

FINAL BILL REPORT

SSB 6306

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Synopsis as Enacted

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.).

Senate Committee on Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks
Senate Committee on Ways & Means
House Committee on Rural Development, Agriculture, & Natural Resources
House Committee on Appropriations

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. WSDA has a duty to promote and protect agriculture and its dependent rural community in Washington State. WSDA must carry out its assigned regulatory responsibilities to protect the public health and welfare.

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

Maintaining and improving soil health is key to preventing soil depletion, ensuring long-term agricultural productivity, and protecting the environment, as well as the ongoing health of the rural economy and regional food security. According to the United States Department of Agriculture—Natural Resources Conservation Service, "soil health" is defined as the continued capacity of soil to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals,

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and humans. During the 2019 legislative session, funds were appropriated for WSU's Soil Health Initiative and its network of long-term agroecological research and extension sites. The network must include a Mount Vernon Research and Extension Center site.

Summary: The Washington Soil Health Initiative (SHI) is created as a partnership jointly administered by WSU, WSDA, and the Commission. The goals and objectives of the SHI are to improve:

- agricultural viability, by improving farm profitability;
- nutrition, by increasing health-promoting nutrients, micronutrients, and microbial processes of agricultural soils; and
- environmental function, by reducing soil erosion, runoff, and leaching of nutrients and pollutants, while also improving water quality.

WSU, WSDA, and the Commission must support and supplement current Washington Soil Health Advisory Committee membership to promote effective implementation of the SHI. Committee members must be qualified and knowledgeable regarding soil health stewardship. Membership may include agricultural producers, soil scientists or specialists, and representatives of governmental, nongovernmental, and tribal organizations interested in soil health as it pertains to agricultural viability, nutrition, or environmental function. WSU, WSDA, and the Commission must convene, staff, and develop agendas for each Washington Soil Health Advisory Committee meeting and appoint committee members and subcommittee members by consensus.

WSU, WSDA, and the Commission must jointly:

- assess programmatic needs and build the capacities of WSU, WSDA, and the Commission to fill gaps in scientific research, economic assessment, staffing, technical assistance, grants administration, project implementation, data management, and monitoring tools to improve the reach and effectiveness of the SHI;
- prioritize in-state sourcing of needed SHI resources including, but not limited to, testing resources, seeds, compost materials, supplies, and equipment; and
- employ adaptive management to support the improvement and long-term viability of the SHI, including modification of soil health metrics, priorities, and activities to maximize complementary net benefits for agricultural viability, nutrition, and environmental function, and to the extent practicable, metrics chosen to assess changes from baseline environmental function must be measured per unit of production.

WSU, WSDA, and the Commission must submit biennial Washington SHI progress reports every other year to the Governor and the Legislature starting October 1, 2020. The report's recommendations must include an assessment of success in meeting the SHI 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 fulfill the responsibilities of WSU, WSDA, and the Commission for programmatic components and advance SHI goals and objectives in the upcoming biennium.

Votes on Final Passage:

Senate	47	0
House	94	3

Effective: June 11, 2020