

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2619

As Reported by House Committee On:
Agriculture & Natural Resources

Title: An act relating to reducing regulatory stress in agriculture.

Brief Description: Reducing regulatory stress in agriculture.

Sponsors: Representatives Dent, Schmick, Barnard and Lekanoff.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 1/30/26, 2/4/26 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates a joint legislative task force to review and recommend ways to streamline, eliminate, or modify regulations related to land use and zoning, stewardship of water resources, grazing rights, and pesticides.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 11 members: Representatives Reeves, Chair; Morgan, Vice Chair; Dent, Ranking Minority Member; Engell, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Bernbaum, McClintock, Nance, Orcutt, Richards, Schmick and Springer.

Staff: Rebecca Lewis (786-7339).

Background:

In 2024 the Department of Agriculture (WSDA) was directed to convene, staff, and co-chair a work group consisting of legislators, representatives from agricultural associations, mental health care providers, and members from the WSDA to address mental health and suicide prevention in the agricultural sector. The work group submitted a required final report to

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the Legislature in 2025 that contained a series of recommendations, some of which related to exploring and streamlining regulatory processes.

Summary of Bill:

A joint legislative task force is created to review aspects of the regulatory environment that lead to agricultural producer stress and provide recommendations to streamline, eliminate, or modify existing regulations related to land use and zoning, stewardship of water resources, grazing rights, and pesticides. The task force must submit its findings and recommendations to the appropriate committees of the Legislature by November 1, 2028.

The task force is composed of one member from each of the largest caucuses of the House of Representatives, appointed by the Speaker of the House, and the Senate, appointed by the President of the Senate, as well as the following agency members or their respective designees:

- the Director of the Department of Agriculture;
- the Director of the Department of Commerce;
- the Director of the Department of Ecology;
- the Commissioner of Public Lands;
- the Director of the Department of Fish and Wildlife;
- the Director of the Governor's Office of Regulatory Innovation and Assistance;
- the Secretary of Health; and
- the Director of the Department of Labor and Industries.

The task force must choose its chair from among its legislative membership. Pending election of the chair, the two appointed legislative members with the most years of legislative service must jointly set an agreed date, time, and location to convene the initial task force meeting. Staff support for the task force must be provided by Senate Committee Services and the Office of Program Research.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill is about the mental health in the agricultural sector, which has the highest level of suicide of any other industry in the United States, over three times the rate

of what is in second place. Work has been done since 2017 or 2018 to study the issue, and the Legislature has expanded its efforts since then. In 2024, legislators worked on a proviso to look at mental health and suicide issues in agricultural producers and workers, and the number one recommendation of that task force was to reduce financial stress and regulatory overload. Mental health struggles are real and the hearing on this bill is appreciated by producers. This bill is solution oriented. The regulatory stresses on family farmers include challenges with keeping farms in the family and the extra pressure that it brings when it was their grandfather's farm and their father's, and now theirs. This is not a private equity situation. These are family farms and do not have attorneys on staff. The state has lost six or seven food processors in the last couple of years, and many jobs in the processing industry. The task force created in the bill should also address suicide prevention for food processors.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) This bill implements the top recommendation out of the mental health task force work that the Department of Agriculture (WSDA) coordinated and worked with legislators on over the last year and a half. Agriculture is at a precipice as it relates to stress and to financial burden, and the WSDA appreciates the idea of moving forward this task force work and identifying opportunities for any type of relief that can be found, whether it's regulatory or in some other space. The WSDA supports the work, but is testifying as "other" due to the fiscal note.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Tom Dent, prime sponsor; Jay Gordon, Washington State Dairy Federation; and Mark Streuli, WA Cattlemen, WA Wheat Growers, WA Potato and Onion Association.

(Other) Kelly McLain, Washington State Dept. of Agriculture.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.