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**SENATE BILL 6278**

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**State of Washington 68th Legislature 2024 Regular Session**

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

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

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

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

The legislature also finds that organic and regenerative agricultural practices help preserve the environment, support economic growth, and protect human health. Practices such as no-till farming, cover cropping, and rotational grazing improve soil health and reduce carbon emissions. Decreasing the use of pesticides and petroleum-based fertilizers mitigates groundwater pollution, supports biodiversity, and reduces the risks of human, animal, and environmental exposure to toxic materials. There is growing consumer demand for healthy foods and the impacts of climate change, including wildfire smoke, drought, excessive heat, flooding, and new invasive species and pests, amplify the need to increase the use of resilient and sustainable agricultural practices.

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

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

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

(a) The conservation commission;

(b) Washington State University;

(c) The Washington soil health initiative established in RCW 15.145.020;

(d) One or more persons currently certified in organic farming;

(e) One or more persons currently engaged in regenerative farming;

(f) One or more persons currently engaged in conventional farming;

(g) Organizations representing farmers markets;

(h) Conservation organizations;

(i) Environmental justice organizations;

(j) Irrigation districts;

(k) Pesticide distributors and applicators;

(l) A member of the public from east of the crest of the Cascade mountains; and

(m) A member of the public from west of the crest of the Cascade mountains.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(10) This section expires December 31, 2025.

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

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

(2) The rules:

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

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

(ii) Recordkeeping requirements; and

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

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

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

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

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