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**SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5474**

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**State of Washington 69th Legislature 2025 Regular Session**

**By** Senate Agriculture & Natural Resources (originally sponsored by Senators Liias, Muzzall, Chapman, Hasegawa, Nobles, and Stanford)

AN ACT Relating to expanding opportunities for organic, regenerative, climate-smart, and sustainable producers; amending RCW 15.86.070; adding a new section to chapter 15.86 RCW; creating a new section; and providing an expiration date.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  (1) The legislature finds that Washington state has the second most diverse agricultural sector in the nation with over 15,000,000 acres of farmland and 300 different crops in production. The state's rich soils, diverse microclimates, and transportation networks support market diversity and the state's diverse agricultural sector is essential to local community resilience and prosperity.

(2) The legislature further finds that global organic sales have grown by 10 to 15 percent annually over the past 15 years and that there is high local consumer demand for organic food. Organic agriculture offers an opportunity for farmers, ranchers, food processors, and other businesses to diversify their operations and participate in higher value markets.

(3) The legislature further finds that organic, regenerative, sustainable, and climate-smart agricultural practices help preserve the environment, support economic growth, and improve human health. These environmental and health effects result in additional societal economic benefits not reflected in the direct economic benefits to producers.

(4) The legislature further finds that producers face a significant expense in achieving organic certification.

(5) The legislature intends to identify and remove existing regulatory and market barriers that are preventing agricultural producers from integrating organic and regenerative practices and accessing certified organic markets. This may include developing a statewide organic action plan, lowering certification costs, identifying the need for new financing vehicles or additional wholesale and retail infrastructure and partnerships, and identifying other policies. The legislature further intends to enact policies to enable more efficient, more inclusive, more resilient, and more sustainable agriculture, to effectively contribute to food availability, accessibility, affordability, and allow our farms to continue to thrive.

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  A new section is added to chapter 15.86 RCW to read as follows:

(1) The department shall develop an organic agriculture action plan to help create opportunities for farmers wishing to transition to organic farming, increase resiliency in agricultural methods, and build a robust regional food system.

(2) When developing the organic agriculture action plan, the department shall consider and provide recommendations, as appropriate, on elements including, but not limited to:

(a) Identifying barriers to achieving organic certification;

(b) Opportunities to expand organic markets and acreage, which may include documenting organic market potential for key commodities and crops;

(c) Opportunities to support job creation and retention in the organic sector, with particular emphasis on supporting entry to organic farming by youth, overburdened communities, and black, indigenous, and other people of color;

(d) Inventorying existing extension, training, and technical resources and identifying gaps in extension, training, and technical resources to support farmers who are certified and seeking to transition to organic and regenerative practices;

(e) Identifying ways to improve organic infrastructure and partnerships between organic producers, processors, and distributors; and

(f) Identifying data sources and data collection opportunities that help quantify the benefits and impacts of organic and regenerative farming on crop resiliency, soil health, genetic biodiversity, water quality, greenhouse gas emissions, energy consumption, minimization of the use of synthetic inputs and pesticides, and reduction of harmful toxins in the environment.

(3) The department, in consultation with the state conservation commission, shall consider the work and recommendations of the Washington soil health initiative created in RCW 15.145.020 when developing the organic agriculture action plan.

(4) The department shall include recommendations for legislative, administrative, or budgetary actions necessary to implement the organic agriculture action plan.

(5) The department shall provide the organic agriculture action plan to the appropriate committees of the senate and house of representatives by June 1, 2027, in compliance with RCW 43.01.036.

(6) This section expires June 30, 2028.

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

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

(2) The rules:

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

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

(ii) Recordkeeping requirements; and

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

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

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

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

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