

Amy Charkowski
Colorado
LD 473

Dear Committee:

I am writing to comment on the amendment to LD473, which will exclude Colorado seed potatoes from the state of Maine. I have worked in seed potato production research since 2001 and have expertise in phytosanitary issues in seed potatoes. I have published over 80 research papers and reports and been invited repeatedly to farmer education meetings throughout the US and internationally to share phytosanitary information.

Seed potatoes are subject to multiple inspections during the growing season and at harvest. In addition, farmers can test field soil and tare soil, which is the soil that was adhered to the potatoes after harvest, for pests and pathogens. This helps ensure that seed potatoes will not result in losses when they are sold and planted in new fields. This system has worked well for decades and is used to manage multiple pathogens. Each region in the United States has its own challenges in seed potato production. For serious pests and pathogens, counties or fields may be restricted from selling seed potatoes to reduce the risk of loss. In addition, modern methods are used to test soil and seed potatoes to restrict movement of pests and pathogens. Importantly, when pests are found, it is standard practice to send the samples to a second lab for confirmation with established protocols. This practice is used because agricultural fields are too valuable to restrict from production when the pests or pathogens are not present in the field. It is also crucial that the industry not restrict trade or damage farm reputations based on rumors.

Each region in the United States also has important benefits. For example, seed potatoes grown in Colorado are free of late blight. Dickeya has never been reported in Colorado. The state is also free of potato cyst nematodes and potato rot nematode. Other diseases, like witches broom, which is caused by phytoplasma, are very rarely found in Colorado. PVYNTN is also rarer in Colorado than some other states. The proposal to exclude all Colorado seed potatoes from import without taking advantage of modern testing and years of historical information is setting a poor precedent and is likely to harm farmers in Maine in both the short and long term. In the short term, this restricts Maine farmers from purchase of high-quality seed free of major diseases, such as late blight and Dickeya. It also returns the US to restricting entire states without using modern tools to allow agriculture on uninfested fields rather than trying to maintain agricultural trade and only restricting infested fields. This precedent could harm Maine farmers if new phytosanitary problems are found in the future in Maine.

Sincerely,
Dr. Amy Charkowski