
**Rural Development, Agriculture, &
Natural Resources Committee**

SSB 6306

Brief Description: Creating the Washington soil health initiative.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators Liias, Van De Wege, Warnick, Rolfes, Short, Nguyen, Das, Lovelett, Randall, Saldaña and Wilson, C.).

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Establishes the Washington Soil Health Initiative as a partnership jointly administered by Washington State University, the Washington State Conservation Commission, and the Washington State Department of Agriculture.
- Requires the collaborating agencies to support and supplement the current Washington Soil Health Advisory Committee membership to promote effective implementation of the Soil Health Initiative.
- Requires the collaborating agencies to submit a biennial Soil Health Initiative progress report to the Governor and appropriate committees of the Legislature by October 1, 2020, and every two years thereafter.

Hearing Date: 2/25/20

Staff: Nico Wedekind (786-7290) and Robert Hatfield (786-7117).

Background:

The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) was created in 1913 and is organized into five divisions, including commodity inspection, food safety, pesticide management, plant protection, and the state veterinarian. The WSDA has a duty to promote and protect agriculture and its dependent rural community in Washington.

The Washington State Conservation Commission (Commission) was created by the Legislature in 1939 to support conservation districts through financial and technical assistance,

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.

administrative and operational oversight, program coordination, and promotion of district activities and services. The Commission has several duties, including to assist the supervisors of districts, keep the supervisors of each district informed of the activities and experiences of other districts, and facilitate an exchange of advice and experience between districts.

Founded in 1890, the Washington State University (WSU) is one of the oldest land-grant universities in the American west and features programs in a broad range of academic disciplines. WSU has four research and extension centers around the state and extension offices in each of Washington's 39 counties, providing training and assistance in agricultural practices, natural resource management, human and life skills, diversity understanding and outreach, the state 4-H program, and many other programs.

The Soil Health Advisory Committee (Committee) was created through a formal cooperative agreement between the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Commission in 2015 with the purpose of providing technical assistance and resources to accomplish NRCS conservation goals in Washington to improve soil health. The Committee has focused on providing education and outreach to the public about the benefits of soil health and funding soil health research pilot projects. The NRCS and the Commission provide funding for the Committee, and the Grant County Conservation District has provided administrative support to the Committee.

During the 2019 legislative session, the Legislature appropriated funds to WSU to initiate the Soil Health Initiative. The proviso directed WSU to establish the proposed long-term agroecological research and extension site at the WSU Mount Vernon Research & Extension Center.

Summary of Bill:

The Washington Soil Health Initiative is created as a partnership jointly administered by three collaborating agencies: Washington State University (WSU), the Washington State Conservation Commission (Commission), and the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA).

The goals and objectives of the Soil Health Initiative are to improve agricultural viability, nutrition, and environmental function.

The collaborating agencies must jointly:

- assess programmatic needs and build the capacities of the collaborating agencies to improve the reach and effectiveness of the soil health initiative;
- prioritize in-state sourcing of needed soil health initiative resources including, but not limited to, testing resources, seeds, compost materials, supplies, and equipment;
- employ adaptive management to support the improvement and long-term viability of the Soil Health Initiative;

The collaborating agencies must support and supplement the current Washington Soil Health Advisory Committee membership to promote effective implementation of the Soil Health Initiative. The collaborating agencies must convene, staff, and develop agendas for each Washington Soil Health Advisory Committee meeting and appoint committee members and

subcommittee members as appropriate. No appointment is effective unless all collaborating agencies concur in the appointment.

The collaborating agencies must submit a biennial Soil Health Initiative progress report to the Governor and appropriate committees of the Legislature by October 1, 2020, and every two years thereafter. The report's recommendations must include an assessment of success in meeting the Soil Health Initiative's goals and objectives, a biennial work plan detailing any proposed legislation, budget requests or administrative rules, and a prioritized list of proposed actions needed to advance Soil Health Initiative goals and objectives in the upcoming biennium.

The primary responsibilities of the individual collaborating agencies are described below.

The primary responsibilities of WSU are:

- establishing a network of term research and extension demonstration sites;
- compiling and developing information on nutrition effects related to agricultural soil management practices and regimes;
- developing a statewide soil health roadmap to refine metrics and objectives to guide future public and private investment in the Soil Health Initiative;
- developing a statewide agricultural soil health monitoring system and database; and
- consulting and collaborating with the WSDA and the Commission to support all Soil Health Initiative goals.

The primary responsibilities of the WSDA are:

- compiling existing information on agricultural viability and environmental function effects related to agricultural soil management practices and regimes across the state, and identifying data gaps associated with understanding and quantifying such effects;
- establishing a "state of the soils" baseline assessment of statewide agricultural soil health practices and characteristic soil health indicators;
- developing standardized methods and diagnostic tools to support accurate and cost-effective measurement of key soil health indicators;
- developing and supporting an agricultural product marketing and promotion program; and
- consulting and collaborating with the Commission and WSU to support all Soil Health Initiative goals, objectives, and components.

The primary responsibilities of the Commission are:

- developing, publishing, and distributing outreach and education materials to help conservation districts, cooperative extension, and local governments raise awareness of the importance of soil health;
- training and mobilizing technical service providers to encourage farmers, ranchers, and land managers to voluntarily implement desired soil health stewardship and enter into any maintenance or easement agreements needed to maintain soil health benefits obtained;
- training technical assistance providers, property owners, land managers, and others to voluntarily take ongoing soil health samples and measurements and submit results to the soil health monitoring database;
- consulting and collaborating with the WSDA and WSU to support all Soil Health Initiative goals, objectives, and components.

The Commission may adopt rules in order to carry out the purposes of the Soil Health Initiative.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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