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**SENATE BILL 5060**

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**State of Washington 64th Legislature 2015 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Honeyford, Schoesler, and Warnick

AN ACT Relating to improving relationships between agricultural producers and state regulatory staff; adding a new section to chapter 89.08 RCW; creating a new section; and providing an expiration date.

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

NEW SECTION. **Sec.**  The legislature finds that relationships between agricultural producers and personnel assigned to state regulatory agencies are in need of improvement in a number of areas in the state. The legislature further finds that many of the staff at state regulatory agencies lack experience and background with agricultural operations and producers. The legislature further finds that tension is created because of a lack of clarity regarding agency roles in addressing natural resources issues, particularly water quality, involving agriculture. Furthermore, the legislature finds agricultural producers lack familiarity with the expectations placed upon state regulatory personnel.

The legislature finds the state conservation commission includes representatives of state regulatory agencies and conservation districts, but does not have representatives of general agricultural organizations or commodity groups. However, the legislature finds that the state conservation commission and local conservation districts have had a long-term experience in successfully working with agricultural producers and state agency personnel on a range of natural resource issues to address concerns regarding the use and stewardship of the state natural resources.

The purpose of this act is to initiate a public process employing the state conservation commission to test processes to clearly define agency roles, improve mutual understandings, and build improved working relationships between agricultural producers and state regulatory personnel.

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

(1)(a) The commission shall initiate a state forum that includes persons designated by the directors of state regulatory agencies, and agricultural producers nominated to the commission by state and regional agricultural organizations to:

(i) Design a process to be instituted at the county or regional level on a pilot project basis that would provide an opportunity for local producers to meet-and-greet the field staff assigned by the regulatory agency to that area of the state and begin a dialogue that improves communication and mutual understanding and cooperation;

(ii) Design a process whereby input and complaints can be received, evaluated, and form the basis for recommending possible change to agency procedures;

(iii) Examine and propose revision of existing training provided to and procedures followed by field enforcement staff of state regulatory agencies that interact with agricultural producers, including cross-training of state regulatory agency field enforcement staff and conservation district technical assistance staff;

(iv) Examine policy issues that create tensions between state regulatory agencies and agricultural organizations and propose methods to relieve these tensions, including recommending to the legislature policy changes; and

(v) Examine the roles and responsibilities of the various agencies and entities, both regulatory and incentive-based, as they relate to programs interacting with agricultural landowners, and recommend policy changes to, if necessary, better clarify these roles and responsibilities.

(b) An initial report of the recommendations in this subsection (1) shall be made to the appropriate policy committees of the legislature and to the governor by December 16, 2015.

(2) The state forum may request assistance from local conservation districts to host and conduct local forums on a pilot basis to initiate a dialogue between state regulatory agency staff assigned in a particular county or region of the state, and agricultural and rural landowners in that county or region. The commission may provide incentives to those conservation districts that engage in the pilot program through the commission's existing district governance and accountability program. The commission shall seek involvement from at least one district from each side of the crest of the Cascade mountains each year. The commission shall consult with legislators to assist in determining which counties may benefit from the establishment of these forums.

(3) State regulatory agencies shall cooperate with the commission and participate in the state and local forums. In conducting this pilot program, the commission may test various options including establishing yearly or periodic forums.

(4) The commission shall submit a final report by December 1, 2019, to the committees with jurisdiction over agricultural issues in the house of representatives and the senate on the results of the forums and the pilot program, and shall also submit any recommendations to further decrease tensions and improve working relationships and understanding between the agricultural landowners and the staff assigned to state regulatory agencies.

(5) As used in this section, "state regulatory agencies" means the department of ecology, the department of agriculture, and the department of fish and wildlife.

(6) This section expires July 1, 2020.

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