

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6246

As of January 17, 2002

Title: An act relating to formation of an organic foods commission.

Brief Description: Adopting the Washington organic foods commission act.

Sponsors: Senators Jacobsen, Kohl-Welles and Kline.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture & International Trade: 1/23/02.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Staff: Bob Lee (786-7404)

Background: There exist over 20 commissions that are organized under state laws to provide services to producers of specific commodities. Some commissions are established under general commission enabling statutes. Others are formed under specific legislative authority that was specifically developed for a named commodity. For example, there are separate commissions for specific commodities such as wheat, milk, beef, apples and other major and minor crops.

Currently, there are about 500 organic food producers in the state certified by the Department of Agriculture. Current commodity commission laws are not designed to provide the opportunity of organic producers to form an organic foods commission.

Summary of Bill: Authority is granted for the producers of organic food to petition for the formation of an organic food commission. Organic food has the same definition as the State Organic Food Certification Program. If a petition of at least 10 percent of the organic food producers is submitted to the Department of Agriculture, a hearing is held on the question of whether an organic food commission should be formed. If the director of the Department of Agriculture finds that the formation of a commission is advantageous, a referendum is held to determine whether a commission should be formed.

If producers representing 60 percent by number and 60 percent by value of those voting support the formation of the commission, then the commission is formed. Once formed, board elections are held. To fund activities of the commission, an assessment of up to 1 percent of the gross value of organic products sold can be established. If the organic food commission is created and an assessment is established, then the organic food product is exempt from assessment by other commodity commissions.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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