

March 4, 2024

Eric Thomas  
Legislative Auditor  
Joint Legislative Audit & Review Committee  
106 11<sup>th</sup> Ave SW  
PO Box 40910  
Olympia, WA 98504-0910

Re: Response to Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) regarding Pesticide Safety Programs to Protect Farmworkers.

Dear Auditor Thomas:

Thank you for the invitation to respond to the JLARC report on Pesticide Safety Programs to Protect Farmworkers.

As requested, we are providing our formal response in the table below:

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Agency Position</b>
1. DOH Should Establish the Medical education program required by state law.	Concur
2. DOH should begin the process of incorporating pesticide illness into the eCR (electronic case reporting) system.	Concur
3. 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.	Concur


We appreciate the opportunity to respond to the recommendations outlined in your recent audit. Washington State Department of Health (WA-DOH) recognizes the importance of these findings and is committed to enhancing our processes and protocols to better serve the public health needs of Washington State. We are committed to creating a medical education program for pesticide safety, as required by state law, recognizing its importance for public health. Resource constraints have hindered the program's initiation, despite attempts to secure funding over the past three years. WA-DOH is exploring alternative funding sources and funding proposals for legislative consideration. We urge the state to allocate necessary resources to meet this critical need and fulfill legal obligations.

WA-DOH supports integrating pesticide illness reporting into the electronic case reporting (eCR) system, acknowledging the system's early development phase focused on COVID-19. The future goals of the eCR team are to work towards integrating additional notifiable conditions. However, establishing a precise timeline is challenging without a clear understanding of the technical readiness of our providers and the system requirements for processing relevant eCR data. While eCR is farther into the future, we have partnered with the Rapid Health Information Network (RHINO) to receive weekly emergency department, urgent care, and primary care visit data from the Washington-specific version of the Electronic Surveillance System for the Early Notification of Community-based Epidemics (WA ESSENCE) on potential pesticide illnesses, enhancing surveillance and identifying previously unreported cases.

The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA), Labor & Industries (L&I), and WA-DOH are united in enhancing farmworker pesticide safety, committed to developing comprehensive plans for monitoring, assessing, and communicating safety improvements. We will leverage collective resources to address measurement challenges and improve prevention efforts. Representation across the Pesticide Advisory Board and Pesticide Application Safety Committee, along with Tri-Agency meetings, ensures collaborative strategy alignment for addressing pesticide safety complexities in agriculture, aiming for effective outcomes to protect farmworkers from pesticide exposure.

Please feel free to contact Mr. Jeff Arbuckle, External Audit Manager, WA-DOH's Center of Facilities Risk Adjudication, should you have any additional questions. We look forward to continuing our work on these initiatives and remain open to further dialogue and collaboration with JLARC to ensure the health and safety of all Washingtonians.

Best,



Umair A. Shah, MD, MPH  
Secretary of Health  
Washington

cc: Jeff Arbuckle, External Audit Manager, Center of Facilities Risk Adjudication, WA-DOH  
Kelly Cooper, Director, Policy & Legislative Relations, WA-DOH  
Lacy Fehrenbach, Chief, Office of Prevention, Safety, & Health, WA-DOH  
Lauren Jenks, Assistant Secretary, Environmental Public Health Division, WA-DOH  
Tao Sheng Kwan-Gett, Chief, Office of Health and Science, WA-DOH  
Liz Perez, Chief, Office of Public Affairs and Equity, WA-DOH  
Kristin Peterson, Chief, Office of Policy, Planning, and Evaluation, WA-DOH  
Jessica Todorovich, Chief of Staff, WA-DOH