

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1552

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to directing the state conservation commission to conduct a study of urban agricultural opportunities and barriers in the state.

Brief Description: Directing the state conservation commission to conduct a study of urban agricultural opportunities and barriers in the state.

Sponsors: Representatives Reeves, Ramel, Springer, Gregerson, Fosse and Doglio.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture and Natural Resources: 1/31/23, 2/3/23 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/28/23, 97-0.

Passed Senate: 4/11/23, 49-0.

Passed Legislature.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the State Conservation Commission (Commission) to conduct a study of urban agricultural opportunities and barriers in the state.
- Establishes required elements of the study, including how urban agriculture can provide economic development, food access, and education opportunities in local communities.
- Requires the Commission to submit the report to the Legislature by June 30, 2024.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 10 members: Representatives Chapman, Chair; Morgan, Vice Chair; Reeves, Vice Chair; Dent, Ranking Minority Member; Chandler,

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Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Kloba, Lekanoff, Orcutt, Schmick and Springer.

Staff: Robert Hatfield (786-7117).

Background:

Washington State Department of Agriculture.

The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) oversees, manages, regulates, and supports a variety of programs related to food safety and agriculture in the state. Programs include animal and livestock health, commodity inspection, food safety, food assistance, pesticide and fertilizer inspection, and business and marketing support.

Food Policy Forum.

Together with the State Conservation Commission, the WSDA convenes the Food Policy Forum (Forum). The Forum is a public-private partnership that must develop recommendations to promote a variety of food system goals including:

- improved coordination and communication between local, state, and regional food policy entities;
- reducing food insecurity and hunger in Washington;
- examining ways to encourage retention of small and mid-scale farmers;
- expand and promote programs that bring healthy and nutritious Washington-grown foods to Washington residents; and
- increase the availability of Washington-grown foods throughout the state.

The Forum issued a report in December 2022 titled *Land Use Policy Solutions to Stem Agricultural Land Loss*. The report found, among other things, that just as cities establish parks and open space to maintain livable communities, opportunities to grow food enhance the livability of urban places. The report included a policy recommendation to increase access to fresh food by supporting urban, peri-urban, indoor, and other emerging agricultural production, directing the Office of Farmland Preservation to conduct a stakeholder review of the opportunities and barriers.

Summary of Bill:

The State Conservation Commission (Commission) must conduct a study of urban agricultural opportunities and barriers in the state. The study must examine, among other things:

- how urban agriculture can provide critical economic development, food access, and education opportunities in local communities;
- opportunities within urban agriculture, such as community gardens and urban farms, to give people access to grow their own food and create jobs, provide fresh food, and expose future farmers to career development; and
- challenges, including access to land, water, and expertise, that limit the potential of urban agriculture.

In conducting the study, the Commission must collaborate with the following entities:

- the Department of Agriculture;
- the University of Washington;
- Washington State University;
- the Food Policy Forum; and
- other stakeholders as deemed appropriate by the Commission.

The Commission must submit the results of the study to the committees of the Legislature with jurisdiction over agricultural issues by June 30, 2024.

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) The purpose of this bill is to start tackling some of the data questions necessary to make sure working families can put food on the table, whether through community gardens, or various urban agricultural opportunities. The state needs to think differently about how the state can make this happen.

The Food Policy Forum has been a very successful forum for addressing important food issues in Washington.

The state needs an all-hands-on-deck approach to utilizing the urban environment to provide food security. Trucking in food from far-away locations is not good for the environment. Also, community gardens promote community. Kids learn about plants and develop a stronger connection to nature. The State Conservation Commission is the right agency for this study.

The recommendations were created by a subcommittee of the Food Policy Forum members, and were pulled together through a consensus process. Many barriers have been created that limit urban food production. In order for cities to function successfully, people have to want to live there. Just as cities preserve open spaces for recreation, open spaces should also be preserved for agriculture. It is important to note the importance of exposing youth to opportunities in agriculture. The demographics of farmers and other agricultural producers are shifting, and it is important to expose youth to these opportunities in order to grow the next generation of farmers.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Kristine Reeves, prime sponsor; Ezra Eickmeyer, Abundant Living Landscapes; Ron Shultz, Washington State Conservation Commission; and Dani Madrone, American Farmland Trust.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.