



Testimony of Jeannie M. Tapley, Executive Director, Maine Potato Board to the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee and Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee

February 27, 2025

LD 210: An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027

Senator Rotundo, Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Gattine, Representative Pluecker and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committees. Testimony of Jeannie Tapley, Executive Director of the Maine Potato Board. I apologize that I am unable to attend the hearing today but I will be available to attend the work sessions, and please contact me anytime if you have any questions.

The Maine Potato Board (MPB) was created in 1986 by an act of the Maine Legislature for the purpose of establishing a cohesive framework for effective leadership within the potato industry. The mission of the MPB is to provide a competitive environment for Maine's potato growers, processors and dealers; and to create both stability and the infrastructure for future growth.

The primary functions of the MPB remain the same as when it was established in 1986; to provide a framework for leadership and undertake activities that will ensure the sustainability of the industry. To meet these goals the MPB has continued to develop programs and activities that meet the needs of an ever-changing industry. In recent years we have taken on some non-traditional programs and eliminated some programs that were no longer essential. While a large portion of our resources continue to be directed to research and education; we have added programs such as engineering/technical assistance, agronomy and plant pathology to help growers meet the changes in technology, state and federal mandates and new and emerging disease issues. In 2010, the legislature transferred the operations of the Maine Seed Potato Board (MSPB) from the Maine Department of Agriculture Conservation and Forestry (MDACF) to the MPB; the MSPB is responsible for providing Maine seed growers with a satiable supply of high-quality early generation seed potatoes.

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The transfer of the MSPB from the MDACF had been discussed for a number of years, as it became apparent that continued operation within the existing structure would not be sustainable. This transfer has allowed the MSPB to change the operational structure of the farm and broaden marketing opportunities. The MSPB uses an annual allotment from General Fund revenues (\$160,902) to maintain their tissue culture bank of over 150 varieties of potatoes and helps to support other essential activities in the laboratory. This tissue culture bank ensures Maine growers have a secure source of early generation seed potatoes and is not dependent on the importation of seed to support the industry; this not only ensures a secure supply but limits the risk of importing diseases that could negatively impact the Maine potato industry. The tissue culture bank also provides the necessary support to the University of Maine's potato breeding program in advancing new potato varieties for the potato industry. It is estimated that over 80% of all potatoes planted in Maine originate from this tissue culture bank at the MSPB.

We undertake these activities from the MPB office in Presque Isle and the MSPB's farm in Masardis. The MPB's staff in the Presque Isle office consists of six full-time; at the MSPB's Porter Farm we have six full-time positions and seasonal help as needed.

While the Maine potato industry has seen many changes over the years; we believe that our industry today is one that continues to thrive. We will need to continue to make changes in all aspects of our industry to meet consumer demands and global market pressures. The Maine Potato Board's directors and staff look forward to the new opportunities that are ahead of us and believe we have the resources and foresight to help our industry continue to be an economic force in the Maine economy.

Thank you for your time today and I will be glad to answer any questions you have or provide additional information if necessary.