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## **OLR Bill Analysis**

### **SB 69**

#### ***AN ACT CONCERNING THE FARMLAND RESTORATION AND VACANT PUBLIC LANDS PROGRAMS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.***

#### **SUMMARY:**

This bill (1) expands the items reimbursable to farmers under the farmland restoration program and (2) increases the maximum reimbursement for management or restoration plans for certain state and municipal lands. The program encourages farmers to restore farmland that has gone out of production.

The bill allows the agriculture commissioner to reimburse a farmer for part of the cost of developing, implementing, and complying with a farm resources management plan or a farmland restoration plan, instead of only for developing a farm resources management plan. The commissioner must approve a management or restoration plan for it to be reimbursable.

Current law limits reimbursement to the lesser of \$20,000 or 50% of the plan's cost. The bill increases the reimbursable amount, to the lesser of \$20,000 or 90% of the plan's cost, for a plan on state or municipal land with an agricultural lease of at least five years.

The bill also broadens the activities eligible for reimbursement to include (1) fences in restoration areas to keep wildlife out and manage livestock and (2) incidental land clearing done in connection with agricultural restoration. It does this by expanding the definition of "agricultural restoration purposes."

Lastly, the bill's expanded definition of "agricultural restoration purposes" applies to the vacant public lands program, which the law authorizes the agriculture commissioner to establish to encourage the use of certain state or municipal property.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2014

**FARMLAND RESTORATION PLAN**

Under the bill, “farmland restoration plan” means a conservation plan (1) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service or a soil and water conservation district or (2) one the agriculture commissioner approves. It includes agricultural restoration purposes.

**AGRICULTURAL RESTORATION PURPOSES**

Under existing law, “agricultural restoration purposes” includes:

1. reclaiming grown-over pastures and meadows;
2. installing fences to keep livestock out of riparian areas;
3. replanting vegetation on erosion-prone land or along streams;
4. restoring water runoff patterns;
5. improving irrigation efficiency;
6. conducting hedgerow management, including removing invasive plants and timber; or
7. renovating farm ponds through farm pond management.

**COMMITTEE ACTION**

Environment Committee

Joint Favorable  
Yea 28 Nay 0 (02/28/2014)