

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5484

As of February 6, 2023

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: Senators Shewmake, Hasegawa, Nguyen, Nobles, Saldaña, Valdez and Wilson, C..

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks: 2/06/23.

Brief Summary of Bill

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

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, WATER, NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Staff: Jeff Olsen (786-7428)

Background: 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. Conservation districts work with landowners on a voluntary basis, providing incentive-based conservation help on private lands.

The Sustainable Farms and Fields Grant Program (Program) was established in 2020 to distribute funds to conservation districts and other public entities to help implement projects

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approved by the Commission. No more than 15 percent of funds may be used to develop and publicize the Program, and no more than 5 percent of funds may be used by the Commission to cover administrative costs of the Program. No more than 20 percent of the funds may be awarded to any one applicant.

Allowable uses of grant funds from the Program include:

- annual payments to enrolled participants for successfully delivered carbon storage or reduction;
- up-front payments for contracted carbon storage;
- down payments or purchases of equipment;
- purchases of seed, seedlings, spores, animal feed, and amendments;
- services to landowners, such as the development of site-specific conservation plans to increase soil organic levels or to increase use of precision agricultural practices, or design and implementation of best management practices to reduce livestock emissions; and
- other equipment purchases or financial assistance deemed appropriate by the Commission.

Applicants for equipment purchase grants under the Program may be farm, ranch, or aquaculture operations coordinating as individual businesses or as formal cooperative ventures. Conservation districts may apply for grant funds to operate an equipment sharing program. The Commission must attempt to achieve a geographically fair distribution of funds across a broad group of crop types, soil management practices, and farm sizes.

Summary of Bill: A 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 whereby conservation districts will hire, host, and share the services of Sustainable Farms and Fields advisors. Sustainable Farms and Fields advisors will:

- provide consultations and develop sustainable farms and fields plans for interested farmers and food processors to help them reduce their carbon footprint by increasing energy efficiency, utilizing more green energy, sequestering carbon, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions; and
- inform conservation districts, farmers, and food processors about local, state, and federal funding opportunities, such as the Sustainable Farms and Fields Grant Program, to implement practices that help achieve these goals to reduce their carbon footprint.

Allowable uses of funding from the Sustainable Farms and Fields Grant Program are expanded to include:

- cost-share purchases of equipment; and
- services to landowners including the development of site-specific sustainable farms and fields plans and climate-smart practices, providing financial assistance to

implement best management practices that increase carbon sequestration in soil organic matter levels and standing vegetation, reduce livestock and soil greenhouse gas emissions, reduce fossil fuel usage and greenhouse gas emissions through increased usage of precision agricultural practices, and increase energy efficiency and utilization of green energy.

Down payments on equipment is removed as an allowable use of grants. Provisions allowing grant applicants, such as farms, ranches, or aquaculture operations, to apply to share equipment purchased with grant funds is also removed. Public entities may apply for grant funds to operate an equipment sharing program.

The Commission must attempt to achieve a geographically fair distribution of funds across a broad group of commodities, climate-smart and energy efficiency practices, and farm sizes. The report that the Commission must submit to the Legislature every two years on the performance of the program must also address the performance of the sustainable farms and fields advisors.

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: Currently there is a shortage of technical advisors to assist farmers. The bill adds grants and people to support agriculture to reduce their carbon footprint and sequester carbon. This bill will expand sustainable farm and field practices to include energy efficiency improvements and green energy usage. This will help working lands reduce their carbon footprint while improving soil health and crop yield. The bill should include both organic and regenerative processes. The bill includes expansions to the current program to help livestock farms. Increased technical support can assist with use of cover crops, no till agriculture, and other practices that sequester carbon over time and advance soil health. Language should be added to increase soil organic levels.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Sharon Shewmake, Prime Sponsor; Jay Gordon, WA State Dairy Federation; Joe Crumbley, Coalition for Organic and Regenerative Agriculture; Skippy Shaw, The Nature Conservancy; Heather Trim, Zero Waste Washington; Alison Halpern, Washington State Conservation Commission; Douglas Ray, Carbon Washington.

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