

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 1188

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Agriculture & Natural Resources

**Title:** An act relating to creating a focused effort on reestablishing a rural agricultural economy in western Washington by making investments aimed at returning underproducing land back into a state of active agricultural production.

**Brief Description:** Creating a focused effort on reestablishing a rural agricultural economy in western Washington by making investments aimed at returning underproducing land back into a state of active agricultural production.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Lytton, MacEwen, Haigh, Tharinger, Blake, Wilcox, Morris, Ryu, Morrell, Pike and Van De Wege.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 1/31/13, 2/12/13 [DPS].

**Brief Summary of Substitute Bill**

- Directs the Washington Department of Agriculture to conduct an inventory of idle agricultural lands in certain western Washington counties.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

**Majority Report:** The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 14 members: Representatives Blake, Chair; Lytton, Vice Chair; Chandler, Ranking Minority Member; MacEwen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Buys, Dunshee, Haigh, Hurst, Kretz, Orcutt, Schmick, Stanford, Van De Wege and Warnick.

**Staff:** Jason Callahan (786-7117).

**Background:**

According to the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA), rich soils and diverse climates help make Washington one of the most productive growing regions in the

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world and enables farmers to produce approximately 300 different crops. To support this industry, the WSDA undertakes the following duties:

- protects and reduces the risk to public health by assuring the safety of the state's food supply;
- ensures the safe and legal distribution, use, and disposal of pesticides and fertilizers;
- protects Washington's natural resources, agriculture industry, and the public from selected plant and animal pests and diseases; and
- facilitates the movement of Washington agricultural products in domestic and international markets.

As part of its mission, the WSDA conducts an ongoing inventory of all agricultural production in the state. This survey is conducted in compliance with the federal Endangered Species Act to ensure that the state knows the location and type of plants used and the pesticides associated with those plants.

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### **Summary of Substitute Bill:**

The WSDA is directed to develop an inventory of idle agricultural lands in certain western Washington counties. The inventory must be built on existing survey programs at the WSDA and focus, when resources are limited, on central and southern Puget Sound counties. In constructing the inventory, the WSDA must consider idle lands as those that have recently moved from crop production, lands that in the past have been used for livestock production, open spaces not being currently put to a conflicting use, and other lands suitable for agricultural production.

The inventory may be done with assistance from Washington State University and must be completed by 2017. Required elements of the survey include: an assessment of water availability, the identification of potential parcels suitable for production, field verification, and the development of mapping databases.

### **Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:**

The original bill did not include an intent section and directed the WSDA, together with Washington State University, to develop a program that would have been designed to return underused agricultural land in western Washington back into a state of production by fostering connections among landowners, potential growers, and purchasers.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date of Substitute Bill:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) Western Washington has a lot of land that is currently idle but that could be easily returned to agricultural production. The reestablishment of agricultural production can be encouraged using the existing resources and research available at Washington State University and the WSDA. The research currently under way needs to filter down to the small landowners who would like to know what to do with their idle acreage, other than growing bumper crops of Scotch broom. Additionally, changes in eastern Washington farming practices makes the timing for an initiative like this one perfect.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Representative Lytton, prime sponsor; Jay Gordon, Washington State Dairy Federation; Kirk Cook, Washington State Department of Agriculture; and Ron Shultz, Washington State Conservation Commission.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.