
SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 6278

State of Washington

68th Legislature

2024 Regular Session

By Senate Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks (originally sponsored by Senators Liias, Muzzall, Billig, Nobles, Saldaña, and Valdez)

READ FIRST TIME 01/30/24.

1 AN ACT Relating to promoting organic agriculture; amending RCW
2 15.86.070; creating new sections; and providing an expiration date.

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

4 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds that Washington
5 state has the second most diverse agricultural sector in the nation
6 with over 15 million acres of farmland and 300 different crops in
7 production. The state's rich soils, diverse microclimates, and
8 transportation networks support market diversity and economic
9 competitiveness within the agricultural sector. Through its
10 institutions of higher education, Washington state supports the
11 development of agricultural knowledge and a robust infrastructure of
12 technical expertise that is deployed across the state to improve
13 agricultural production, protect the environment, and strengthen
14 farming communities.

15 The legislature also finds that organic and regenerative
16 agricultural practices help preserve the environment, support
17 economic growth, and protect human health. Practices such as no-till
18 farming, cover cropping, and rotational grazing improve soil health
19 and reduce carbon emissions. Decreasing the use of pesticides and
20 petroleum-based fertilizers mitigates groundwater pollution, supports
21 biodiversity, and reduces the risks of human, animal, and

1 environmental exposure to toxic materials. There is growing consumer
2 demand for healthy foods and the impacts of climate change, including
3 wildfire smoke, drought, excessive heat, flooding, and new invasive
4 species and pests, amplify the need to increase the use of resilient
5 and sustainable agricultural practices.

6 The legislature further finds that an increase in organic and
7 regenerative agriculture would protect and improve the state's
8 valuable farmlands, increase the value of the state's agricultural
9 commodities, and help protect farmworkers, their communities, and the
10 environment from exposure to harmful chemicals and practices.

11 Therefore, the legislature finds that development of an organic
12 agriculture action plan is needed to increase the amount of organic
13 and regenerative agricultural practices in the state.

14 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** (1) The department of agriculture shall
15 create and chair an organic and regenerative agriculture task force.
16 The department of agriculture shall appoint the members of the task
17 force, which must include, but is not limited to, representatives of
18 the following interests, organizations, and state agencies:

- 19 (a) The conservation commission;
- 20 (b) Washington State University;
- 21 (c) The Washington soil health initiative established in RCW
22 15.145.020;
- 23 (d) One or more persons currently certified in organic farming;
- 24 (e) One or more persons currently engaged in regenerative
25 farming;
- 26 (f) One or more persons currently engaged in conventional
27 farming;
- 28 (g) One or more historically underserved farmers or ranchers;
- 29 (h) Organizations representing farmers markets;
- 30 (i) Conservation organizations;
- 31 (j) Environmental justice organizations;
- 32 (k) Irrigation districts;
- 33 (l) Pesticide distributors and applicators;
- 34 (m) A member of the public from east of the crest of the Cascade
35 mountains; and
- 36 (n) A member of the public from west of the crest of the Cascade
37 mountains.

38 (2) One or more representatives of Washington tribes must also be
39 invited to participate on the task force.

1 (3) One youth representative from an organization that encourages
2 students to engage in agricultural education must also be invited to
3 participate on the task force when available.

4 (4) When appointing members of the task force, the department of
5 agriculture must include representatives from large farming
6 operations with greater than \$250,000 gross receipts annually and
7 small farming operations with less than \$250,000 gross receipts
8 annually and farming operations from both east and west of the crest
9 of the Cascade mountains.

10 (5) The department of agriculture must, in consultation with the
11 organic and regenerative agriculture task force, develop an organic
12 agriculture action plan to serve as a guide to leverage organic and
13 regenerative agriculture to address economic, social, and
14 environmental challenges, create opportunities for farmers wishing to
15 transition to organic farming, increase resiliency in agricultural
16 methods, and build a robust regional food system.

17 (6) When developing the organic agriculture action plan, the
18 department of agriculture, in consultation with the organic and
19 regenerative agriculture task force, must consider and provide
20 recommendations, as appropriate, on the following elements including,
21 but not limited to:

22 (a) Identifying barriers to achieving organic certification and
23 expanding organic markets;

24 (b) Defining regenerative agriculture and considering how and
25 where regenerative agriculture and organic agriculture overlap and
26 interconnect;

27 (c) Providing education to support job creation and retention in
28 the organic sector;

29 (d) Ways to increase Washington's certified organic acreage to 25
30 percent of agricultural land by 2035;

31 (e) Ways to support entry to organic farming, particularly among
32 youth, overburdened communities, and black, indigenous, and other
33 people of color;

34 (f) Increasing the number of farmers, processors, wholesalers,
35 and retailers transitioning to organic farming production and sale of
36 organic products;

37 (g) Ways to improve coordination of organic farming and food
38 processing and distribution infrastructures;

39 (h) Options to increase financial revenue for, and sustainability
40 of, organic farms, processors, wholesalers, and retailers;

1 (i) Ways to enhance soil health, water and air quality,
2 biodiversity, and carbon sequestration to mitigate climate change and
3 improve on-farm resilience through organic or regenerative farming;
4 and

5 (j) Research on topics specific to or relevant to organic and
6 regenerative farming, including increased crop productivity and
7 quality, genetic biodiversity, and alternatives to synthetic
8 pesticides.

9 (7) The department of agriculture, in consultation with the
10 organic and regenerative agriculture task force, shall consider the
11 work and recommendations of the Washington soil health initiative
12 created in RCW 15.145.020 when developing the organic agriculture
13 action plan.

14 (8) The department of agriculture must include recommendations
15 for legislative, administrative, or budgetary actions necessary to
16 implement the organic agriculture action plan, including whether to
17 extend the organic and regenerative agriculture task force, in the
18 plan.

19 (9)(a) The department of agriculture shall provide a progress
20 report on the development of the organic agriculture action plan to
21 the appropriate committees of the senate and the house of
22 representatives by November 1, 2024, in compliance with RCW
23 43.01.036.

24 (b) The department of agriculture shall provide the organic
25 agriculture action plan to the appropriate committees of the senate
26 and house of representatives by November 1, 2025, in compliance with
27 RCW 43.01.036.

28 (10) This section expires December 31, 2025.

29 **Sec. 3.** RCW 15.86.070 and 2010 c 109 s 6 are each amended to
30 read as follows:

31 (1) The director may adopt rules establishing a program for
32 certifying producers, processors, and handlers as meeting state,
33 national, or international standards for organic or transitional
34 products.

35 (2) The rules:

36 (a) May govern, but are not limited to governing:

37 (i) The number and scheduling of on-site visits, both announced
38 and unannounced, by certification personnel;

39 (ii) Recordkeeping requirements; and

1 (iii) The submission of product samples for chemical analysis;
2 and

3 (b) Shall include a fee schedule that will provide for the
4 recovery of the full cost of the program. However, the fee schedule
5 may be modified to the extent that funds are appropriated to the
6 department for the specific purpose of reducing fees to decrease the
7 financial burden to achieve or maintain organic certification and
8 increase participation in organic agriculture.

9 (3) All fees collected under this chapter shall be deposited in
10 an account within the agricultural local fund. The revenue from such
11 fees shall be used solely for carrying out the provisions of this
12 chapter, and no appropriation is required for disbursement from the
13 fund.

14 (4) The director may employ such personnel as are necessary to
15 carry out the provisions of this chapter.

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