

SENATE BILL REPORT

HB 1552

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks, March 27, 2023

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

Committee Activity: Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks: 3/23/23, 3/27/23 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the State Conservation Commission to conduct a study of urban agricultural opportunities and barriers in the state.
- Requires the Commission to submit the report to the Legislature by June 30, 2024.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, WATER, NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Van De Wege, Chair; Salomon, Vice Chair; Muzzall, Ranking Member; Rolfes, Shewmake, Short, Stanford, Wagoner and Warnick.

Staff: Delika Steele (786-7486)

Background: Washington State Department of Agriculture. The Washington State

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.

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 (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;
- expanding and promoting programs that bring healthy and nutritious Washington-grown foods to Washington residents; and
- increasing 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, 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. The report also directed the Office of Farmland Preservation to conduct a stakeholder review of the opportunities and barriers to increasing access to fresh food.

Summary of Bill: The Commission must conduct a study of urban agricultural opportunities and barriers in the state. The study must examine:

- 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.

When conducting the study, the Commission must collaborate with the Department of Agriculture, the University of Washington, Washington State University, the Forum, and other stakeholders deemed appropriate by the Commission.

The Commission must submit the results of the study to the appropriate committees of the Legislature by June 30, 2024.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Food is the key to success long term and healthy food along with knowledge of where food is coming from is important. This is an opportunity to think strategically and proactively about how we're providing tools for our suburban and urban communities to feed themselves. This can help these communities think more critically about how they can grow their own food and is a great way to bridge the gap with rural communities.

There are many people in the urban environment who neither have the capital or the space to have their own garden. There are a lot of opportunities and spaces for people to get in touch with the dirt and grow their own food. Many kids growing up in these environments don't have a connection to where their food comes from and it would be great to see that change.

This will be good for the environment, kids, and community building, and is a great opportunity to include schools.

Urban agriculture faces barriers including land access, land tenure, water access, lack infrastructure, access to capital and other issues. The study is urgently needed not just to identify the barriers urban farmers face, but to assist urban farms and farmers in understanding what investments and policies are needed to support and grow urban agriculture. Urban agriculture is an important contributor to a strong, sustainable, and resilient local food system.

Responsible production is important to prevent diseases and should be an integral part of this study.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Kristine Reeves, Prime Sponsor; Ezra Eickmeyer, Abundant Living Landscapes; Melissa Spear, Tilth Alliance; Ron Shultz, WA State Conservation Commission.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.