

HCS HB 882 -- AGRI-READY COUNTY DESIGNATION PROGRAM

SPONSOR: McGaugh

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with Amendments" by the Standing Committee on Agriculture Policy by a vote of 11 to 4. Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Select Committee on Agriculture by a vote of 8 to 3.

This bill establishes the Agri-Ready County Designation Program within the Department of Agriculture. The program is a voluntary program by which a county or the City of St. Louis may apply to become designated as an agri-ready county.

To qualify as an agri-ready county, the county or St. Louis City must meet specified requirements that show the county encourages agricultural operations to locate in the county. By March 31, 2016, the department must establish application requirements and review procedures for the program. Any county or St. Louis City that receives an agri-ready county designation must submit a report annually to the department that includes specified information. The report may not be longer than one page and the department must allow for the on-line submission of the report. If the department determines a county or the city no longer meets the requirements of the program, it may withdraw the designation.

The department must develop an agri-ready county logo and any county or St. Louis City designated as agri-ready may use the logo on any sign, brochure, website, or other marketing material. Any agri-ready county or the city may request the Department of Transportation erect and maintain signs designating it as agri-ready with the cost to be paid for by the county or the city. The department must publish and maintain a list of all agri-ready counties on its website.

In evaluating any grant proposal based on a point system, the departments of Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Economic Development must increase the total number of points awarded by 5% to any agri-ready county or St. Louis City, any political subdivision within an agri-ready county, or any agricultural operation located within or proposing to locate within an agri-ready county. If an agri-ready county loses its designation at any point during the grant period, the county is responsible for repaying any grant funding received.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that the bill creates a program that would promote the state's number one industry of agriculture. This voluntary program allows counties to advertise to current and potential agriculture-related businesses looking to expand or

relocate.

Testifying for the bill were Representative McGaugh; Missouri Farm Bureau; Missouri Cattlemens Association; Missouri Corn Growers Association; Missouri Soybean Association; Missouri Pork Association; Missouri Agribusiness Association; and Missouri Federation of Animal Owners.

OPPONENTS: Those who oppose the bill say that this program promotes one county over another county and punishes counties with county health ordinances. The bill puts counties with health ordinances at a disadvantage when applying for grants from certain state agencies.

Testifying against the bill was Brian Smith, Rural Crisis Center.