

LEGISLATURE OF NEBRASKA
ONE HUNDRED SIXTH LEGISLATURE
FIRST SESSION

LEGISLATIVE BILL 243

Introduced by Gragert, 40; Brandt, 32; Dorn, 30; McCollister, 20; Pansing
Brooks, 28; Walz, 15.

Read first time January 14, 2019

Committee: Agriculture

- 1 A BILL FOR AN ACT relating to soil; to create the Healthy Soils Task
- 2 Force; to provide powers and duties; and to require reports.
- 3 Be it enacted by the people of the State of Nebraska,

1 Section 1. The Legislature finds that:

2 (1) Healthy soils are a limited natural resource and fundamental for
3 healthy and sustainable food production. Improving soil health means
4 increasing soil's organic matter and diversifying its microbial activity
5 to enhance agricultural productivity and environmental resilience. A
6 commitment to healthy and productive soils and clean water is critical as
7 world population and food production demands rise;

8 (2) Nebraska is a powerhouse agricultural state because of its
9 productive soils and abundant water. However, through the years there has
10 been a depletion of organic matter and trace minerals, making the soil
11 less fertile than it was;

12 (3) There is a significant opportunity for Nebraska farmers and
13 ranchers to capitalize on the economic and production benefits of
14 improved soil health, while simultaneously improving surface and ground
15 water quality;

16 (4) Improving the health of Nebraska's soil is the most effective
17 way for agricultural producers to increase crop and forage productivity
18 and profitability while also protecting the environment;

19 (5) Appropriate planning and coordination is needed to speed up and
20 coordinate the adoption of conservation practices that rebuild and
21 protect soil carbon to increase water holding capacity and enhance the
22 vitality of the subsurface microbiome for landowners to capitalize on the
23 economic and production benefits of soil health, while simultaneously
24 enhancing water quality, capturing carbon, building resilience to drought
25 and pests, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, expanding pollinator and
26 other wildlife habitat, and protecting fragile ecosystems for a more
27 sustainable future; and

28 (6) A number of states have initiated formal soil health programs
29 either through the establishment of new entities or collaborations
30 between existing entities.

31 Sec. 2. (1) The Healthy Soils Task Force is created.

1 (2) The task force shall consist of the following voting members:

2 (a) The Director of Agriculture or his or her designee;

3 (b) Two representatives of natural resources districts in Nebraska,
4 appointed by the Governor;

5 (c) Two academic experts in agriculture and natural resources in
6 Nebraska, appointed by the Governor;

7 (d) Five representatives from production agriculture, appointed by
8 the Governor;

9 (e) Two representatives from agribusiness, appointed by the
10 Governor; and

11 (f) One representative from an environmental organization in
12 Nebraska, appointed by the Governor.

13 (3) The task force shall consist of the following nonvoting members:

14 (a) The chairperson of the Natural Resources Committee of the
15 Legislature; and

16 (b) the chairperson of the Agriculture committee of the Legislature.

17 (4) For administrative purposes the task force shall be within the
18 Department of Agriculture. The department may request additional advisory
19 support from appropriate federal and state agencies.

20 Sec. 3. The Healthy Soils Task Force shall:

21 (1) Develop a comprehensive healthy soils initiative for the State
22 of Nebraska;

23 (2) Develop a comprehensive action plan to coordinate efforts to
24 carry out such healthy soils initiative using standards for organic
25 matter, biological activity, biological diversity, and soil structure as
26 measures to assess improved soil health. The action plan shall set goals,
27 formulate timelines for task completion, and determine resources required
28 and resource availability. In developing the action plan, the task force
29 shall draw upon the resources of the Natural Resources Conservation
30 Service of the United States Department of Agriculture, the Soil Health
31 Institute, and the Soil Health Partnership and shall examine:

- 1 (a) Issues related to providing farmers and ranchers with research,
2 education, technical assistance, and demonstration projects;
3 (b) Options for financial incentives to improve soil health; and
4 (c) The contribution of livestock to soil health; and
5 (3) Create a timeline to improve soil health in Nebraska within five
6 years after completion of the action plan.

7 Sec. 4. On or before January 1, 2021, the Healthy Soils Task Force
8 shall submit the action plan and report its findings and recommendations
9 to the Governor and electronically to the Natural Resources Committee of
10 the Legislature. The task force shall terminate on January 1, 2021.