



**WASHINGTON FARM BUREAU**  
www.wsfb.com

# LegisLetter

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*Activities of the Legislature affecting farmers and ranchers in Washington state*

**March 20, 2009**

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**CALL TO ACTION: Tell Your Representative, "Retro Works!"**

It's time to counteract the "Get Retro" bill ([ESSB 6035](#)) with our own message: "Retro Works!"

Your help is needed to protect worker safety programs. ESSB 6035 is anti-business. If passed it will interfere with Retro/Safety programs, harm the independence of associations, and violate the privacy of associations and their members. Losing our Retro/Safety program would mean less workplace safety, higher L&I costs to employers, and higher costs to the state.

**CALL TO ACTION: Please contact your Representative today to ask for a VOTE AGAINST ESSB 6035.**

- Call the Committee member from your district and tell him or her:
  - I am a business owner in your district. I employ \_\_\_\_\_ people.
  - I use Retro and "Retro works!"
  - ESSB 6035 is bad for business and should not be passed out of committee.

### **House Committee on Commerce & Labor Members:**

[Steve Conway](#) (D-Tacoma) Chair (360) 786-7906  
[Alex Wood](#) (D-Spokane) Vice Chair (360) 786-7888  
[Cary Condotta](#)\* (R-East Wenatchee) (360) 786-7954  
[Bruce Chandler](#) (R-Granger) (360) 786-7960  
[Larry Crouse](#) (R-Spokane) (360) 786-7820  
[Tami Green](#) (D-Lakewood) (360) 786-7958  
[Jim Moeller](#) (D-Vancouver) (360) 786-7872  
[Brendan Williams](#) (D-Olympia) (360) 786-7940

\*Ranking Minority Member

### **Stopping this measure is a high priority for Farm Bureau and all of agriculture.**

If your Representative is not part of the House Committee that will hear this bill on [Tuesday](#), it is still important that he or she hears from you.

By visiting the [Farm Bureau Action Center](#) and entering your zip code, you can send an email directly to your Representatives so they can see that Retro works!

Please act NOW, since there is a [hearing on Tuesday](#) and they need to hear from you.

## **Open Space Update**

On Monday (March 16) both of the remaining Open Space Taxation bills were heard in the Senate.

The Agriculture Committee heard testimony on [HB 1815](#) (Rep. Pat Sullivan D-Covington), which would protect the eligibility of crops that take several years to mature to harvest.

The bill would make it clear that crops that take up to seven years to harvest are eligible for the program if they are planted and the owner has invested at least \$100 per acre to plant to the crop. For short-rotation hardwoods, the harvest expectation is extended to 15 years.

The bill is necessary to prevent the spread of an interpretation by a county assessor that the crops are eligible only after they have been harvested and sold. In some scenarios, that would remove many crops from eligibility.

The Washington Association of County Officials, representing county assessors, is trying to kill the bill by having it amended. They have proposed specifically identifying only Christmas trees, vineyards and fruit trees as eligible after planting and before harvest.

Washington Farm Bureau has expressed opposition to the amendment. In a letter to the Senators on the Committee, WFB said:

We have reviewed the proposed amendment to HB 1815 that has been submitted by the Washington Association of County Officials.

The amendment appears to be an attempt to do two things:

1. Exclude legitimate crops from inclusion in the Open Space program. For example, why not list cranberries, blueberries, or other berry bushes or vines? Why not asparagus? Nut trees? Ginseng? Truffles? Kiwi? Nursery stock? Rhubarb? Wasabi? If we start listing specific crops or categories, we are likely to leave something out.
2. Kill the bill via amendment. If amended, the bill may be lost in the late-session flurry surrounding the budget. The best chance to kill the bill is to amend it in any way.

Farm Bureau is satisfied with the bill in its current form and is opposed to amendments.

On the same day, the Ways & Means Committee heard testimony on [HB 1733](#) (Rep. Roger Goodman, D-Kirkland), which would clarify and protect the eligibility of commercial horse operations. In addition, the bill would protect all farms from penalties if they are removed from the open space tax program through no fault of the owner.

In some cases, farms have been notified of a decision to remove them from the program, despite the fact that the farms have not changed the nature of their operations since entering the program.

Washington Farm Bureau supports the passage of both bills without further amendment.

The Open Space Tax Program was adopted by the voters in the early 1970s through the passage of a ballot measure aimed at preserving open space lands and agricultural lands in particular.

## **State Budget Deficit Grows Again, Now Nearly \$9 Billion**

The state revenue forecast released Thursday shows expected tax collections for July 1, 2009 through June 30, 2011 will be approximately \$30.1 billion. The updated prediction for the current fiscal biennium ending June 30 is \$30 billion in tax revenue.

While tax collections are expected to be largely unchanged from the current budget cycle, projected state spending has driven the so-called "budget deficit" to about \$8.7 billion for the coming biennium.

House and Senate Democrats are expected to release their respective budget proposals by the end of next week. Federal stimulus funds, budget transfers, and budget savings are expected to make up about \$3 billion of the shortfall. Legislative budget-writers are reported to be finalizing about \$4.5 billion in spending cuts to balance the 2009-11 operating budget.

## **Governor Pleads for Climate Change Bill**

Governor Gregoire appeared before the House Ecology and Parks Committee Tuesday to plead with Legislators to “strengthen” her “Cap and Trade” bill -- [E2SSB 5735](#), sponsored by Sen. Phil Rockefeller (D-Bainbridge Island). It is a rare practice for any governor to appear before a legislative committee, signaling that a priority of this administration is struggling.

Following the Governor’s testimony, nearly 50 people testified on the measure. Those from the environmental community asked for more regulation of greenhouse gas emissions while WFB and other business representatives noted that the bill as passed by the Senate is greatly improved over the original bill advocated by the Governor. The key “positive” aspect of the present bill is that it finally demands an economic analysis of the true costs of greenhouse emission reduction policy on consumers, businesses, and citizens. This notion must be pressed forward by the Legislature, but a simple budget proviso ordering this would be a more appropriate way to proceed.

Legislators should not pass this measure because: (1) we can continue working on the key issues without a bill this year; (2) we need to wait to see what the US government chooses to do on the subject; (3) any mandatory emission reduction program will greatly harm our fragile economy; and (4) we need proof that such a program will actually help us deal with natural climate variability.

WFB hopes the bill will die and that the budget will include direction to study the economic impacts of carbon policy.

### **Bills of Interest**

Please note that since some bills have “died” there are two versions of bill tracking posted on our website. Please check the file name and date to distinguish between the two. Since there is always a chance a bill may be “revived” we judiciously keep a copy of bill tracking as it was before cutoff, in addition to the active bill tracking list. Both are available at: <http://www.wsfb.com/issues/legisletter>.

### **Information Resources**

Washington Farm Bureau: [www.wsfb.com](http://www.wsfb.com)  
Legislative Information: [www.leg.wa.gov](http://www.leg.wa.gov)

Governor’s Bill Actions: [www.governor.wa.gov](http://www.governor.wa.gov)  
Legislative Hotline: (800) 562-6000