

## **LD 473 – An Act to Support Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry in Maine**

**March 19, 2026**

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and Members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee:

My name is Dominic LaJoie, seed potato grower from Van Buren and chair of the Seed Potato Executive Council. Our Council has recently been made aware of seed potatoes being allowed to be imported into our State from an area known to be infested with Columbia Root Knot nematodes; a quarantine/regulated pest known to be prevalent in western potato producing states. Furthermore, it has been made aware that the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (MDACF) has a seemingly relaxed interpretation of our rules that protect us from these pests and has been allowing imports to happen from the state of Colorado.

I am completely puzzled and appalled that this was allowed to happen and that evidently when import permit requests were received, areas of infection and proximities of the quarantined pest were overlooked. Just because it was previously allowed, it does not justify it being right; it means MDACF was doing so in error.

These quarantined pests always eventually spread into adjacent fields and counties hence this information should be thoughtfully considered by the MDACF staff and Commissioner Beal, with consultation from the Maine potato industry as needed. An infested ‘area’ is determined by all gathered quarantine pest information especially related to known finds. If the CRKN quarantine pest should happen to be found in our state the added stress to all agriculture in Maine would be astronomical and all divisions of the potato industry: Seed, Tablestock, Processing and Organic, would not only greatly suffer economically but we will also lose precious good producing farmland to this pest and possibly have farms remain fallow for years to mitigate spread. This pest is known to affect rotational crops as well.

Past generations spent lifetimes protecting our precious farmland through best management practices and thoughtful science-based policies only now to be put at high risk by the MDACF’s current actions and practices. It appears that MDACF is choosing to be influenced by outside stakeholders and ignoring industry needs and recommendations as well as refusing to attend meetings with our council to have discussions so that we could provide input and share expertise. This is very concerning and needs to change.

In my 20+ years of experience serving nationally on the National Potato Council I have been involved in many potato phytosanitary issues as it relates to US trade as well as international trade. Maine is geographically located in that a high percentage of our seed potato and processing potato trade is with Canada. Several large potato processing industries depend on our State and its farmers to have the proper rules and regulations in place to protect all the production areas in Maine from any quarantine/regulates pests which could limit or stop trade. Having been involved first hand in trying to negotiate trade agreements, phytosanitary memorandum of understandings, soil testing protocols, and pest management strategies between

APHIS and CFIA, I can assure it becomes very challenging and near impossible when a quarantine/regulated pest is involved. Many times, it takes years to resolve and resume trade, if ever. It has been widely proven in the scientific community worldwide that the only way to prevent the spread of these pests is to eliminate any pathway associated with it; in this case the movement of seed potatoes.

The only time I have seen agreed upon high-cost management strategies of such pests, is between trading partners in which both parties or areas are known to be infested with a pest. This involves expensive high-cost testing and high use chemical controls to keep it at low levels.

CRKN has never been eradicated from an area once found as it has other crops that can host it, not only potatoes. Remember Maine does not have CRKN and we do not ever want it. While I believe the current rules we have in place should have been sufficient to address this pest, the Maine Seed Potato Executive Council have proposed changes to Chapter 30 for your consideration through this proposed bill.

Your support would greatly enhance Chapter 30 for clear interpretation of “areas known to have CRKN” and other quarantine pests. Chapter 255 rules also provide the guidance needed to review import permit requests received by the MDACF. Finally, Chapter 409 (Est 1977) quarantine pest rule allows our Commissioner authority to deny any request to export into our state from any area with a quarantined/regulated pest. I would like to express gratitude to the sponsor of this Bill, Senator Talbot Ross and all those in our Legislature today who have recognized the extreme and critical importance of this situation and taking the time to listen to the Maine potato industry’s pressing concerns on the need to resolve this as quickly as possible.

Travel has made it impossible for me to attend the hearing today, but if there are any questions or additional information I can provide, please feel free to contact me.

Respectfully,

Dominic LaJoie  
Chairperson MPB Seed Executive Council  
Potato Farmer  
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