience in successfully working

1 with agricultural producers and state agency personnel on a range of
2 natural resource issues to address concerns regarding the use and
3 stewardship of the state natural resources.

4 The purpose of this act is to initiate a public process employing
5 the state conservation commission to test processes to clearly define
6 agency roles, improve mutual understandings, and build improved
7 working relationships between agricultural producers and state
8 regulatory personnel.

9 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 89.08
10 RCW to read as follows:

11 (1)(a) The commission shall initiate a state forum that includes
12 persons designated by the directors of state regulatory agencies, and
13 agricultural producers nominated to the commission by state and
14 regional agricultural organizations to:

15 (i) Design a process to be instituted at the county or regional
16 level on a pilot project basis that would provide an opportunity for
17 local producers to meet-and-greet the field staff assigned by the
18 regulatory agency to that area of the state and begin a dialogue that
19 improves communication and mutual understanding and cooperation;

20 (ii) Design a process whereby input and complaints can be
21 received, evaluated, and form the basis for recommending possible
22 change to agency procedures;

23 (iii) Examine and propose revision of existing training provided
24 to and procedures followed by field enforcement staff of state
25 regulatory agencies that interact with agricultural producers,
26 including cross-training of state regulatory agency field enforcement
27 staff and conservation district technical assistance staff;

28 (iv) Examine policy issues that create tensions between state
29 regulatory agencies and agricultural organizations and propose
30 methods to relieve these tensions, including recommending to the
31 legislature policy changes; and

32 (v) Examine the roles and responsibilities of the various
33 agencies and entities, both regulatory and incentive-based, as they
34 relate to programs interacting with agricultural landowners, and
35 recommend policy changes to, if necessary, better clarify these roles
36 and responsibilities.

37 (b) An initial report of the recommendations in this subsection
38 (1) shall be made to the appropriate policy committees of the
39 legislature and to the governor by December 16, 2015.

1 (2) The state forum may request assistance from local
2 conservation districts to host and conduct local forums on a pilot
3 basis to initiate a dialogue between state regulatory agency staff
4 assigned in a particular county or region of the state, and
5 agricultural and rural landowners in that county or region. The
6 commission may provide incentives to those conservation districts
7 that engage in the pilot program through the commission's existing
8 district governance and accountability program. The commission shall
9 seek involvement from at least one district from each side of the
10 crest of the Cascade mountains each year. The commission shall
11 consult with legislators to assist in determining which counties may
12 benefit from the establishment of these forums.

13 (3) State regulatory agencies shall cooperate with the commission
14 and participate in the state and local forums. In conducting this
15 pilot program, the commission may test various options including
16 establishing yearly or periodic forums.

17 (4) The commission shall submit a final report by December 1,
18 2019, to the committees with jurisdiction over agricultural issues in
19 the house of representatives and the senate on the results of the
20 forums and the pilot program, and shall also submit any
21 recommendations to further decrease tensions and improve working
22 relationships and understanding between the agricultural landowners
23 and the staff assigned to state regulatory agencies.

24 (5) As used in this section, "state regulatory agencies" means
25 the department of ecology, the department of agriculture, and the
26 department of fish and wildlife.

27 (6) This section expires July 1, 2020.

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