
SENATE BILL 6306

State of Washington

66th Legislature

2020 Regular Session

By Senators Lias, Van De Wege, Warnick, Rolfes, Short, Nguyen, Das, Lovelett, Randall, Saldaña, and Wilson, C.

Read first time 01/15/20. Referred to Committee on Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks.

1 AN ACT Relating to creating the Washington soil health
2 initiative; and adding a new chapter to Title 15 RCW.

3 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

4 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds that healthy soil is
5 a cornerstone of a high quality of life on earth and that soil health
6 is integral to supporting agricultural viability, promoting positive
7 environmental outcomes, and ensuring the long-term availability of
8 nutritious food.

9 It is the intent of the legislature that the mission of the
10 Washington soil health initiative be the promotion of collaborative
11 soil health research, education, demonstration projects, and
12 technical assistance activities designed to identify, promote, and
13 implement soil health stewardship practices that are grounded in
14 sound science and that can be voluntarily and economically
15 implemented by farmers and ranchers across Washington's diverse
16 agricultural communities, climates, and geographies.

17 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** The definitions in this section apply
18 throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires
19 otherwise.

1 (1) "Collaborating agencies" means the university, the
2 department, and the commission.

3 (2) "Commission" means the Washington state conservation
4 commission.

5 (3) "Department" means the Washington department of agriculture.

6 (4) "Soil health" means the continued capacity of the soil to
7 function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals,
8 and humans.

9 (5) "Soil health initiative" means the Washington soil health
10 initiative created by this chapter as a collaborative partnership to
11 promote and implement voluntary soil management actions and systems
12 to improve soil health, environmental function, nutrition, and the
13 productivity of working farm and ranch lands.

14 (6) "University" means Washington State University.

15 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** (1) The Washington soil health initiative
16 is created as a partnership jointly administered by the collaborating
17 agencies.

18 (2) The goals and objectives of the soil health initiative are to
19 improve:

20 (a) Agricultural viability, by improving farm profitability; and
21 by helping agricultural producers implement good soil health
22 practices that build soil organic matter, reduce soil erosion, soil
23 compaction and production costs, and improve nutrient management,
24 soil tilth, moisture infiltration, moisture retention, drought
25 resilience, disease suppression, and the beneficial activity of
26 microbes, fungi, earthworms, and other organisms;

27 (b) Nutrition, by increasing health-promoting nutrients,
28 micronutrients, and microbial processes of agricultural soils; and by
29 improving nutrient uptake, thereby expanding access to nutritious
30 food and improving human health; and

31 (c) Environmental function, by reducing soil erosion, runoff, and
32 leaching of nutrients and pollutants, thereby improving water
33 quality; and by promoting strategies to store carbon and build soil
34 organic matter and other beneficial properties, thereby enhancing the
35 environmental functions of agricultural soils.

36 (3) In addition to the joint responsibilities established for the
37 collaborative agencies in this section and the primary
38 responsibilities established for each collaborating agency in
39 sections 4 through 6 of this act, the collaborating agencies may

1 pursue any action designed to improve soil health and promote
2 complementary improvements to agricultural viability, nutrition, and
3 environmental function. The collaborating agencies must jointly:

4 (a) Support and supplement current Washington soil health
5 advisory committee membership to promote effective implementation of
6 the soil health initiative. Committee members must be qualified and
7 knowledgeable regarding soil health stewardship. Membership may
8 include agricultural producers, soil scientists or specialists, and
9 representatives of governmental, nongovernmental, and tribal
10 organizations interested in soil health as it pertains to
11 agricultural viability, nutrition, or environmental function. The
12 collaborating agencies must convene, staff, and develop agendas for
13 each Washington soil health advisory committee meeting and appoint
14 committee members and subcommittee members as appropriate. No
15 appointment is effective unless all collaborating agencies concur in
16 the appointment.

17 (b) Assess programmatic needs and build the capacities of the
18 collaborating agencies to fill gaps in scientific research, economic
19 assessment, staffing, technical assistance, grants administration,
20 project implementation, data management, and monitoring tools to
21 improve the reach and effectiveness of the soil health initiative.

22 (c) Prioritize in-state sourcing of needed soil health initiative
23 resources including, but not limited to, testing resources, seeds,
24 compost materials, supplies, and equipment.

25 (d) Employ adaptive management to support the improvement and
26 long-term viability of the soil health initiative, including
27 modification of soil health metrics, priorities, and activities to
28 maximize complementary net benefits for agricultural viability,
29 nutrition, and environmental function. To the extent practicable,
30 metrics chosen to assess changes from baseline environmental function
31 must be measured per unit of production.

32 (e) Submit a biennial Washington soil health initiative progress
33 report to the governor and appropriate committees of the legislature
34 by October 1, 2020, and every even-numbered year thereafter. The
35 report's recommendations must include an assessment of success in
36 meeting the soil health initiative's goals and objectives, a biennial
37 work plan detailing any proposed legislation, budget requests or
38 administrative rules, and a prioritized list of proposed actions
39 needed to fulfill each collaborating agency's responsibilities for

1 programmatic components and advance soil health initiative goals and
2 objectives in the upcoming biennium.

3 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** The university has primary responsibility
4 for the following components of the soil health initiative:

5 (1) Establishing a regionally dispersed network of long-term
6 agro-ecological research and extension demonstration sites to
7 showcase and refine soil health research and practices, build
8 statewide awareness and understanding, and support technical
9 assistance capacity through trainings and on-farm demonstration
10 projects that promote positive soil health outcomes across the
11 state's diverse food production zones;

12 (2) Compiling existing information and developing new information
13 on nutrition effects related to agricultural soil management
14 practices and regimes, and identifying data gaps associated with
15 understanding and quantifying such effects across the state's diverse
16 food production zones, soil types, tillage systems, and cropping
17 methods. Nutrition effects information compiled, developed, and
18 assessed must include, but not be limited to, soil, plant, and food
19 nutrient and micronutrient levels and community access to nutritious
20 food;

21 (3) Developing a statewide soil health roadmap, based on a
22 compilation of existing soil health information and ancillary
23 agronomic, economic, environmental, and nutritional benefits and
24 identified data gaps, to refine metrics and objectives to guide
25 future public and private investment in the soil health initiative;

26 (4) Developing a statewide agricultural soil health monitoring
27 system and database to receive data, test modeling estimations, and
28 measure, analyze, and track trends over time in the productive use,
29 management, and health of Washington's agricultural soils; and

30 (5) Consulting and collaborating with the department and the
31 commission to support all soil health initiative goals, objectives,
32 and components established in this chapter.

33 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** (1) The department has primary
34 responsibility for the following components of the soil health
35 initiative:

36 (a) Compiling existing information on agricultural viability and
37 environmental function effects related to agricultural soil
38 management practices and regimes across the state's diverse food

1 production zones, soil types, tillage systems, and cropping methods,
2 and identifying data gaps associated with understanding and
3 quantifying such effects. Agricultural viability effects compiled and
4 assessed must include, but not be limited to, assessments of yields,
5 profitability, costs, and benefits. Environmental function effects
6 compiled and assessed must include, but not be limited to,
7 assessments of water quality and water availability;

8 (b) Establishing a "state of the soils" baseline assessment of
9 statewide agricultural soil health practices and characteristic soil
10 health indicators, which may include, but is not limited to: Soil
11 type, organic matter, aggregate stability, porosity, temperature,
12 microbiology, and pathogens; carbon storage; nutrient management;
13 crop rotations; cropping techniques; tillage systems; plant biomass
14 input, residue, and cover levels; water infiltration rate; water
15 retention; root exudates; electrical conductivity; soil nutrient,
16 vitamin, and mineral levels including, but not limited to, levels of
17 nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium, magnesium, sulfur, calcium, and
18 micronutrients; and any other indicator of a soil's health, yield,
19 profitability, or ecological function. Baseline assessments must be
20 developed in a stepwise process to incrementally assess the baseline
21 for each of Washington's major food production zones, soil types,
22 tillage systems, and cropping methods, including both conventional
23 and organic food production systems;

24 (c) Developing standardized methods and diagnostic tools to
25 support accurate and cost-effective measurement of key soil health
26 indicators at a scale and speed that supports broad implementation
27 and verification of improved soil health stewardship across
28 Washington's diverse agricultural landscapes;

29 (d) Developing and supporting an agricultural product marketing
30 and promotion program that creates opportunities for participating
31 producers to benefit from the emerging market for Washington food
32 products grown under good soil health stewardship; and

33 (e) Consulting and collaborating with the commission and the
34 university to support all soil health initiative goals, objectives,
35 and components established in this chapter.

36 (2) In consultation with the commission and the university, the
37 department may adopt rules as needed to carry out the purposes of
38 this chapter.

1 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 6.** (1) The commission has primary
2 responsibility for the following components of the soil health
3 initiative:

4 (a) Developing, publishing, and distributing outreach and
5 education materials to help conservation districts, cooperative
6 extension, and local governments raise awareness of the importance of
7 soil health to society and agriculture, including farmer case studies
8 on soil health practices, experiences, and outcomes;

9 (b) Training and mobilizing technical service providers to
10 encourage farmers, ranchers, and land managers to voluntarily
11 implement desired soil health stewardship and enter into any
12 maintenance or easement agreements needed to maintain soil health
13 benefits obtained. The commission and the university must coordinate
14 technical assistance, working with and through conservation districts
15 and university extension, to avoid duplication of effort in carrying
16 out soil health initiative technical assistance responsibilities;

17 (c) Training technical assistance providers, property owners,
18 land managers, and others to voluntarily take ongoing soil health
19 samples and measurements and submit results to the soil health
20 monitoring database;

21 (d) In collaboration with the department and the university,
22 developing equitable criteria for the awarding of grants to help
23 producers improve soil health across the state's diverse agricultural
24 systems; and

25 (e) Consulting and collaborating with the department and the
26 university to support all soil health initiative goals, objectives,
27 and components established in this chapter.

28 (2) In consultation with the department and the university, the
29 commission may adopt rules as needed to carry out the purposes of
30 this chapter.

31 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 7.** This chapter may be known and cited as the
32 Washington soil health initiative act.

33 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 8.** Sections 1 through 7 of this act
34 constitute a new chapter in Title 15 RCW.

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