

ONE HUNDRED SIXTH LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION - 2019
COMMITTEE STATEMENT
LB243

Hearing Date: Tuesday January 29, 2019
Committee On: Agriculture
Introducer: Gragert
One Liner: Create the Healthy Soils Task Force

Roll Call Vote - Final Committee Action:
Advanced to General File with amendment(s)

Vote Results:

Aye:	7	Senators Blood, Brandt, Halloran, Hansen, B., Lathrop, Moser, Slama
Nay:		
Absent:	1	Senator Chambers
Present Not Voting:		

Oral Testimony:

Proponents:

Senator Tim Gragert
Annette Sudbeck
Tom Hoegemeyer
Jeffrey Steffen
Shelby Janke
Scott Gonnerman
Lance Gunderson
Alan Moeller
Rev. Helen Greer
Matthew Gregory
Tim Kalkowski
Wayne Rasmussen
David Potter
Wes Sheets
Lane Meyer
Al Juhnke
Eric Zach
Edison McDonald
Tom Venzor
John Hansen

Representing:

Introducer
Lewis and Clark Natural Resources District
Self
Self
Nebraska League of Conservation Voters
Self
Ward Laboratories, Inc.
Nebraska Elder Climate Legacy Group
Interfaith Power and Light
Nebraska Wildlife Federation
Nebraska Grazing Lands Coalition
Self
Lower Platte South Natural Resources District
Izaak Walton League, Nebraska Division
Self
Nebraska Pork Producers Association
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
Self
Nebraska Catholic Conference
Nebraska Farmers Union

Opponents:

Representing:

Neutral:

Steve Ebke
Aaron Hird

Representing:

Nebraska Corn Growers Association
United States Department of Agriculture (USDA),
Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Summary of purpose and/or changes:

LB 243 creates a task force to develop a healthy soils initiative and action plan and timetable to implement such initiative.

Section 1: States legislative findings and intent.

Section 2: Creates the Health Soils Task Force and specifies its membership. Membership includes: Director of Agriculture (or designee), 2 representatives of NRDs, 2 academic experts in agriculture and natural resources, 5 agricultural producers, 2 representatives of agribusiness, and 1 representative of environmental organizations. Chair of Agriculture and Chair of Natural Resources Committee are non-voting members. Assigns the task force to the Department of Agriculture for administrative support purposes. Provides that the task force may request advisory support from state and federal agencies.

Section 3: Assigns duties to the Healthy Soils Task Force including development of a healthy soils initiative and an action plan to implement the initiative utilizing soil quality benchmarks and establish goals and a timeline for completing elements of the plan, and identify resources needed. In developing action plan, the task force may draw upon the NRCS of USDA, the Soil Health Institute and Soil Health Partnership, and shall examine 1) issues in disseminating research and technical assistance, 2) options for financial incentives, and 3) the contribution of livestock to healthy soils. The task force is to develop a timeline to improve soil health within five years.

Section 4: Directs the task force to provide a report of its findings and recommendations to the governor and the Natural Resources Committee or before January 1, 2021, and terminates the task force on January 1, 2021.

Explanation of amendments:

The committee amendment (AM640) strikes the original provisions and becomes the bill. The amendment adds one additional agricultural producer representative to the task force and provides that at least two are producers using healthy soil practices. The amendment also adds one additional environmental group representative. The amendment further adds guidance that in making appointments, the governor seek to appoint persons to provide the task force with expertise in incorporating soil stewardship practices in working operations and optimizing environmental services.

AM640 further inserts process for organizing the task force, including: 1) that appointments be completed within 60 days of the effective date, 2) expressly provides that task force members be reimbursed for actual and necessary expenses, 3) that the task force shall hold its first meeting by September 1, 4) select a chairperson, and 5) that the task force shall meet as necessary at the call of the chairperson. The task force may request support from state and federal agencies to facilitate the work of the task force.

The amendment adds two additional tasks as subsections (1)(c) and (d) of section 3 to identify realistic goals and timelines through voluntary partnerships among growers and relevant state, local and private entities, and to review the provisions of the 2018 Farm Bill and identify funding opportunities for purpose of soil health. It also inserts new subsection (2) to authorize the task force to consult with a number of listed organizations and provides the report of the task force be submitted electronically, and submitted to the Agriculture Committee.

The committee amendment inserts a new section amending Neb. Rev. Stat. Section 81-2,162.27 to allow use of the Fertilizers and Soil Conditioners Act to cover the costs of the task force, up to a limit of \$10,000 per fiscal year.

Finally, AM640 inserts the emergency clause as section 7 to enable the appointment and initial meeting of the task force to occur by timelines specified in the amendment.

Steve Halloran, Chairperson