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**SENATE BILL 5543**

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**State of Washington 66th Legislature 2019 Regular Session**

**By** Senator Takko

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

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

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

(2) State agencies acquire various interests in real property that range from easements and leases to purchases in fee simple. Sometimes agencies will acquire an interest in real property that is currently used as working agricultural land for the production of food and fiber, or has the potential for such production. In these acquisitions, the agency plans for the real property may or may not include the continued use of the land for agricultural production. When the agency does not continue agricultural production, these lands may be put to other uses that will permanently remove productive agricultural lands from future use. Given the continuing loss of productive agricultural lands, the legislature intends to gather information to determine the scope and extent to which state agency acquisition of real property contributes to this ongoing loss of productive agricultural lands.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(a) Any interest in a water right; and

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

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