



Pesticide safety programs to protect farmworkers

Legislative Auditor's Conclusion

Three agencies—WSDA, L&I, and DOH—work to protect farmworkers from pesticide exposure. Setting common goals and sharing information will likely help them reduce harmful exposures.

Key points

- State law directs three agencies—WSDA, L&I, and DOH—to coordinate efforts to protect farmworkers from hazardous pesticide exposure.
- WSDA reaches thousands of farmworkers each year through its licensing and training programs.
- WSDA and L&I coordinate on investigations but have no formal agreements for routine inspections. Doing so could better target resources and avoid duplicate inspections.
- Pesticide exposures are likely underreported. DOH has not established the medical education program required by state law.
- While the agencies share responsibility, they lack formal methods of sharing information to know the degree to which they prevent or reduce pesticide exposures.

Key terms

WSDA

Dept. of Agriculture

L&I

Dept. of Labor and Industries

DOH

Dept. of Health

Recommendations

1. WSDA and L&I should create a formal agreement to share inspection information that will support inspection scheduling, avoid duplication, and maximize resources.
2. DOH should establish the medical education program required by state law.
3. DOH should begin the process of incorporating pesticide illness into its eCR (electronic case reporting) system.
4. WSDA, L&I, and DOH should define common outcomes for farmworker pesticide safety, develop plans to monitor, assess, and communicate their achievement of those outcomes, and leverage resources and information to improve prevention efforts and administer programs.

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Additional Detail

This study is one of three JLARC studies addressing issues that affect farmworkers

This study This study assesses pesticide safety programs at DOH, WSDA, and L&I.

January 2024 A study of state administration of the federal H-2A visa program, which allows employers to hire temporary foreign farmworkers was also published in January 2024.

2026 We plan to complete a study of farmworker safety, health, and wage protection programs at the Department of Labor and Industries in 2026.

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Additional Detail (cont'd)

WSDA, L&I, and DOH share responsibility to prevent, respond, and follow up on hazardous pesticide exposures

	WSDA	L&I	DOH
General role under state law	Enforce safe use of pesticides	Protect worker health and safety	Protect public health
Roles in protecting farmworkers	Train farmworkers License farmworkers to apply pesticides		Train providers Maintain reporting systems
	Inspect worksites for compliance		
	Investigate incidents to enforce regulations		Investigate suspected pesticide poisonings Collect and report data

Many entities report potential pesticide poisonings to DOH. Exposures are likely underreported.

- Under state law health care providers and facilities must report pesticide poisoning to DOH.
- Research indicates that providers may not know about the requirement, symptoms, or how to report.
- Underreporting increases the risk that dangerous practices or trends are undetected and limits the ability to evaluate the effectiveness of farmworker safety trainings and inspections.

Agencies do not know the degree to which they prevent or reduce pesticide exposures

- WSDA, L&I, and DOH share an interest in preventing or reducing pesticide incidents and illness.
- Currently, each agency tracks its processes and monitors its performance in its own way. They do not analyze if their pesticide-related trainings or inspections lead to fewer pesticide incidents or illnesses.
- The agencies should apply best practices to set goals, measure progress, and leverage information.

	Goals and outcomes	→ Accountability	→ Leveraging information
Current practice	Agencies have individual outcomes	Agencies track and monitor performance individually	Agencies do not have formal procedures for sharing sufficient information
Best practice	Establish common, measurable outcomes of pesticide safety for farmworkers	Develop a process to monitor, assess, and communicate progress toward shared outcomes	Share data to inform prevention efforts and/or target resources