

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1731

As Reported by House Committee On:
Rural Development, Agriculture, & Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to continuing the work of the Washington food policy forum.

Brief Description: Continuing the work of the Washington food policy forum.

Sponsors: Representatives Gregerson, Dye, Ramos, Dent, Blake, Jinkins, Peterson, Hudgins and Riccelli.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Rural Development, Agriculture, & Natural Resources: 2/12/19, 2/15/19 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes the Washington Food Policy Forum (Forum) as a public-private partnership to promote a variety of goals related to Washington's food system.
- Directs the Forum to submit recommendations to the Legislature no later than October 29, 2020.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT, AGRICULTURE, & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 14 members: Representatives Blake, Chair; Shewmake, Vice Chair; Chandler, Ranking Minority Member; Dent, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chapman, Dye, Kretz, Lekanoff, Orcutt, Pettigrew, Ramos, Schmick, Springer and Walsh.

Staff: Robert Hatfield (786-7117).

Background:

The Washington Food Policy Forum.

The Washington State Conservation Commission (Commission) convened the Washington Food Policy Forum (Forum) in response to direction and funding in the 2016 Supplemental

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Operating Budget. The Forum followed a previous food system roundtable established by Executive Order Number 10-02.

The Forum is composed of members appointed by the Director of the Commission, as well as four members from the Legislature.

The 2018 Supplemental Operating Budget required the Commission to report the Forum's recommendations to the Legislature by June 30, 2019.

Summary of Bill:

The Washington Food Policy Forum (Forum) is established as a public-private partnership and must develop recommendations to promote the following food system goals:

- increase the availability of Washington-grown foods throughout the state, including by increasing direct marketing sales and consumption of Washington-grown foods;
- expand and promote programs that bring healthy and nutritious Washington-grown foods to Washington residents, including increased public and private purchasing of Washington food products for schools, adult care programs, and other publicly funded food programs;
- examine ways to encourage retention of an adequate number of farmers for small and mid-scale farms, meet the educational needs for the next generation of farmers, and provide for the continued economic viability of Washington food production, processing, and distribution in the state;
- reduce food insecurity and hunger in the state; and
- identify ways to improve coordination and communication among city, county, regional, and state food policy entities and communication between these entities and state agencies.

The Forum's recommendations must consider, at a minimum, how the following can help achieve the goals of the Forum:

- increased collaboration and communication between local, state, and federal governments and agencies;
- innovative public-private partnerships that can leverage private and public market influence, such as through institutional purchasing and contracts;
- improvements to state or federal laws or regulations, or funding relevant to the small and mid-scale farming interactions with the food system and food security in the state;
- improvements in state or federal program implementation relevant to small and mid-scale farming interactions with the food system and food security in the state;
- identification of additional federal, state, local, and private investments needed to accomplish the recommendations; and
- determination of definitions and descriptions of the variety of agriculture in the state, utilizing farm acreage, farm business type, crop and agricultural product type, and definition of what the term "local" means in the context of food production and distribution.

In the course of developing its recommendations, the Forum:

- shall coordinate with appropriate local, state, and federal agencies, tribes, and nongovernmental organizations to avoid duplication of effort;
- shall solicit public input through public hearings or informational sessions;
- may conduct research and analysis as needed within the financial resources available to the Forum; and
- may form an advisory committee or committees to address issues identified by the Forum, and that are within the guidelines of the goals of the Forum, as requiring additional study or particular expertise.

The Director of the Washington State Conservation Commission (Commission) and the Director of the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) share equally the responsibility for appointing the members of the Forum, with a goal of ensuring a diversity of knowledge, experience, and perspectives, including, but not limited to:

- state and federal government employees, including academia;
- related nonprofit and community organizations; and
- the food industry, including food production, processing, distribution, marketing, and retail sales.

A majority of the participating members appointed by the directors must appoint an administrative chair for the Forum.

Four members of the Legislature may also serve on the Forum, one from each of the two largest caucuses in the House of Representatives and the Senate.

The members of the Forum will not receive compensation, but may be reimbursed for their travel expenses.

The Commission and the WSDA must provide staff for the Forum. The Commission and the WSDA are also responsible for transmitting the Forum's recommendations to the Legislature.

The Forum's recommendations must be submitted to the Legislature by October 29, 2020.

If specific funding for the Forum is not provided in the 2019 State Omnibus Operating Appropriations Act, the act is null and void.

The Forum expires on July 1, 2021.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed. However, the bill is null and void unless funded in the budget.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The potential opportunity offered by the Food Policy Forum (Forum) is exciting. An improved hunger response depends on coordination that can be achieved only by having all stakeholders at a table, sharing best practices. The Forum provides a great exchange of information and a great opportunity for knowledge building. The Forum can act as a force multiplier to leverage the many resources the state has. It is important to develop a food system that works for all participants: producers, processors, and consumers. There has been a great deal of learning that has already taken place as a result of the Forum. Farmland preservation is one of the improvements that the Forum would want to look at. Only through a body like this is it possible to achieve the necessary level of understanding about the food system, and to have the platform to do something about it.

The Forum is focused right where it needs to be: providing value to small and medium-sized farms across the state, looking for farm-to-school opportunities, and improving the viability of small and medium-sized farms. The Forum is also helping out on food insecurity issues; there are people who do not have access to fresh fruit and vegetables. Hopefully, the Forum can find a way to address those issues. There needs to be funding for the Washington State Department of Agriculture's (WSDA's) farm-to-market program in order to implement some of the ideas that may come out of the Forum.

This bill, coupled with the food waste bill, could make for a strong food policy for Washington's future. The hope is that the Forum's work will build strong ties between independent grocers and farmers in the state. Independent grocers are ready and willing to help out.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) The Forum shows the importance of partnerships. Food security continues to be a problem in the state. The Forum represents a great relationship with the WSDA.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Aaron Czyzewski, Food Lifeline; Tom Davis, Washington Farm Bureau; and Jan Gee, Washington Food Industry Association.

(Other) Kirk Robinson, State Conservation Commission.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.