

Washington

Washington Farm Bureau likes new recipe for food forum

Panel would tackle regulations

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — An urban legislator's longstanding proposal to set up a "food policy forum" has been refashioned enough to win over the once-critical Washington Farm Bureau.

The Farm Bureau's top lobbyist, Tom Davis, endorsed House Bill 1562 on Tuesday. As amended by the House, the forum no longer looks like a platform for telling producers how to do business, he told the Senate agriculture committee.

Instead, the forum would talk about relieving hunger, connecting small farms with local customers and easing regulations that hold back agriculture, Davis said.

"Boy, we're all open to having that conversation — to help those especially in the fringe areas, the suburban and urban areas, where farms have a harder time existing," he said.

Lawmakers have kicked around for several years the idea of appointing a panel to



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Rep. Mia Gregerson, D-SeaTac, has won support from the Washington Farm Bureau for her bill to appoint a food policy forum. Gregerson, shown here at a House committee meeting, calls getting some Republican support a "huge success."

study food-related programs and policies. Urban Democrats have touted the potential benefits, but rural Republicans have been wary, especially because of the idea's association with the Washington State Food System Roundtable.

The roundtable was created in 2012 by Gov. Chris Gregoire's executive order. Made up mostly of nonprofit groups, the roundtable recently released a report calling for more government interven-

tion to create an "equitable" food system. As introduced, SB 1562 directed the food policy forum to coordinate and build on the roundtable's "processes."

The bill no longer mentions the roundtable. The House also deleted references to housing and obesity, and added a section sought by the Farm Bureau to look at how regulations affect farms.

The State Conservation Commission and Department of Agriculture would oversee

the forum. The two agencies were once part of the roundtable, but later distanced themselves from the group.

SB 1562's sponsor, Rep. Mia Gregerson, D-SeaTac, told the agriculture committee that she's learned a lot by talking with farm groups and visiting farms.

"I want to be very, very clear that this is not the roundtable," she said. "I want to be very clear, the intent is to do no harm."

The bill passed the Democratic-controlled House by a 63-34 vote. Most Republicans voted "no," but Gregerson called the 13 "yes" votes from Republicans "a huge success," considering past opposition.

Davis said the bill was probably still tainted by its history.

"Our concern with the original bill was that it was going out of its way to tell conventional ag how to do its business. And our response was, frankly, we think we have that down pretty well," he said. "We don't need a forum to tell conventional ag how to do its business. It's like putting one together to tell Boeing how to build an aircraft wing."



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press File

Cattle at a feedlot near Pasco, Wash. The state House agriculture committee on March 23 endorsed raising the beef checkoff. The issue has divided the beef industry.

Washington GOP lawmaker slices beef checkoff hike

Fee would increase by 50 cents

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Given a second take, a Moses Lake Republican passed through the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee on Wednesday a bill to raise the beef checkoff by 50 cents this year, but without another increase in two years.

The committee had passed the checkoff bill March 23. The bill then called for a 50-cent increase now and another 50-cent hike in 2019. A procedural error, however, forced the committee to vote again.

Between last week and this week, Rep. Tom Dent, who's taken a lead on the issue, reconsidered his position.

Dent said the majority of producers he's heard from support a \$1 increase. But he noted that the industry was not unanimous, so he dropped the second half-dollar hike.

"We give them a little bit of a raise, and we'll see where the money goes," he said. "I think this was a good compromise for everybody, I truly do."

For more than a year, beef producers have argued strenuously for and against raising the per-head tax on cattle transactions from \$1.50 to \$2.50. The \$1 increase would double the annual budget of the Washington Beef Commission to about \$2 million. The state's \$500,000 a year contribution to the national Beef Board would stay the same.

The House committee accepted Dent's proposal and voted 13-2 to amend a Senate-passed bill, which provided for a \$1 increase this year.

The bill's sponsor, Sen. Judy Warnick, R-Moses Lake, said after the House committee vote that she preferred a

\$1 hike, but agreed to Dent's proposal.

"I would have liked to see it increase in two years, but we have been in a lot of conversations, and I think it's the best we can get this year," she said.

The Washington Cattlemen's Association, the Cattle Feeders of Washington and Washington Farm Bureau supported the \$1 increase. The Cattle Producers of Washington and Northwest Farmers Union opposed it.

Cattle Feeders Executive Director Jack Field said the organization would have preferred the dollar, but will be grateful for the 50 cents.

"I think this is going to be outstanding. I'm sure people will see great things, though we can't have \$1 expectations based on a 50-cent increase," he said.

The Cattle Producers argue their members, cow-calf ranchers, see little benefit from the checkoff.

The group's president, Stevens County rancher Scott Nielsen, said last week that he was "exasperated" at proposals to incrementally raise the checkoff. "It's either good or bad," he said.

Dent also included a provision in the bill requiring the Beef Commission to present producers and legislators with budget reports. While some ranchers heap praise on the Beef Commission, others say they aren't informed about how their money is used.

"One of the big pushbacks is, 'We don't know where the money is going,'" Dent said.

The beef industry was torn over the checkoff last year, so Dent and Warnick took on the issue.

Dent said he doesn't regret stepping in, though it's brought him some heat.

"There was way more passion than I expected on both sides at times," he said.

Crop tours to answer disease questions, highlight new varieties

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Washington wheat farmers are expected to ask questions about stripe rust, snow mold and falling number tests during field tours this season, a Washington State University research leader says.

Ryan Higginbotham, director of WSU's cereal variety testing program, released the 2017 crop tour schedule, which kicks off May 24 in Columbia County and ends July 14 with a barley field day in Pullman, Wash.

New varieties will be highlighted, he said. All major breeding programs will have entries, Higginbotham said, including newly named lines and some still in the experimental stage.

"There's something new for everybody in just about every location that people will want to keep their eyes on and see how they perform this year," he said.

Higginbotham is getting questions from farmers about soil fertility, given higher moisture levels.

"Should they or should they not be adding some extra fertilizer?" he said. "That's a difficult decision to make when it's \$3.50 per bushel wheat — it's a lot easier to do that when it's \$7 per bushel wheat."

WSU, Oregon State University and Northwest Grain Growers are cooperating on field trials in Eureka, Walla Walla and Dayton, Wash.

28 crop tours scheduled

The Pacific Northwest 2017 Crop Tour Schedule, released by Washington State University: Columbia County Conservation Tour: 9 a.m., May 24, contact Paul Carter at 509-382-4741

Horse Heaven: 8 a.m., June 6, contact Ryan Higginbotham at 509-641-0549

Ritzville: 3 p.m., June 7, contact Aaron Esser at 509-659-3210

Western Whitman County and Lacrosse: 9:30 a.m., June 8, contact Steve Van Vleet at 509-397-6290

Connell: 5 p.m., June 8, contact Ryan Higginbotham at 509-641-0549

Pendleton, Ore.: 7:30 a.m., June 13, contact Mary Corp at 541-278-4415

Moro, Ore.: 7:30 a.m., June 14, contact Mary Corp at 541-278-4415

WSU Weed Science in Pullman: 1 p.m., June 14, contact Drew Lyon at 509-335-2961

Harrington: 4 p.m., June 14, contact Diana Roberts at 509-477-2167

Lind: 8:30 a.m., June 15, contact Bill Schillinger at 509-235-1933

St. Andrews: 5 p.m., June 16, contact Dale Whaley at 509-745-8531

Mayview: 9 a.m., June 20, contact Mark Heitstuman at 509-243-2009

Eureka: 3 p.m., June 20, contact Ryan Higginbotham at 509-641-0549

Higginbotham said the researchers decided to work together instead of duplicating efforts. He hopes the cooperative field days will help boost attendance.

WSU's biennial Spillman Field Day in Pullman, Wash., would normally be this year,

Walla Walla (cereals): 1 p.m., June 21, contact Paul Carter at 509-382-4741

Dayton (legumes): 8 a.m., June 22, contact Paul Carter at 509-382-4741

Anatone: 3:30 p.m., June 22, contact Mark Heitstuman at 509-243-2009

Moses Lake (irrigated): 8 a.m. June 27, contact Andy Jensen at 509-754-2011

University of Idaho/Limagrain; Moscow, Idaho: 8:30 a.m. June 27, contact Debby Rigby at 208-885-6681

Almira: 3 p.m., June 27, contact Diana Roberts at 509-477-2167

Reardan: 7 a.m., June 28, contact Diana Roberts at 509-477-2167

Wilke Farm Soil Workshop; Davenport: 9:30 a.m., June 28, contact Aaron Esser at 509-659-3210

Fairfield: 7 a.m., June 29, contact Diana Roberts at 509-477-2167

St. John: 10 a.m., July 6, contact Steve Van Vleet at 509-397-6290

Lamont: 2:30 p.m., July 6, contact Steve Van Vleet at 509-397-6290

Farmington: 8 a.m., July 7, contact Steve Van Vleet at 509-397-6290

Palouse: 3:30 p.m., July 7, contact Steve Van Vleet at 509-397-6290

Bickleton: 1 p.m., July 11, contact Hannah Brause at 509-773-5817

Know Barley, Know Beer; Pullman: 3 p.m. July 14, contact Kevin Murphy at 509-335-9692

June 14 will be in Pullman.

The field day June 28 on WSU's Wilke Farm east of Davenport, held as a soil workshop, will also be different, Higginbotham said.

"(We'll) see if we can regroup and maybe try something a little different next summer," Higginbotham said.

WSU researcher Drew Lyon's weed science field day

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Online <http://smallgrains.wsu.edu/2017-pnw-crop-tour-schedule/>

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