

Chapter 89.10 RCW

FARMLAND PRESERVATION

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89.10.005

Findings.

The legislature finds that maintaining the capacity to provide adequate food and fiber resources is essential to the long-term sustainability of the state's citizens and economy. The nation's population has reached three hundred million and will continue to increase for the foreseeable future. Further, the world population is now over six billion and is projected to reach nine billion by the year 2050.

In Washington state, the population is growing by over one million people every decade with much of this growth occurring in western Washington. This growth is increasing the competition for land not only for housing, but also associated retail, commercial, industrial, and leisure industries.

The legislature finds that many once-productive agricultural areas in western Washington have been overtaken and irreversibly converted to nonagricultural uses. Other agricultural areas in the state have diminished to the point that they are dangerously close to losing the land mass necessary to be economically viable. Further, only a limited number of areas in western Washington still retain a sufficient agricultural land base and the necessary agricultural infrastructure to continue to be economically viable both in the short term and the long term.

The legislature recognizes that because this significant decline has largely occurred in less than a half century, it is imperative that mechanisms be established at the state level to focus attention, take the action needed to retain agricultural land, and ensure the opportunity for future generations to farm these lands.

The legislature finds that history shows that previous advanced civilizations in the world were founded on highly productive agricultural lands and food production systems but when the land or its productivity was lost, the civilizations declined. In contrast, other civilizations have existed for millennia because they maintained their agricultural land base, its productivity, and economic conditions sufficient to maintain stewardship of their land.

The legislature finds that there is a finite quantity of high quality agricultural land and that often this agricultural land is mistakenly viewed as an expendable resource. The legislature finds that the retention of agricultural land is desirable, not only to produce food, livestock, and other agricultural products, but also to maintain our state economy and preferable environmental conditions. For these reasons, and because it is essential that agricultural production be sufficient to meet the needs of our growing population, commitment to the retention of agricultural land should be reflected at the state policy level by the creation of an office of farmland preservation to support the retention of farmland and the viability of farming for future generations.

[2007 c 352 § 1.]

89.10.010

Office of farmland preservation.

- (1) The office of farmland preservation is created and shall be located within the state conservation commission.
- (2) Staff support for the office shall be provided by the state conservation commission.
- (3) The office of farmland preservation may:
 - (a) Provide advice and assist the state conservation commission in implementing the provisions of RCW **89.08.530** and **89.08.540**, including the merits of leasing or purchasing easements for fixed terms in addition to purchasing easements in perpetuity;
 - (b) Develop recommendations for the funding level and for the use of the agricultural conservation easements account established in RCW **89.08.540** with the guidance of the farmland preservation task force established under *RCW **89.10.020**;
 - (c) With input from the task force created in *RCW **89.10.020**, provide an analysis of the major factors that have led to past declines in the amount and use of agricultural lands in Washington and of the factors that will likely affect retention and economic viability of these lands into the future including, but not limited to, pressures to convert land to nonagricultural uses, loss of processing plants and markets, loss of profitability, productivity, and competitive advantage, urban sprawl, water availability and quality, restrictions on agricultural land use, and conversion to recreational or other uses;
 - (d) Develop model programs and tools, including innovative economic incentives for landowners, to retain agricultural land for agricultural production, with the guidance from the farmland preservation task force created under *RCW **89.10.020**;
 - (e) Provide technical assistance to localities as they develop and implement programs, mechanisms, and tools to encourage the retention of agricultural lands;
 - (f) Develop a grant process and an eligibility certification process for localities to receive grants for local programs and tools to retain agricultural lands for agricultural production;
 - (g) Provide analysis and recommendations as to the continued development and implementation of the farm transition program including, but not limited to, recommending:
 - (i) Assistance in the preparation of business plans for the transition of business interests;
 - (ii) Assistance in the facilitation of transfers of existing properties and agricultural operations to interested buyers; and
 - (iii) Research assistance on agricultural, financial, marketing, and other related transition matters;
 - (h) Begin the development of a farm transition program to assist in the transition of farmland and related businesses from one generation to the next, aligning the farm transition program closely with the farmland preservation effort to assure complementary functions; and
 - (i) Serve as a clearinghouse for incentive programs that would consolidate and disseminate information relating to conservation programs that are accessible to landowners and assist owners of agricultural lands to secure financial assistance to implement conservation easements and other projects.

[**2007 c 352 § 2.**]

NOTES:

*Reviser's note: RCW **89.10.020** expired January 1, 2011.