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**SENATE BILL 5474**

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**State of Washington**

**69th Legislature**

**2025 Regular Session**

**By** Senators Lias, Muzzall, Chapman, Hasegawa, Nobles, and Stanford

Read first time 01/24/25. Referred to Committee on Agriculture & Natural Resources.

1 AN ACT Relating to expanding opportunities for organic,  
2 regenerative, climate-smart, and sustainable producers; amending RCW  
3 15.86.070; adding new sections to chapter 15.86 RCW; creating a new  
4 section; and providing an expiration date.

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

6 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** (1) The legislature finds that Washington  
7 state has the second most diverse agricultural sector in the nation  
8 with over 15,000,000 acres of farmland and 300 different crops in  
9 production. The state's rich soils, diverse microclimates, and  
10 transportation networks support market diversity and the state's  
11 diverse agricultural sector is essential to local community  
12 resilience and prosperity.

13 (2) The legislature further finds that global organic sales have  
14 grown by 10 to 15 percent annually over the past 15 years and that  
15 there is high local consumer demand for organic food. Organic  
16 agriculture offers an opportunity for farmers, ranchers, food  
17 processors, and other businesses to diversify their operations and  
18 participate in higher value markets.

19 (3) The legislature further finds that organic, regenerative,  
20 sustainable, and climate-smart agricultural practices help preserve  
21 the environment, support economic growth, and improve human health.

1 Practices such as no-till farming, cover cropping, and rotational  
2 grazing improve soil health and reduce carbon emissions. Decreasing  
3 the use of pesticides and petroleum-based fertilizers mitigates  
4 groundwater pollution, supports biodiversity, and reduces the risk of  
5 human, animal, and environmental exposure to toxic chemicals. These  
6 environmental and health effects result in additional societal  
7 economic benefits not reflected in the direct economic benefits to  
8 producers.

9 (4) The legislature further finds that producers face a  
10 significant expense in achieving organic certification.

11 (5) The legislature intends to identify and remove existing  
12 regulatory and market barriers that are preventing agricultural  
13 producers from integrating organic and regenerative practices and  
14 accessing certified organic markets. This may include developing a  
15 statewide organic action plan, lowering certification costs,  
16 identifying the need for new financing vehicles or additional  
17 wholesale and retail infrastructure and partnerships, and identifying  
18 other policies. The legislature further intends to enact policies to  
19 enable more efficient, more inclusive, more resilient, and more  
20 sustainable agriculture, to effectively contribute to food  
21 availability, accessibility, affordability, and allow our farms to  
22 continue to thrive.

23 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** A new section is added to chapter 15.86  
24 RCW to read as follows:

25 (1) The department shall develop an organic agriculture action  
26 plan to help create opportunities for farmers wishing to transition  
27 to organic farming, increase resiliency in agricultural methods, and  
28 build a robust regional food system.

29 (2) When developing the organic agriculture action plan, the  
30 department shall consider and provide recommendations, as  
31 appropriate, on elements including, but not limited to:

- 32 (a) Identifying barriers to achieving organic certification;
- 33 (b) Opportunities to expand organic markets and acreage, which  
34 may include documenting organic market potential for key commodities  
35 and crops;
- 36 (c) Opportunities to support job creation and retention in the  
37 organic sector, with particular emphasis on supporting entry to  
38 organic farming by youth, overburdened communities, and black,  
39 indigenous, and other people of color;

1 (d) Inventorying existing extension, training, and technical  
2 resources and identifying gaps in extension, training, and technical  
3 resources to support farmers who are certified and seeking to  
4 transition to organic and regenerative practices;

5 (e) Identifying ways to improve organic infrastructure and  
6 partnerships between organic producers and processors, distributors,  
7 and financial institutions; and

8 (f) Identifying data sources and data collection opportunities  
9 that help quantify the benefits and impacts of organic and  
10 regenerative farming on crop resiliency, soil health, genetic  
11 biodiversity, water quality, greenhouse gas emissions, energy  
12 consumption, minimization of the use of synthetic inputs and  
13 pesticides, and reduction of harmful toxins in the environment.

14 (3) The department, in consultation with the state conservation  
15 commission, shall consider the work and recommendations of the  
16 Washington soil health initiative created in RCW 15.145.020 when  
17 developing the organic agriculture action plan.

18 (4) The department shall include recommendations for legislative,  
19 administrative, or budgetary actions necessary to implement the  
20 organic agriculture action plan.

21 (5) The department shall provide the organic agriculture action  
22 plan to the appropriate committees of the senate and house of  
23 representatives by June 1, 2027, in compliance with RCW 43.01.036.

24 (6) This section expires June 30, 2028.

25 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** A new section is added to chapter 15.86  
26 RCW to read as follows:

27 (1) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this  
28 specific purpose, the department must contract with a nonprofit  
29 organization to administer a low barrier microgrant program to  
30 support the growth of organic, regenerative, and sustainable climate-  
31 smart agriculture.

32 (2) The nonprofit organization must be a 501(c)(3) organization  
33 that can demonstrate more than five years of experience awarding  
34 grants of less than \$25,000 to state farm businesses with the primary  
35 purpose of supporting implementation of sustainable agricultural  
36 practices.

37 (3) The nonprofit organization's administrator:

38 (a) May award grants of up to \$25,000 to any applicant that meets  
39 the following criteria:

1 (i) Is a producer, as defined in RCW 15.86.020, that has been in  
2 operation for at least two years; and

3 (ii) Currently employs, is implementing, or is seeking to  
4 implement, practices adhering to regenerative, sustainable, climate-  
5 smart, or organic principles on at least some of the land farmed or  
6 ranched;

7 (b) Must prioritize:

8 (i) Projects that implement or enhance climate-smart and  
9 regenerative practices, measure and enhance carbon sequestration,  
10 reduce greenhouse gas emissions, restore soil health, utilize cover  
11 crops, preserve and create habitats, increase biodiversity, or employ  
12 environmentally safe waste management practices; and

13 (ii) Projects located in overburdened communities or led by  
14 members of vulnerable populations, as those terms are defined in RCW  
15 70A.02.010;

16 (c) Is encouraged to facilitate accessibility of these  
17 microgrants by awarding more than one cycle of funding each year and  
18 supplementing this program with private philanthropic funding, if  
19 practicable;

20 (d) Must provide a report to the department by December 15th each  
21 year with the following information:

22 (i) The total amount of funds awarded and the number of farm  
23 businesses who received a grant that calendar year funded in whole or  
24 part by this section;

25 (ii) A brief description of the project funded and which of the  
26 priorities in (b)(i) of this subsection were addressed by the  
27 project;

28 (iii) The location of funded projects and a summary of the total  
29 number of projects and amounts awarded to projects located in  
30 overburdened communities led by members of vulnerable populations;  
31 and

32 (iv) Any amount of private philanthropic funding that was raised  
33 to supplement the funds provided through this program.

34 **Sec. 4.** RCW 15.86.070 and 2010 c 109 s 6 are each amended to  
35 read as follows:

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

1           (2) The rules:  
2           (a) May govern, but are not limited to governing:  
3           (i) The number and scheduling of on-site visits, both announced  
4 and unannounced, by certification personnel;  
5           (ii) Recordkeeping requirements; and  
6           (iii) The submission of product samples for chemical analysis;  
7 and  
8           (b) Shall include a fee schedule that will provide for the  
9 recovery of the full cost of the program. This fee schedule may be  
10 modified to the extent that funds are appropriated to the department  
11 for the specific purpose of reducing fees to decrease the financial  
12 burden to achieve or maintain organic certification and increase  
13 participation in organic agriculture.  
14           (3) All fees collected under this chapter shall be deposited in  
15 an account within the agricultural local fund. The revenue from such  
16 fees shall be used solely for carrying out the provisions of this  
17 chapter, and no appropriation is required for disbursement from the  
18 fund.  
19           (4) The director may employ such personnel as are necessary to  
20 carry out the provisions of this chapter.

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