



WASHINGTON STATE
HORTICULTURAL ASSOCIATION

Hort Headline Update

Keeping the Washington Tree Fruit Industry Informed Since 1904

February 13, 2004

This week *Hort Headlines* is going to lean political to bring you up-to-speed on the legislative session, focusing primarily on issues of importance to the tree fruit industry.

- **Session Deadlines Approach** - Despite the short session, there is no shortage of issues, from passing a supplemental budget to addressing a number of critical policy matters. Legislators are now working against the clock with an adjournment date of March 11. The next significant cutoff date for legislation is February 17 when bills need to pass their house of origin or they're technically dead for the session.
- **Senate Passes Minimum Wage Trigger Bill** - The state Senate on Tuesday night approved a measure ([SB 5697](#)) that would revise the minimum wage trigger, slowing the ever rising minimum wage. Under the proposal, the state's minimum wage would not increase unless the state's unemployment rate dropped below the federal jobless rate. The proposal passed the Senate 27-22 and now proceeds to the House for consideration.

FACTS:

 - Washington State's minimum wage as of Jan.1 is \$7.16, highest in the nation.
 - Washington's current jobless rate is 20 percent higher than the national

jobless rate.

- Washington's minimum wage has increased 46 percent since 1998.

- **Send Speaker Frank Chopp An E-Mail** - Use the link below to send a note to Speaker Frank Chopp (D-Seattle). Ask Speaker Chopp to consider allowing the full House to vote on the minimum wage trigger bill (SB 5697). Speaker Frank Chopp E-mail: chopp_fr@leg.wa.gov
- Follow this link to read [Hort's legislative issue briefs on minimum wage](#).
- Be sure to also check out this [Tacoma News Tribune](#) op-ed to read how tying wages to CPI locks in unintended consequences.
- **Apple Commission Rewrite Moves Forward** - The Washington Apple Commission legislative rewrite has passed a major legislative hurdle, making it out of committee and house of origin. On different days this week the Senate and the House approved its version of the rewrite. Both the Senate and House bills are identical, and one of them should make it to the governor's desk for his signature. The proposal restructures the commission as a state agency, provides the Director of Agriculture with additional powers and oversight, and reduces the assessment to 3.5 cents. A grower referendum clause was added to each bill, allowing apple producers a process to consider discontinuation of the assessment.
- **Clarifying Orchard Burning** - This measure ([SB 6155](#)) attempts to clarify the issue of orchard burning for the Department of Ecology. Producers, who have ripped out their orchards, are often caught in a regulatory "catch -22" when it comes to burning. Orchard burning is heavily restricted and near impossible in urban growth areas. This bill allows the burning of "orchard tear-outs" to prevent and control pests and diseases without a permit in counties with less than 250,000 in population. The proposal passed the Senate unanimously 49-0 and now moves to the House for consideration.
- **Water Bills Hit Roadblock** - A number of water bills were introduced this session, including some major efforts aimed at clarifying in-stream flows and revising the state's "use it or lose it" policy. At this stage in the session, it does not appear that there is enough time to adequately consider these complex issues before adjournment. With Gov. Locke set to leave office at the end of the year, addressing one of the state's most pressing issues water will be left up to the next administration.

- **Department Mulling Quarantine Area** - The Washington State Department of Agriculture will hold a second public hearing before making a final decision on whether to change the Kittitas County apple maggot quarantine area. The second public hearing will be held on March 30, at 11:00 a.m., at the Washington Cattlemen's Association conference room, 1301 Dolarway Rd., Ellensburg. The change, according to the department, would add most of Kittitas County to the quarantine area. The department will make a final decision on April 13, 2004.
- **Industry Still Sorting Out Impact of Buffer Zone Ruling** - The federal court ruling that restricts the use of 38 pesticides near salmon waterways will require growers to consider other options to fight pests. Tree fruit industry specialists agree that ripping out orchards to comply with the buffer zones is not necessary given available options on the market to combat pests within the restricted spray zones. Specialists also remind producers that the materials not on the list can still be used within the prescribed buffer zone. Link [HERE](#) to view a listing of active ingredients subject to the case. Also, connect here to a [Yakima Herald-Republic](#) editorial that says the court failed to seek facts before banning pesticides in the WTC case.

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