

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1631

As Reported by House Committee On:

Rural Development, Agriculture & Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to supporting Washington's food production system by providing technical assistance in support of improved voluntary environmental stewardship.

Brief Description: Supporting Washington's food production system by providing technical assistance in support of improved voluntary environmental stewardship.

Sponsors: Representatives Shewmake, Ryu, Leavitt, Wicks, Bateman, Duerr, Boehnke, Walen, Paul, Rule, Santos, Sullivan, Slatter, Macri and Harris-Talley.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Rural Development, Agriculture & Natural Resources: 1/11/22, 1/26/22 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes a network of sustainable farms and fields advisors at the State Conservation Commission to assist agricultural producers and food processors in increasing energy efficiency, sequestering carbon, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT, AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 8 members: Representatives Chapman, Chair; Shewmake, Vice Chair; Fitzgibbon, Kloba, Lekanoff, Morgan, Ramos and Springer.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Dent, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Klicker, Kretz, McEntire, Orcutt and Schmick.

Staff: Robert Hatfield (786-7117).

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.

Background:

Pursuant to legislation enacted in 2020, the Washington State Conservation Commission (Commission) is responsible for developing a Sustainable Farms and Fields grant program in consultation with specified state agencies.

Allowable uses of grant funds from the Sustainable Farm and Fields program include:

- annual payments to enrolled participants for successfully delivered carbon storage or reduction;
- up-front payments for contracted carbon storage; and
- services to landowners, such as the development of site-specific conservation plans to increase organic soil levels or to increase usage of precision agricultural practices.

As funding allows, the Commission must distribute funds to conservation districts and other public entities to help implement the projects approved by the Commission.

Conservation districts are special local government districts authorized to engage in a variety of activities relating to the conservation of soil, water, and other natural resources.

Summary of Bill:

The Sustainable Farms and Fields advisor network is established at the Commission to assist agricultural producers and food processors in increasing energy efficiency and utilization of green energy, sequestering carbon, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The Commission must develop a network of Sustainable Farms and Fields advisors in which pools of geographically adjacent conservation districts will hire, host, and share the services of Sustainable Farms and Fields advisors.

The services to be provided by Sustainable Farms and Fields advisors include, but are not limited to:

- consultations regarding sustainable farms and fields plans for interested farmers and food processors to help them reduce their carbon footprint; and
- informing conservation districts, farmers, and food processors about local, state, and federal funding opportunities to implement practices that help reduce the carbon footprint of farmers and food processors.

The Commission must establish within each pool of geographically adjacent conservation districts a sustainable farms and fields committee to develop a prioritized list of farmers and food processors interested in working with the advisor. The Sustainable Farm and Field advisors' workload and priorities are set according to an interlocal agreement established between the districts in the pool.

The Commission must hire a Sustainable Farms and Fields coordinator who is responsible for coordinating the advisors, disseminating current information about energy efficiency and climate-smart practices and funding opportunities, applying for grants, and writing progress reports.

The report that the Commission must submit to the Legislature every two years on the performance of the Sustainable Farms and Fields program must address the accomplishments of the Sustainable Farms and Fields advisors, including, among other things, grants awarded, projects funded, greenhouse gas emissions reduced, and carbon sequestered.

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) This bill represents the natural next step in carrying out the work of the Sustainable Farms and Fields program. One suggested improvement in the bill would be to refer to "teams" of conservation districts rather than "pools" of conservation districts.

Providing access to technical information and funding opportunities is a proven model for conservation districts. Cover crops and no-till practices can store significant amounts of carbon in the soil. This bill will advance climate goals.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) The network of advisors created in the bill would enhance the sustainable farms and fields program.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Sharon Shewmake, prime sponsor; Tom Davis, Washington Farm Bureau; and Justin Allegro, The Nature Conservancy.

(Other) Alison Halpern, Washington State Conservation Commission.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.