
SENATE BILL 5543

State of Washington

66th Legislature

2019 Regular Session

By Senator Takko

Read first time 01/23/19. Referred to Committee on Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks.

1 AN ACT Relating to retaining productive farmland; adding a new
2 section to chapter 89.08 RCW; adding a new section to chapter 43.17
3 RCW; and creating a new section.

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

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** (1) The legislature finds that loss of
6 productive farmland is a critical issue of statewide importance that
7 puts at risk the long-term viability of agriculture in the state. To
8 address the issues relating to loss of farmland the legislature, in
9 2007, created the office of farmland preservation as a program within
10 the state conservation commission. One of the tasks of the office is
11 to provide the legislature and governor with an analysis of the
12 factors contributing to the loss of farmland in the state.

13 (2) State agencies acquire various interests in real property
14 that range from easements and leases to purchases in fee simple.
15 Sometimes agencies will acquire an interest in real property that is
16 currently used as working agricultural land for the production of
17 food and fiber, or has the potential for such production. In these
18 acquisitions, the agency plans for the real property may or may not
19 include the continued use of the land for agricultural production.
20 When the agency does not continue agricultural production, these
21 lands may be put to other uses that will permanently remove

1 productive agricultural lands from future use. Given the continuing
2 loss of productive agricultural lands, the legislature intends to
3 gather information to determine the scope and extent to which state
4 agency acquisition of real property contributes to this ongoing loss
5 of productive agricultural lands.

6 (3) The legislature finds that agricultural lands are also
7 acquired and in some cases converted to other uses by activities that
8 are not undertaken by state agencies. It is the intent of the
9 legislature to gather information on the scope and extent of the
10 impact of these private activities on agricultural lands.

11 (4) State agencies adopt rules, guidance, and policies that may
12 impact productive agricultural lands. It is the intent of the
13 legislature to examine whether additional information is needed to
14 determine the scope and extent to which agricultural lands may be
15 impacted by these activities.

16 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 89.08
17 RCW to read as follows:

18 (1) The commission shall develop a form and process for an
19 agricultural land assessment to be completed by any state agency
20 before the acquisition of an interest in real property when the
21 interest includes agricultural land as defined in this section. The
22 acquisition of a water right separate from real property is not
23 considered an interest in real property for the purposes of this
24 section and is not subject to completion of an agricultural land
25 assessment form.

26 (2) When developing the agricultural land assessment form and
27 process, the commission shall consult with affected agencies before
28 final adoption. The commission may exempt smaller scale acquisitions
29 and activities from the requirements of this section. The commission
30 shall work with affected agencies to identify sources of information
31 that minimize costs to agencies but will still provide the necessary
32 information.

33 (3) The commission shall report to the governor and legislature
34 no later than December 1st of each calendar year, which at a minimum
35 should provide information on the status of the agricultural land
36 assessment program, the results of the information submitted to the
37 commission over the previous year, and other factors the commission
38 deems appropriate to report that fulfill the purposes of this section
39 and section 3 of this act. The commission may also make

1 recommendations to the governor and legislature on issues raised
2 through the evaluation of the agricultural land assessment forms.

3 (4) (a) In the first report to the legislature and governor, the
4 commission shall address the information obtained through the
5 agricultural land assessment process and other research by the
6 commission. The first report must contain commission recommendations
7 on:

8 (i) The potential applicability of the agricultural land
9 assessment to agency rule-making actions;

10 (ii) The potential applicability to acquisition and land use
11 activities by federal and local governments;

12 (iii) Whether the agricultural land assessment should be applied
13 to the state acquisition of an interest in a water right; and

14 (iv) Whether existing processes adequately provide for the
15 evaluation of impacts to agricultural lands from other project
16 activities.

17 (b) After consultation with local governments and others, the
18 commission shall make recommendations on how the agricultural land
19 assessment could be used to track conversions of agricultural land
20 through private transactions.

21 (5) An agricultural land assessment completed by an agency
22 pursuant to this chapter may not be used as the basis for appeal of
23 an agency action or to otherwise delay or stop the proposed agency
24 activity described in the agricultural land assessment.

25 (6) The definitions in this subsection apply throughout this
26 section unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

27 (a) "Agriculture land assessment" means the document developed by
28 the state conservation commission and used by agencies consistent
29 with this section, and is separate and distinct from the detailed
30 environmental review documents required under chapter 43.21C RCW and
31 WAC 197-11-400.

32 (b) "Agricultural land" includes land that is: (i) Currently used
33 for agricultural production; (ii) zoned agricultural land of long-
34 term commercial significance; or (iii) otherwise zoned as
35 agricultural land by a local jurisdiction. "Agricultural land" does
36 not include timberland as defined in RCW 84.40.032.

37 (c) "Interest in real property" includes an easement, lease, any
38 interest in fee simple or less than fee simple, a restrictive
39 covenant, or a deferred purchase mechanism.

1 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** A new section is added to chapter 43.17
2 RCW to read as follows:

3 (1) Except as provided in subsection (2) of this section, all
4 state agencies including all state departments, boards, councils,
5 commissions, and state universities, colleges, and community colleges
6 shall complete an agricultural land assessment in the form and
7 process described and adopted by the Washington state conservation
8 commission pursuant to chapter 89.08 RCW before acquisition of an
9 interest in real property, except any interest in a water right, as
10 defined in section 2 of this act. Agricultural land does not include
11 timberland as defined in RCW 84.40.032.

12 (2) This section does not apply to the following:

13 (a) Any interest in a water right; and

14 (b) Any acquisition by the department of transportation of a
15 right-of-way to be used only for physical construction purposes.

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