



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
P.O. Box 42560 • Olympia, Washington 98501 • (360) 902-1800

February 6, 2025

Dear Governor Ferguson:

I am writing to inform you of the Washington State Department of Agriculture's (WSDA) efforts to meet your directive on reducing costs while ensuring the continuation of critical services for Washingtonians. Understanding the magnitude of the state's projected budget shortfall, we have carefully reviewed our operations and made necessary reductions in alignment with your recommended strategies.

WSDA has always operated efficiently, with all our managers performing not only supervisory duties but also hands-on work, often in scientific fields that require specialized certifications, federal licenses, and proficiencies. Our agency is diverse, with responsibilities ranging from food safety to regulatory oversight, which necessitates unique expertise across various programs.

Key Reductions:

1. Management and Administrative Positions:

In line with your recommendation to consolidate management positions, we have reduced one Washington Management Service (WMS) position. This will bring our WMS percentage to 6%, slightly below the 6.3% threshold set by the Office of Financial Management (OFM), while still ensuring core operational functions are maintained.

2. Program and Staffing Reductions:

We have carefully evaluated non-essential functions and programs. Notably, we have paused the hiring of customer service and externally focused positions and temporarily reduced several administrative and technical positions. These reductions, though difficult, will ensure that essential services, such as food assistance, regulatory oversight, and laboratory functions, continue without significant disruption.

3. Equipment Purchases:

To comply with the directive to restrict equipment purchases, we have ensured that 62% of equipment purchases in the current biennium have been funded through federal and local funds, leaving only a percentage of equipment purchases funded by GFS. The remaining GFS funds are essential for maintaining laboratory operations, which are critical to our public safety and regulatory responsibilities.

4. Travel Reductions:

Recognizing the need to reduce travel expenditures, we have prioritized essential travel while committing to reducing in-state travel by 25%. It's important to note that only 22% of our travel expenditures are funded through GFS, with the remaining 78% covered

mostly by local accounts and federal funding, primarily for fee-related work and to meet federal contract requirements. Our reduction strategy will focus on minimizing costs while still fulfilling vital inspection and regulatory activities.

5. Program Adjustments:

In alignment with the directive to prioritize fully implemented programs, we have proposed pausing the implementation of our branding program and reducing funds for our regional markets program. Although the regional markets program is fully operational, the grant programs launched post-COVID and are considered new, making it a candidate for resource adjustments during this fiscal period.

6. Program Reductions:

In our proposal the Food Assistance Program will experience a reduction in funding for pass-through grants to hunger relief organizations, impacting the nearly 2.2 million Washingtonians who rely on this support. While these reductions are difficult, they reflect our efforts to protect core programs, as required by the state legislature and aligned with your guidance to prioritize direct services to Washingtonians. The reduction will undoubtedly challenge our department, as we know how vital this assistance is to our most vulnerable residents.

WSDA has always operated as a lean and efficient agency. Our staffing levels and structure have historically reflected the essential nature of our work, without excess administrative layers. This is especially true in our approach to legislative reports and agency working groups, where much of the necessary work is completed by existing staff, rather than dedicated teams or positions. Our scientific programs, from food safety inspections to pest management, are critical to the health and wellbeing of Washington's residents, and we are committed to ensuring that these functions remain intact.

In closing, I want to emphasize that WSDA remains dedicated to our core mission—that we continue to support the viability and vitality of agriculture while protecting consumers, public health, and the environment. While we face difficult budget decisions, we are doing our best to preserve the functions that are essential to Washingtonians, even as we reduce costs where possible. We are confident that these reductions are the right balance between fiscal responsibility and maintaining the services that the people of Washington rely on every day.

Thank you for your continued leadership and for the opportunity to contribute to the state's efforts to navigate these challenging times.

Sincerely,



Derek I. Sandison
Director

Budget Savings Options 2025

Dollars in Thousands

Agency: Washington State Department of Agriculture

Agency Priority H, M, L	Impact 1-5	Program/Activity	GF-S					Other Funds					FTE Change					Brief Description and Rationale	Effective Date (MM/YY)	Impacts of Reductions and Other Considerations	Law/Reg. Change Required (cite)
			FY 25	FY 26	FY 27	FY28	FY 29	FY 25	FY 26	FY 27	FY28	FY 29	FY 25	FY 26	FY 27	FY28	FY 29				
H	1	090/A028		1,237	1,237	1,237	1,237											As part of the required 6 percent General Fund-State budget reduction exercise and in alignment with Legislative intent outlined in RCW 43.23.292 to protect core programs, the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) proposes a reduction in the Food Assistance Program. To meet the required annual reduction over the next four years, WSDA proposes reducing pass-through grants to hunger relief organizations.	07/25	The 2.2 million lower-income Washingtonians—the highest number on record—who rely on WSDA-supported hunger relief organizations may face reduced access to food at their local food pantries. In some cases, fewer food pantries may be available to serve households in need. In SFY24, food pantries saw 13.4 million client visits, a nearly 20% increase from 2023, highlighting the growing demand for food assistance. More than 600 hunger relief organizations will receive less financial support, further straining resources. If federal food assistance funding is also reduced, the impact will be even greater. Additionally, this reduction is expected to affect WSDA’s Farm to Community efforts, which play a vital role in supporting small farmers and increasing access to nutritious foods for those relying on food pantries and meal programs.	
H	1	090/A028		3,298	3,298	2,798	2,798											The CFL for the Washington State Department of Agriculture is artificially high in FY 28 & 29 due to one-time funding for food systems in FY 26 & 27 which created an artificially high GFS reduction target in the second biennium. We are proposing the same reduction as the previous fiscal year to not impact our core programs reduction target. As part of the required General Fund-State budget reduction exercise and in alignment with Legislative intent outlined in RCW 43.23.292 to protect core programs, the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) proposes reducing one-time funding for the Food Assistance Program. Taking into consideration the guidance to evaluate programs that were implemented since 2020 and/or that were originally funded with one-time federal COVID dollars, WSDA proposes to reduce this one-time funding by a larger percentage than our pre-COVID, ongoing Food Assistance funding to meet the demands of this difficult budget situation. This state funding supports essential functions such as staffing, operations, food storage, and transportation—costs not covered under the federal Local Food Assistance Purchasing Agreement (LFPA) cooperative program grant or pass-through grants to hunger relief organizations statewide. To achieve the required annual reduction, WSDA proposes decreasing pass-through grants to hunger relief organizations. Additionally, state operational funding plays a critical role in leveraging approximately \$8 million in local food purchasing funds, which help acquire Washington-grown farm and food products for distribution to food pantries and meal programs across the state.	07/25	This additional one-time funding does not represent an overall increase in food assistance funding; rather, it reallocates food security grant resources that were previously designated for the COVID-19 relief program We Feed Washington (21-23 and 23-25 bienniums) into established statutory Food Assistance programs. Over the past five years, the State of Washington and the federal government have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in COVID-19 relief to address food insecurity. As a result, hundreds of community-based organizations across the state are now serving more clients than ever before. However, they are doing so at a higher cost per client due to persistently high grocery, fuel, labor, and facilities prices, while state, local, and federal support continues to shrink. Given the substantial technical assistance needs of many hunger relief organizations (HROs) in administering state funding, WSDA cannot reduce full-time staff positions without compromising the grant oversight and customer service standards that ensure program success and prevent misuse of funds. Therefore, the primary impact of reduced funding would be felt by HROs in the form of decreased pass-through grants, limiting their ability to meet growing food assistance needs.	
H	1	060/A026		365	365	700	700											Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) proposes reducing funding for the Farm to School Purchasing Grant originally funded with COVID funding in the 21-23 biennium. Maintaining program staff and services that support effective Farm to School engagement beyond implementation of direct purchasing grants are imperative to the core functions of the Farm to School program outlined in RCW 15.64.060. Because Farm to School and Food Assistance programs are both important parts of Washington's Hunger Safety net, and because the Farm to School Purchasing grants are aligned with to the Governor's objective to reconnect school lunch programs to local farming communities, WSDA proposes a smaller reduction in these grant funds in the 25-27 biennium where we have offered a larger reduction in one-time food assistance funds to off-set and ultimately hit the agency's target budget reduction goal.	07/25	Reducing funding for the Farm to School Program and Purchasing Grant will limit the number of school districts able to receive grants, decreasing direct purchases from Washington farms and food hubs. Smaller farms that rely on these sales may be disproportionately affected as districts adjust their purchasing strategies. Schools that currently incorporate locally sourced foods into student meals may have fewer opportunities to do so, potentially reducing access to fresh, Washington-grown products for students.	

Agency Priority H, M, L	Impact 1-5	Program/Activity	GF-S					Other Funds					FTE Change					Brief Description and Rationale	Effective Date (MM/YY)	Impacts of Reductions and Other Considerations	Law/Reg. Change Required (cite)
			FY 25	FY 26	FY 27	FY28	FY 29	FY 25	FY 26	FY 27	FY28	FY 29	FY 25	FY 26	FY 27	FY28	FY 29				
H	1	060/A026		600	600	765	765											Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) proposes reducing funding for the Local Food System Infrastructure grant originally funded with COVID funding in the 21-23 biennium. Maintaining program staff and services that support effective small farm, direct marketing technical assistance and value chain coordination beyond issuing grant funds are imperative to the core functions of the Regional Markets program outlined in RCW 15.64.050. The proposed reductions would result in fewer grant funds available for a highly popular and competitive grant program, but would preserve the core functions of the program.	07/25	Reducing funding for the Infrastructure Grant will limit the ability of recipients to invest in equipment and facility improvements that support local food systems. Organizations that rely on these funds to expand capacity, improve efficiency, or enhance food storage and distribution may face delays or be unable to move forward with planned projects. This could impact the ability of small and mid-sized farms, food hubs, and other partners to scale operations and meet the growing demand for locally produced food.	
M	2	060/A015		179	179	179	179							1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) proposes pausing the branding program. While branding is valuable for enhancing public awareness and promoting Washington agriculture, the program requires dedicated resources for design, implementation, and outreach. Given current budget constraints, we must focus funding on essential programs that directly support food security, agricultural sustainability, and regulatory functions. Pausing the branding program allows WSDA to reallocate staff time to higher-priority initiatives while still maintaining core department efforts.	07/25	Washington is one of the few states without a dedicated program to help food and agricultural producers promote their products. Pausing this initiative would delay efforts to establish a strong, statewide promotional program that supports Washington producers in maintaining economic viability. Without this program, producers will have fewer resources to navigate rising production costs, trade disruptions, and increasing global competition, potentially limiting their market opportunities and long-term sustainability.	
M	1	010/A00		129	129	129	129							1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) proposes pausing the hiring of an external Civil Rights Specialist for the DEI position. This decision allows the agency to manage costs while maintaining essential operations. WSDA will continue to meet DEI and civil rights obligations by utilizing existing resources and evaluating alternative approaches.	07/25	Pausing on hiring an External Civil Rights Specialist position would limit the agency's capacity to advance its diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. This includes efforts to foster a more inclusive work environment by promoting competencies essential for delivering culturally responsive services. Additionally, the ability to collaborate with Human Resources on enhancing diversity in recruitment, hiring practices, employee development, and retention would be constrained. The creation and implementation of staff training programs focused on equity would also be delayed, affecting the agency's progress in building a more inclusive and equitable workplace.	
H	1	020/A011							137	137	137	137		1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) proposes keeping a WMS position vacant. This decision aligns with the agency's need to prioritize essential services and allocate resources effectively during this time of budget constraints. By keeping this position vacant, WSDA can focus on maintaining core operations while managing costs. (Other Funds - 516)	07/25	With the WMS position remaining vacant, the workload will be redistributed among the existing Regional Managers within the Fruit and Vegetable Program. This will result in an expanded geographical coverage and an increased number of subordinates for the remaining managers. Additionally, the program will be unable to participate in succession planning and leadership development efforts—areas that were consistently identified as needing improvement in employee surveys. This could affect the long-term growth and stability of the team.	
L	1	010/A001		35	35	35	35		112	112	112	112		2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	Washington State Department of Agriculture proposes temporarily reducing administrative positions to align with current fiscal constraints. This decision will help manage costs while ensuring that core services remain operational. (Other Funds Breakdown - 001-2 \$8, 02R - \$1, 23P - \$4, 126 - \$43, 128 - \$27 & 516 - \$29)	07/25	With the temporary reduction of administrative positions, work will be redistributed among the remaining administrative staff, including mailroom and reception coverage. As a result, certain processes and turnaround times may be impacted or require adjustments due to reduced staffing levels. This could lead to delays in service or an increased workload for existing staff members.	
M	1	070/A021		-	-	-	-		457	457	457	457		5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	Washington State Department of Agriculture proposes temporarily reducing the following positions: administrative intern, customer service specialist, regulatory specialist, and two pesticide regulatory specialists. This decision is necessary to align staffing levels with current fiscal constraints while ensuring that core regulatory and customer service functions remain operational. These reductions will help manage costs while maintaining critical services, though staffing capacity will be impacted. (Other Funds Breakdown - 23P - \$65 & 126 - \$392)	07/25	With the temporary reduction of these positions, the work will be redistributed among existing administrative and technical staff. As a result, support for regulatory and training programs, particularly in central and eastern Washington, will be slower, potentially affecting response times and program delivery.	

Agency Priority H, M, L	Impact 1-5	Program/Activity	GF-S					Other Funds					FTE Change					Brief Description and Rationale	Effective Date (MM/YY)	Impacts of Reductions and Other Considerations	Law/Reg. Change Required (cite)
			FY 25	FY 26	FY 27	FY28	FY 29	FY 25	FY 26	FY 27	FY28	FY 29	FY 25	FY 26	FY 27	FY28	FY 29				
M	1	050/A014							69	69	69	69		1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	Washington State Department of Agriculture proposes temporarily reducing the positions of an office assistant. This decision is necessary to manage costs while still maintaining essential administrative and customer service functions. The work from this position will be folded into other staff members' responsibilities. (Other Funds - 126)	07/25	The temporary reduction of this position will result in a reduced ability to support industry needs, requiring current staff to take on additional responsibilities. This will also impact lab programs, including hop inspection and analysis, leading to delays in processing samples for stakeholders.	
M	1	050/A027							73	73	73	73		1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	Washington State Department of Agriculture proposes temporarily reducing the positions of a customer services specialist. This decision is necessary to manage costs while still maintaining essential administrative and customer service functions. The work from this position will be folded into other staff members' responsibilities. (Other Funds - 126)	07/25	The temporary reduction of this position will result in a reduced ability to support industry needs, requiring current staff to take on additional responsibilities. This will also impact lab programs, including hop inspection and analysis, leading to delays in processing samples for stakeholders.	
L	1	010/A001		12	12	12	12											Washington State Department of Agriculture proposes reducing the number of staff attending external meetings, conferences, and training events. This decision will help manage travel and professional development costs while ensuring that essential in-person engagements are prioritized. Staff will continue to participate in critical events, but fewer staff will be sent, and virtual options will be priotized whenever possible to reduce expenses. This will allow the department to allocate resources more effectively while still supporting core operations and staff development.	07/25	This reduction may impact professional development opportunities, limit networking and knowledge-sharing, and affect our ability to stay current with industry best practices. It may also result in fewer staff members available to represent our agency at key discussions and decision-making forums.	
L	1	0/A004		20	20	20	20											Washington State Department of Agriculture proposes reducing the number of staff attending external meetings, conferences, and training events. This decision will help manage travel and professional development costs while ensuring that essential in-person engagements are prioritized. Staff will continue to participate in critical events, but fewer staff will be sent, and virtual options will be priotized whenever possible to reduce expenses. This will allow the department to allocate resources more effectively while still supporting core operations and staff development.	07/25	Reducing travel will help save costs but may impact WSDA's ability to perform critical animal health functions, including surveillance and investigations at facilities where animals congregate and engagement with industry representatives and animal producers who rely on our staff for guidance on disease response and regulatory compliance. Fewer in-person trainings could affect staff readiness, development, and proficiency, while reduced attendance at industry meetings would limit outreach and representation. WSDA will prioritize essential travel and explore alternative solutions to minimize service disruptions.	
L	1	040/A010		20	20	20	20											Washington State Department of Agriculture proposes reducing the number of staff attending external meetings, conferences, and training events. This decision will help manage travel and professional development costs while ensuring that essential in-person engagements are prioritized. Staff will continue to participate in critical events, but fewer staff will be sent, and virtual options will be priotized whenever possible to reduce expenses. This will allow the department to allocate resources more effectively while still supporting core operations and staff development.	07/25	This decision will help manage travel and professional development costs while ensuring that essential in-person engagements are prioritized. Staff will continue to participate in critical events, but fewer staff will be sent, and virtual options will be priotized whenever possible to reduce expenses. This will allow the department to allocate resources more effectively while still supporting core operations and staff development.	
L	1	050/A022		21	21	21	21											Washington State Department of Agriculture proposes reducing the number of staff attending external meetings, conferences, and training events. This decision will help manage travel and professional development costs while ensuring that essential in-person engagements are prioritized. Staff will continue to participate in critical events, but fewer staff will be sent, and virtual options will be priotized whenever possible to reduce expenses. This will allow the department to allocate resources more effectively while still supporting core operations and staff development.	07/25	By not attending any conferences where employees are presenting or staffing booths, we anticipate a decrease in key activities, including providing technical assistance, raising awareness of our roles, interacting with potential customers, gathering valuable industry insights, and building relationships with industry clients and partners. This will also impact our ability to create a positive image through direct engagement with attendees about our services. Additionally, eliminating all in-person annual meetings and trainings in favor of regional or virtual formats will help reduce travel costs but may limit the opportunities for face-to-face interaction and networking.	

Agency Priority H, M, L	Impact 1-5	Program/Activity	GF-S					Other Funds					FTE Change					Brief Description and Rationale	Effective Date (MM/YY)	Impacts of Reductions and Other Considerations	Law/Reg. Change Required (cite)
			FY 25	FY 26	FY 27	FY28	FY 29	FY 25	FY 26	FY 27	FY28	FY 29	FY 25	FY 26	FY 27	FY28	FY 29				
L	1	070/A021							10	10	10	10						Washington State Department of Agriculture proposes reducing the number of staff attending external meetings, conferences, and training events. This decision will help manage travel and professional development costs while ensuring that essential in-person engagements are prioritized. Staff will continue to participate in critical events, but fewer staff will be sent, and virtual options will be priotized whenever possible to reduce expenses. This will allow the department to allocate resources more effectively while still supporting core operations and staff development. (Other Funds - 315)	07/25	Reducing out-of-state travel and collaboration with other states regulating the recreational cannabis market may hinder our ability to respond swiftly to critical issues. This limitation could lead to delayed responses or increased reliance on phone calls and emails to gather similar information, potentially slowing down the efficiency of our work.	
L	1	010/A001		20	20	20	20											WSDA proposes temporarily reducing travel and limiting goods and services purchases within the Emergency Management Program. This reduction will focus on minimizing discretionary expenses while maintaining essential operations. Travel for trainings, exercises, and stakeholder engagement will be prioritized based on urgency and impact, with virtual participation encouraged when possible. Additionally, purchases of non-essential supplies and materials will be deferred or reduced to conserve resources while ensuring the program can continue to fulfill its critical emergency response functions.	07/25	Temporarily reducing travel and limiting goods and services purchases in the Emergency Management Program may impact the agency's ability to fully engage in emergency preparedness, response coordination, and stakeholder collaboration. Reduced travel may limit in-person participation in key trainings, exercises, and planning meetings, potentially affecting readiness and relationship-building with partners. Scaling back purchases of supplies and materials may also delay updates to emergency response resources, potentially impacting operational efficiency during critical incidents.	

Priority:

L = Low priority agency activity or program
M = Medium priority agency activity or program
H = High priority agency activity or program

Impact:

1 = Allows continuation of the program/activity at a reduced level
2 = Eliminates the ability to perform program objectives
3 = Eliminates agency function
4 = Long term implications (moves the problem to next biennium)
5 = Short term (reduction to one time increase)