

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6854

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Agriculture & Rural Economic Development, January 31, 2006

Title: An act relating to disclosure of animal information.

Brief Description: Regarding disclosure of animal information.

Sponsors: Senator Rasmussen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Agriculture & Rural Economic Development: 1/30/06, 1/31/06 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Rasmussen, Chair; Shin, Vice Chair; Schoesler, Ranking Minority Member; Delvin, Jacobsen and Morton.

Staff: Bob Lee (786-7404)

Background: The National Animal Identification System is being designed by the United States Department of Agriculture with the goal of having the capability to identify all animal premises and animals that had direct contact with specific foreign or domestic animal diseases within 48 hours of discovery. The involved species include cattle, swine, sheep, goats, poultry, buffalo, ostrich, emu, horses, llamas, alpacas, and aquaculture.

The program is anticipated to be developed so that all premises and animals will be registered by January 2008, and animal movement reporting is to be fully implemented in 2009. Programs that fit the unique characteristics of each species are being developed. Some species will involve the identification of individual animals while other species will involve the identification as a group. Radio frequency identification tags or implants are anticipated to be used for specific species.

Each state will have specific responsibilities to develop and implement specific components of the system including developing and maintaining data bases. The Department of Agriculture is the coordinating entity for this program in Washington State.

Since there is no federal law that mandates that this program be established, successful implementation is dependent on enlightened voluntary action by livestock producers. There is concern that full public disclosure of all of the information needed for disease surveillance will create a disincentive to participation in the system.

Summary of Bill: Specified information relating to livestock premises, animal identification numbers, animal movement data, passwords, and linkages is exempt from public disclosure.

Animal testing information submitted to the Department of Agriculture on a voluntary basis is exempt from disclosure. This exemption does not apply to reportable disease investigations once they are complete and found to be positive.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: The bill contains several effective dates. Please refer to the bill.

Testimony For: The federal program is not required by federal law and is not being paid for by federal dollars. The disease trace-back goal is supported by the industry to protect livestock health. The United States lags behind two major producing countries, Canada and Australia. The biggest obstacle to developing the program in Washington is to overcome small and livestock owners' fears that any and all information as to livestock numbers, locations, and health issues will be available to anyone who asks for it. There is a high cost to the industry from reporting inaccurate information such as false negatives. If people are penalized, they will likely delay in taking the key action such as immediately reporting possible disease symptoms to authorities. Once an investigation has been completed by the state veterinarian that confirms a positive, the result of the investigation should and will be provided.

Testimony Against: The media needs access to information on livestock disease to report to the public what is occurring. Transparency is needed to maintain public confidence. It is doubtful that the level of compliance will be achieved solely on a voluntary basis. The media has no desire in private financial information.

Who Testified: PRO: Jim Sizemore, Jack Field and Rick Nelson, Washington Cattlemen's Association; Jay Gordon, Washington State Dairy Federation; Chris Cheney, Washington Fryer Commission; Jim Jessernig and Rick Stott, Agri Beef Co.

CON: Rowland Thompson, Allied Daily Newspapers.