

WSR 26-19-131 - Department of Agriculture: Chapter 16-86 WAC, Cattle and bison diseases in Washington state

Published September 23, 2026

Statewide, WA - Washington statewide County, WA

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WSR 26-19-131 (26-19) WSR 26-19-131

PREPROPOSAL STATEMENT OF INQUIRY

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

[Filed September 23, 2026, 7:32 a.m.]

Subject of Possible Rule Making: Chapter 16-86 WAC, Cattle and bison diseases in Washington state.

The department of agriculture (department) is considering amending chapter 16-86 WAC to:

- ? Make brucellosis vaccination voluntary at change of ownership while retaining the official identification requirement for all sexually intact cattle and bison that change ownership and all exhibition cattle;
- ? Align regulations with United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) C.F.R.s;
- ? Align pasture-to-pasture (grazing permits) requirements and language with Oregon and Idaho;
- ? Update definitions and simplify language throughout the rule; and
- ? Revise language to increase clarity and readability.

Statutes Authorizing the Agency to Adopt Rules on this Subject: RCW 16.36.040 .

Reasons Why Rules on this Subject may be Needed and What They Might Accomplish: Almost a century after the initiation of the United States brucellosis eradication program, the USDA declared all 50 states are now considered free by USDA standards and the risk to cattle outside of the greater Yellowstone area (GYA) has been deemed negligible. As a result, there is a national proposal to: Remove the vaccination requirement for all states without infected wildlife; eliminate the vaccination requirement in all low-risk counties in GYA states; and focus on surveillance at slaughter and movement testing strategies to replace mandatory vaccination programs.

The only cattle that really benefit from vaccination are cattle directly exposed to infected GYA wildlife.

Currently, there are no infected wildlife in Washington state. In addition, the vaccine only prevents abortion, not infection, masking clinical signs in affected animals. Vaccination does little other than to add a burdensome regulation, add to cost of production, and restrict the producer's ability to buy and sell cattle. Producers that have a market advantage or that may sell animals to GYA states still have the option to vaccinate. The rule change proposal will make the vaccine voluntary for producers while retaining the official identification requirement for breeding cattle to uphold current animal disease traceability capabilities. Official identification, readable both visually and electronically, will continue to enhance the department's ability to quickly detect and respond to any disease occurrences within the state, thus ensuring the marketability of Washington cattle.

Official temporary grazing permits, also known as pasture-to-pasture permits, are issued jointly by Washington

and neighboring states to allow cattle to move across state lines to an adjoining state for grazing and to return to Washington with no change of ownership. Updates to the rule harmonize regulations with neighboring states to require a certificate of veterinary inspection (CVI) for cattle entering the state but not to return. Cattle can move back to the state of origin within six months without an additional CVI, providing a benefit to producers.

Other Federal and State Agencies that Regulate this Subject and the Process Coordinating the Rule with These Agencies: USDA, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services, Veterinary Services regulates interstate movement of animals and animal disease traceability.

Department staff have been discussing this proposal, and our federal partners support this rule proposal.

Process for Developing New Rule: Department staff will discuss any proposed amendments with affected stakeholders. Affected stakeholders will also have an opportunity to submit written comments on the proposed rules during the public comment period and will be able to present oral testimony at the public hearing.

Interested parties can participate in the decision to adopt the new rule and formulation of the proposed rule before publication by contacting Dr. Amber Itle, P.O. Box 42560, Olympia, WA

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Source: Washington State Register

Published: 2026-09-23

Original: <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/law/wsr/2026/19/26-19-131.htm>

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