

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1722

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to standards and grades for fruits and vegetables.

Brief Description: Extending an asparagus exception to the standards for fruits and vegetables.

Sponsors: By Representatives Grant, Newhouse, Linville, Buri, Clements, Walsh, Haler and Skinner.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Economic Development, Agriculture & Trade: 2/22/05, 2/23/05 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/8/05, 97-0.

Passed Senate: 4/11/05, 48-0.

Passed Legislature.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Extends the expiration date for the exception from mandatory grading standards for asparagus shipped out of state for fresh packing to December 31, 2007.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AGRICULTURE & TRADE

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 20 members: Representatives Linville, Chair; Pettigrew, Vice Chair; Kristiansen, Ranking Minority Member; Blake, Buri, Chase, Clibborn, Condotta, Grant, Haler, Holmquist, Kilmer, Kretz, McCoy, Morrell, Newhouse, Quall, Strow, P. Sullivan and Wallace.

Staff: Meg Van Schoorl (786-7105).

Background:

The Fruit and Vegetable Inspection Program of the Department of Agriculture (Department) inspects fresh and processed produce such as apples, pears, cherries, peaches, asparagus, and potatoes. The produce is inspected according to uniform standards adopted by the Department including maturity, size, soundness, shape, color, condition and other factors important to marketing. The produce may also be certified as free from pests and diseases in order to meet domestic and international market requirements. The Fruit and Vegetable Inspection Program is self-supporting through fees-for-service.

Under current law, the Director of the Department must adopt rules providing grading standards for some fruits and vegetables, and may adopt rules providing grading standards for others. Asparagus is one of the vegetables for which standards must be adopted. In 2004, the Legislature approved a temporary exception to mandatory grading standards for asparagus shipped out of state for fresh packing. With no grading standards, there are no inspections in Washington. Instead the inspection takes place in whichever state the processing occurs. The exception expires on December 31, 2005.

Summary of Bill:

The exception from mandatory grading standards for asparagus shipped out of state for fresh packing is extended and will expire on December 31, 2007.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: The fresh pack asparagus industry did not expect to have to ask for another two years of this exception to mandatory grading standards. General Mills made a decision to move its asparagus canning and labeling operation to Peru. This meant that Seneca's canning operation in Dayton, Washington, would no longer have a contract with General Mills, and would be closing. After the upcoming harvest, there will be 28 million pounds of asparagus left on the fresh market in Washington. The industry is therefore asking for two more years of the exception. The industry is not dying but is facing changes. The industry will meet the challenges by automating and mechanizing existing fresh pack operations in the state so that they will once again be able to take the 28 million pounds of asparagus.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Grant, prime sponsor; and Charlie Brown, Washington Asparagus Council.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.