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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

Prefiled 01/09/15. Read first time 01/12/15. Referred to Committee on Agriculture, Water & Rural Economic Development.

1 AN ACT Relating to improving relationships between agricultural  
2 producers and state regulatory staff; adding a new section to chapter  
3 89.08 RCW; creating a new section; and providing an expiration date.

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

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds that relationships  
6 between agricultural producers and personnel assigned to state  
7 regulatory agencies are in need of improvement in a number of areas  
8 in the state. The legislature further finds that many of the staff at  
9 state regulatory agencies lack experience and background with  
10 agricultural operations and producers. The legislature further finds  
11 that tension is created because of a lack of clarity regarding agency  
12 roles in addressing natural resources issues, particularly water  
13 quality, involving agriculture. Furthermore, the legislature finds  
14 agricultural producers lack familiarity with the expectations placed  
15 upon state regulatory personnel.

16 The legislature finds the state conservation commission includes  
17 representatives of state regulatory agencies and conservation  
18 districts, but does not have representatives of general agricultural  
19 organizations or commodity groups. However, the legislature finds  
20 that the state conservation commission and local conservation  
21 districts have had a long-term experience in successfully working

1 with agricultural producers and state agency personnel on a range of  
2 natural resource issues to address concerns regarding the use and  
3 stewardship of the state natural resources.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

17           (4) The commission shall submit a final report by December 1,  
18 2019, to the committees with jurisdiction over agricultural issues in  
19 the house of representatives and the senate on the results of the  
20 forums and the pilot program, and shall also submit any  
21 recommendations to further decrease tensions and improve working  
22 relationships and understanding between the agricultural landowners  
23 and the staff assigned to state regulatory agencies.

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

27           (6) This section expires July 1, 2020.

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