

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## SB 5391

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Agriculture & Natural Resources

**Title:** An act relating to the sustainable farms and fields grant program.

**Brief Description:** Concerning the sustainable farms and fields grant program.

**Sponsors:** Senators Shewmake, Krishnadasan, Nobles, Saldaña and Valdez.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Agriculture & Natural Resources: 3/25/25, 4/1/25 [DP].

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Amends the list of allowable uses for Sustainable Farms and Fields Grant Program (Grant Program) funding.
- Adds criteria that must be used when prioritizing or weighting projects for Grant Program funding.
- Amends the timeline by when the State Conservation Commission must evaluate and update the most appropriate carbon equivalency metric that applies to the Grant Program.

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### 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:**

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

The Sustainable Farms and Fields Grant Program (Grant Program) was created in 2020 with the stated purpose to enable farmers and ranchers to adopt practices that increase appropriate quantities of carbon stored in and above their soil and to initiate or expand the use of precision agriculture on their farms. The Grant Program is administered by the State Conservation Commission (SCC) in consultation with the Washington State Department of Agriculture, Washington State University (WSU), and the Natural Resources Conservation Service within the United States Department of Agriculture.

Allowable uses of Grant Program funds include:

- annual payments to enrolled participants for successfully delivered carbon storage or reduction;
- up-front payments for contracted carbon storage;
- down payments on equipment;
- purchases of equipment;
- purchases of seed, seedlings, spores, animal feed, and amendments;
- services to landowners, such as the development of site-specific conservation plans to increase soil organic levels or to increase usage of precision agricultural practices, or design and implementation of best management practices to reduce livestock emissions;
- purchases of compost spreading equipment, or financial assistance to farmers to purchase compost spreading equipment, for the annual use for at least three years of volumes of compost determined by the SCC to be significant from materials composted at a site not owned or operated by the farmer;
- scientific studies to evaluate and quantify the greenhouse gas emissions avoided as a result of using crop residues as a biofuel feedstock or to identify management practices that increase the greenhouse gas emissions avoided as a result of using crop residues as a biofuel feedstock;
- efforts to support the farm use of anaerobic digester digestate, including scientific studies, education and outreach to farmers, and the purchase or lease of digestate spreading equipment; and
- other equipment purchases or financial assistance deemed appropriate by the SCC.

Individual projects must be prioritized or weighted, according to a prioritization metric developed by the SCC, based on the project's ability to:

- increase the quantity of organic carbon in topsoil through practices including, but not limited to, cover cropping, no-till and minimum tillage conservation practices, crop rotations, manure application, biochar application, compost application, and changes in grazing management;
- increase the quantity of organic carbon in aquatic soils;
- intentionally integrate trees, shrubs, seaweed, or other vegetation into management of agricultural and aquacultural lands, with preference for native vegetation where practicable and appropriate;
- reduce or avoid carbon dioxide equivalent emissions in or from soils;
- reduce nitrous oxide and methane emissions through changes to livestock or soil

- management; and
- increase usage of precision agricultural practices.

The Legislature originally directed the SCC to evaluate and update the most appropriate carbon equivalency metric for the Grant Program, in consultation with WSU and the University of Washington, by July 1, 2024. The SCC initially must use an equivalency that recognizes the storage of 3.67 tons of biogenic carbon for 100 years being assigned a value equal to avoiding 1 ton of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions.

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### **Summary of Bill:**

The allowable uses for Sustainable Farms and Fields Grant Program (Grant Program) funding are amended to remove the purchase of, or financial assistance to farmers to purchase, compost spreading equipment for the annual use for at least three years of volumes of compost determined by the State Conservation Commission (SCC) to be significant from materials composted at a site not owned or operated by the farmer.

In addition to the current criteria, projects must be prioritized or weighted based on the project's ability to reduce or avoid carbon dioxide equivalent emissions through increased energy efficiency or reduced fuel use.

The SCC must evaluate and update the most appropriate carbon equivalency metric, in consultation with Washington State University and the University of Washington, before implementing upfront payments for carbon storage instead of by July 1, 2024.

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**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) The primary goal of this bill is to add reduced fuel use and increased energy efficiency to the project prioritization criteria. The bill also removes complicated language describing compost spreaders, which has been difficult to implement. The State Conservation Commission does not anticipate making upfront payments for carbon storage in the short term, and would prefer to not put resources towards updating the carbon equivalency metric if making those payments through the grant program is not imminent. The Sustainable Farms and Fields Program is a good program that prioritizes the use of

climate smart agricultural practices, and is especially needed as federal funds have recently been cut for grants and other financial assistance to address climate change.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Dani Madrone, State Conservation Commission; and Bonny Jo Peterson.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.