

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 6091

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: Senate Committee on Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks (originally sponsored by Senators Warnick, Saldaña, Lovelett, Stanford and Wilson, C.).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Rural Development, Agriculture, & Natural Resources: 2/21/20, 2/28/20 [DP].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Establishes the Washington Food Policy Forum (Forum) as a public-private partnership for the purpose of developing recommendations to advance certain food system goals.
- Requires the Forum to submit its recommendations to the Legislature by 2021 and every odd-numbered year thereafter.

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, Fitzgibbon, Lekanoff, Orcutt, Pettigrew, Ramos, Schmick, Springer and Walsh.

Staff: Robert Hatfield (786-7117).

Background:

The Washington Food Policy Forum.

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

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followed a previous food system roundtable established by Executive Order Number 10-02. The 2017-2019 Biennial Operating Budget contained a proviso to continue the work of the Forum. As required by the proviso, the Forum submitted recommendations to the Legislature in June 2019.

The Forum's recommendations addressed the following topics:

- coordination with and among local food policy entities;
- food insecurity;
- agricultural land protection and availability;
- transportation and related infrastructure;
- alleviating barriers to small and medium scale farmers accessing markets, including institutional purchasing;
- rural economic development including next-generation farming; and
- impacts of climate change.

Summary of Bill:

The Washington Food Policy Forum (Forum) is established as a public-private partnership with the purpose of developing recommendations to advance the following food system goals:

- to increase the availability of Washington-grown foods throughout the state;
- to expand and promote programs that bring healthy and nutritious Washington-grown foods to Washington residents;
- to 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;
- to reduce food insecurity and hunger in the state; and
- to identify ways to improve coordination and communication among city, county, regional, and state food policy entities and communication between these entities and state agencies.

Recommendations of the Forum must consider, but not be limited to, ways in which the goals identified above may be achieved through the following:

- 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

- defining and describing the variety of agriculture in the state utilizing farm acreage, farm business type, crop and agricultural product type, and defining what the term "local" means in the context of food production and distribution.

In developing its recommendations, the Forum:

- must coordinate with appropriate local, state, and federal agencies, tribes, and nongovernmental organizations to avoid duplication of effort;
- must solicit public input through public hearings or informational sessions;
- may conduct research and analysis as needed within 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 Forum's goals, as requiring additional study or particular expertise.

The directors of the Washington State Conservation Commission (Commission) and the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) are responsible for appointing members of the Forum and no appointment may be made unless each director concurs in the appointment. In making appointments, the directors must attempt to ensure a diversity of knowledge, experience, and perspectives reflecting the issues to be addressed by the Forum 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.

In addition to members appointed by the directors, four legislators may serve on the Forum in an ex officio capacity. Legislative participants must be appointed as follows:

- The Speaker of the House of Representatives shall appoint one member from each of the two largest caucuses of the House of Representatives; and
- The President of the Senate shall appoint one member from each of the two largest caucuses of the Senate.

Each member of the Forum shall serve without compensation but may be reimbursed for travel expenses.

Staff for the Forum must be provided by the Commission and the WSDA. The Commission and WSDA are jointly responsible for transmitting the recommendations of the Forum to the Legislature by October 29, 2021, and every odd-numbered year thereafter.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The bill represents a dialogue among multiple stakeholders with a focus on food policy. It is good for farmers and it is good for food-insecure people. The dialogue has built consensus on a number of issues, including capacity for the safe storage of Washington-grown produce, support for small and mid-scale growers, and a shared concern for struggling rural economies. The dialogue has resulted in a stronger coalition across all sectors that connects the dots between farmers, the state, and consumers.

This idea has been road-tested and put into practice for several years now. This has been a robust process that has built relationships between groups. Everybody benefits from these kinds of conversations and relationships.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) It would be helpful to have the Washington Food Policy Forum (Forum) in statute. The Forum started with the intent of bringing together diverse food interests. Food issues can sometimes be contentious. The Forum is beginning the process of developing its implementation work plan. Having the Forum enacted into law ensures that the work of forum will continue into the future.

The forum is a cross-sector group of stakeholders tasked with listening and learning from each other to make meaningful recommendations about improving the food system of Washington. Food that is grown, produced, and processed in the state brings diverse communities together, and sustains the state both nutritionally and economically. There are many pressures on Washington farmers. Food issues are most effectively addressed holistically, which requires bringing many diverse parties together. The forum's process to date has been successful, and the forum is moving ahead on issues where there is agreement. The Forum's June 2019 report made 15 recommendations that were all consensus recommendations.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Senator Warnick, prime sponsor; Representative Gregerson; Christina Wong, Northwest Harvest; and Tom Davis, Washington Farm Bureau.

(Other) Alison Halpern, State Conservation Commission; and Laura Raymond, Regional Markets Program, Department of Agriculture.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.