

FINAL BILL REPORT

2SSB 5947

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Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Establishing the sustainable farms and fields grant program.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Ways & Means (originally sponsored by Senators McCoy, Schoesler, Palumbo, King, Salomon and Warnick).

Senate Committee on Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks

Senate Committee on Ways & Means

House Committee on Rural Development, Agriculture, & Natural Resources

House Committee on Capital Budget

Background: The 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. WSDA has a duty to promote and protect agriculture and its dependent rural community in Washington State. Additionally, WSDA must carry out its assigned regulatory responsibilities to protect the public health and welfare. In 2018, WSDA received approximately \$4.6 million in specialty crop block grants to help fund twenty-five projects. A few of those projects included:

- promoting productivity and on-farm efficiencies with plastic mulches in raspberry crops;
- alternative pest management technologies for tree fruit and wine grapes;
- ensuring the sustainability of pollination services to Washington specialty crops; and
- developing a Washington organic asparagus industry.

Agroforestry is the intentional integration of trees and shrubs into crop and animal farming systems to create environmental, economic, and social benefits. For a management practice to be agroforestry, it must be intentional, intensive, integrated, and interactive. Agroforestry practices can include managed forest canopies in a woodland that protect a range of crops grown for food, landscaping, and medicinal use. Additionally, farmers and ranchers who plant pine trees on land used for livestock and forage production may be able to sell pine straw and saw logs.

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

Carbon farming is a process designed to maximize agriculture's potential for moving excess greenhouse gases from the atmosphere and storing them into the soil and vegetation. It focuses on carbon as a key agricultural element and involves implementing common practices known to enhance transferring and storing atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) as soil and biomass carbon. This is done through common practices that support plant photosynthesis, increase soil organic matter, and reduce erosion. Because water retention and nutrient availability increase with more carbon in the soil, carbon farming may help ranchers and farmers increase production, enhance resilience to drought, and reduce input costs over time.

Summary: The WSDA must develop a sustainable farms and fields grant program (program). WSDA must consult with Washington State University, and the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service. Certain activities must be included as activities eligible for grant funding under the program, including:

- on-farm fossil fuel input efficiency measures, including any activity or technology that reduces the quantity of fuel or electricity used, the quantity of water used, and the quantity of fossil fuel-based fertilizer or pesticide used;
- agroforestry; and
- carbon farming..

WSDA must ensure, to the extent practicable based on grant applications received, that roughly 20 percent of available funding is awarded to the three categories described above. The remaining available funding should be awarded to the most effective projects, as determined by WSDA, regardless of category. When prioritizing grant recipients, WSDA must seek to maximize the total reduction in atmospheric carbon dioxide equivalents per dollar awarded by leveraging other nonstate public or private funding. In consultation with Washington State University, the State Conservation Commission, the United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Department of Natural Resources, WSDA must determine methods for estimating, measuring, and verifying outcomes under the program.

Sustainable farms and fields grant funding may be applied towards:

- down payments on equipment or other types of loans;
- blended use of fossil-fuel based pesticides and fertilizers and non-fossil-fuel based pesticides and fertilizers;
- no till equipment, precision agriculture equipment, advanced irrigation systems, and GIS technologies; or
- costs associated with installation of carbon farming practices or agroforestry practices.

Grant applicants may apply to share equipment purchased with sustainable farm and field grant funding. Sustainable farms and fields grant funding may not be awarded to fund activities on lands that are participating in a land retirement program, activities on commercial working forest land, or ocean-based aquaculture or blue carbon practices.

WSDA may award up to 20 percent of available sustainable farms and fields grant funds to projects that would not otherwise qualify for funding by maximizing the total reduction in atmospheric carbon dioxide equivalent per dollar awarded.

WSDA must use 5 percent of available funds on educational campaigns that raise awareness about the sustainable farms and fields grant program and WSDA may spend up to 50 percent of any unused funds on educational campaigns. WSDA may use up to 10 percent of available funds to provide technical assistance to grant applicants and may use up to 5 percent to cover the cost of administering the program. WSDA must make reasonable efforts to award at least 80 percent of funds made available for sustainable farms and fields grants each fiscal year.

Grants awarded for carbon farming activities with an uncertain storage life may include ongoing annual payments for the previous year's storage, or upfront cumulative payments based on the expected storage in future years. Grants that include upfront payments for future benefits must be conditioned to include penalties for default due to negligence on the part of the recipient. Grant recipients may be required to allow access to the property, with reasonable notice, to monitor impacts of the project. All grant recipients must allow information about their projects to be made available to the public.

WSDA must biennially report to the Legislature on the performance of the sustainable farms and fields grant program. The sustainable farms and fields account is created in the state treasury.

Votes on Final Passage:

2019 Regular Session

Senate 32 15

2020 Regular Session

Senate 32 17

House 74 22 (House amended)

Senate 43 6 (Senate concurred)

Effective: