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**SENATE BILL 6278**

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**State of Washington**

**68th Legislature**

**2024 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Lias, Muzzall, Billig, Nobles, Saldaña, and Valdez

Read first time 01/19/24. Referred to Committee on Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks.

1 AN ACT Relating to promoting organic agriculture; amending RCW  
2 15.86.070; creating new sections; and providing an expiration date.

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

4 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds that Washington  
5 state has the second most diverse agricultural sector in the nation  
6 with over 15 million acres of farmland and 300 different crops in  
7 production. The state's rich soils, diverse microclimates, and  
8 transportation networks support market diversity and economic  
9 competitiveness within the agricultural sector. Through its  
10 institutions of higher education, Washington state supports the  
11 development of agricultural knowledge and a robust infrastructure of  
12 technical expertise that is deployed across the state to improve  
13 agricultural production, protect the environment, and strengthen  
14 farming communities.

15 The legislature also finds that organic and regenerative  
16 agricultural practices help preserve the environment, support  
17 economic growth, and protect human health. Practices such as no-till  
18 farming, cover cropping, and rotational grazing improve soil health  
19 and reduce carbon emissions. Decreasing the use of pesticides and  
20 petroleum-based fertilizers mitigates groundwater pollution, supports  
21 biodiversity, and reduces the risks of human, animal, and

1 environmental exposure to toxic materials. There is growing consumer  
2 demand for healthy foods and the impacts of climate change, including  
3 wildfire smoke, drought, excessive heat, flooding, and new invasive  
4 species and pests, amplify the need to increase the use of resilient  
5 and sustainable agricultural practices.

6 The legislature further finds that an increase in organic and  
7 regenerative agriculture would protect and improve the state's  
8 valuable farmlands, increase the value of the state's agricultural  
9 commodities, and help protect farmworkers, their communities, and the  
10 environment from exposure to harmful chemicals and practices.

11 Therefore, the legislature finds that development of an organic  
12 agriculture action plan is needed to increase the amount of organic  
13 and regenerative agricultural practices in the state.

14 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** (1) The department of agriculture shall  
15 create and chair an organic and regenerative agriculture task force.  
16 The department of agriculture shall appoint the members of the task  
17 force, which must include, but is not limited to, representatives of  
18 the following interests, organizations, and state agencies:

- 19 (a) The conservation commission;
- 20 (b) Washington State University;
- 21 (c) The Washington soil health initiative established in RCW  
22 15.145.020;
- 23 (d) One or more persons currently certified in organic farming;
- 24 (e) One or more persons currently engaged in regenerative  
25 farming;
- 26 (f) One or more persons currently engaged in conventional  
27 farming;
- 28 (g) Organizations representing farmers markets;
- 29 (h) Conservation organizations;
- 30 (i) Environmental justice organizations;
- 31 (j) Irrigation districts;
- 32 (k) Pesticide distributors and applicators;
- 33 (l) A member of the public from east of the crest of the Cascade  
34 mountains; and
- 35 (m) A member of the public from west of the crest of the Cascade  
36 mountains.

37 (2) One or more representatives of Washington tribes must also be  
38 invited to participate on the task force.

1 (3) One youth representative from an organization that encourages  
2 students to engage in agricultural education must also be invited to  
3 participate on the task force when available.

4 (4) When appointing members of the task force, the department of  
5 agriculture must include representatives from large farming  
6 operations with greater than \$250,000 gross receipts annually and  
7 small farming operations with less than \$250,000 gross receipts  
8 annually and farming operations from both east and west of the crest  
9 of the Cascade mountains.

10 (5) The department of agriculture must, in consultation with the  
11 organic and regenerative agriculture task force, develop an organic  
12 agriculture action plan to serve as a guide to leverage organic and  
13 regenerative agriculture to address economic, social, and  
14 environmental challenges, create opportunities for farmers wishing to  
15 transition to organic farming, increase resiliency in agricultural  
16 methods, and build a robust regional food system.

17 (6) When developing the organic agriculture action plan, the  
18 department of agriculture, in consultation with the organic and  
19 regenerative agriculture task force, must consider and provide  
20 recommendations, as appropriate, on the following elements including,  
21 but not limited to:

22 (a) Identifying barriers to achieving organic certification and  
23 expanding organic markets;

24 (b) Defining regenerative agriculture and considering how and  
25 where regenerative agriculture and organic agriculture overlap and  
26 interconnect;

27 (c) Providing education to support job creation and retention in  
28 the organic sector;

29 (d) Ways to increase Washington's certified organic acreage to 25  
30 percent of agricultural land by 2035;

31 (e) Ways to support entry to organic farming, particularly among  
32 youth, overburdened communities, and black, indigenous, and other  
33 people of color;

34 (f) Increasing the number of farmers, processors, wholesalers,  
35 and retailers transitioning to organic farming production and sale of  
36 organic products;

37 (g) Ways to improve coordination of organic farming and food  
38 processing and distribution infrastructures;

39 (h) Options to increase financial revenue for, and sustainability  
40 of, organic farms, processors, wholesalers, and retailers;

1 (i) Ways to enhance soil health, water and air quality,  
2 biodiversity, and carbon sequestration to mitigate climate change and  
3 improve on-farm resilience through organic or regenerative farming;  
4 and

5 (j) Research on topics specific to or relevant to organic and  
6 regenerative farming, including increased crop productivity and  
7 quality, genetic biodiversity, and alternatives to synthetic  
8 pesticides.

9 (7) The department of agriculture, in consultation with the  
10 organic and regenerative agriculture task force, shall consider the  
11 work and recommendations of the Washington soil health initiative  
12 created in RCW 15.145.020 when developing the organic agriculture  
13 action plan.

14 (8) The department of agriculture must include recommendations  
15 for legislative, administrative, or budgetary actions necessary to  
16 implement the organic agriculture action plan, including whether to  
17 extend the organic and regenerative agriculture task force, in the  
18 plan.

19 (9)(a) The department of agriculture shall provide a progress  
20 report on the development of the organic agriculture action plan to  
21 the appropriate committees of the senate and the house of  
22 representatives by November 1, 2024, in compliance with RCW  
23 43.01.036.

24 (b) The department of agriculture shall provide the organic  
25 agriculture action plan to the appropriate committees of the senate  
26 and house of representatives by November 1, 2025, in compliance with  
27 RCW 43.01.036.

28 (10) This section expires December 31, 2025.

29 **Sec. 3.** RCW 15.86.070 and 2010 c 109 s 6 are each amended to  
30 read as follows:

31 (1) The director may adopt rules establishing a program for  
32 certifying producers, processors, and handlers as meeting state,  
33 national, or international standards for organic or transitional  
34 products.

35 (2) The rules:

36 (a) May govern, but are not limited to governing:

37 (i) The number and scheduling of on-site visits, both announced  
38 and unannounced, by certification personnel;

39 (ii) Recordkeeping requirements; and

1 (iii) The submission of product samples for chemical analysis;  
2 and

3 (b) Shall include a fee schedule that will provide for the  
4 recovery of the full cost of the program. However, the fee schedule  
5 may be modified to the extent that funds are appropriated to the  
6 department for the specific purpose of reducing fees to decrease the  
7 financial burden to achieve or maintain organic certification and  
8 increase participation in organic agriculture.

9 (3) All fees collected under this chapter shall be deposited in  
10 an account within the agricultural local fund. The revenue from such  
11 fees shall be used solely for carrying out the provisions of this  
12 chapter, and no appropriation is required for disbursement from the  
13 fund.

14 (4) The director may employ such personnel as are necessary to  
15 carry out the provisions of this chapter.

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