

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5957

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Agriculture & Rural Economic Development, March 3, 1999

Title: An act relating to food labeling.

Brief Description: Requiring country of origin labeling for bulk fruits and vegetables for retail sale.

Sponsors: Senators Johnson, B. Sheldon, McDonald, Hale, Deccio, Costa, Wojahn and Roach.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture & Rural Economic Development: 3/3/99 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5957 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Rasmussen, Chair; T. Sheldon, Vice Chair; Gardner, Honeyford, Morton, Prentice, Snyder and Swecker.

Staff: David Johnson (786-7754)

Background: Fruits and vegetables are often imported from a variety of countries with differing rules regarding their growth. Because of the varying rules, produce from different countries may contain different chemical residues in or on them. Such residues may include pesticides, herbicides, and fungicides. For health reasons, many consumers wish to know the country of origin when selecting their produce.

Summary of Substitute Bill: A task force of legislators and industry representatives is formed to explore issues of country of origin labeling and a Grown in Washington-promotional program. The task force looks at issues related to fruits, vegetables, meat, fish, dairy, and poultry. The task force reports to the Legislature by December 10, 1999, with recommendations.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The substitute bill removed the labeling requirement and commissioned a task force to study the issues of product labeling and promotion.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: This is a consumer information oriented bill. It provides consumers with information about fruits and vegetables, as they get other products. This will also enable consumers to promote domestic produce. Some stores already do this; it should be easy to implement.

Testimony Against: It will be difficult to assure validity of labels. The Department of Agriculture needs rulemaking authority to implement this and coordinate with federal programs.

Testified: Mary Beth Lang, Dept. of Agriculture (comments); Doug Henken, WA Food Industry (comments, concerns); PRO: Senator Johnson, prime sponsor; Representative Clements; Jerry Honeyford; Lynn Johnson; Bill Garvin, WS Farm Bureau.