

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 16, 2024

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack  
Secretary of Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We write to express concern about the potential for imports of potatoes from Canada's Prince Edward Island (PEI) to spread potato wart to U.S. farms and production facilities, threatening farms and farming communities in our states. We appreciate your efforts thus far and urge you to implement additional mitigation measures to prevent the introduction of this pathogen into the United States.

Potato wart (*Synchytrium endobioticum*) is a highly destructive disease that can spread via infected potatoes and soil, reduce crop yields, and make potatoes unmarketable domestically and abroad. The disease could eventually render potato production infeasible on affected farms and fields. Although the fungus that causes potato wart is currently not known to be present in the United States, it has been consistently detected in PEI fields since its initial detection more than 20 years ago. Potato wart can lie dormant in the soil for decades and remain a viable phytosanitary threat. There is no treatment available to eliminate it from contaminated farmland.

The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) own pathway analysis states that outbreaks of potato wart in PEI are "continuous" and that the current outbreak "is likely to be larger than currently reported." If potato wart should enter the United States, our farmers and the communities they support will be economically devastated. Given that twenty percent of our potato crop—valued at over \$2 billion—is exported, we cannot allow introduction of a disease that would shut off access to international markets, and also curtail domestic production and sales.

We know that you share our commitment to protect the health of U.S. agriculture against invasive diseases, and we appreciate the steps you have taken to prevent the introduction of potato wart into the United States, including the November 2021 suspension of all PEI potato exports to the United States taken in conjunction with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). That said, we are concerned that USDA's April 2022 decision to resume the importation of field-grown potatoes from PEI into the United States does not appear to adhere to USDA's own scientific findings and may fail to properly mitigate the risk posed by this disease.

Most notably, USDA does not require any testing of PEI fields prior to potatoes being cleared for export, despite the fact that USDA regulations identify soil testing as the most effective tool to detect potato wart. While we understand that CFIA seeks public input on the implementation of

additional mitigation measures, the timeframe for action is years down the line, when the threat of potato wart entering the United States is already here.

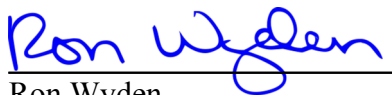
American potato growers, processors and consumers must have confidence that any potatoes imported into the United States are safe and free of potato wart. Therefore, at a minimum, we urge you to implement the following measures for all shipments of potatoes from PEI, in addition to other mitigation strategies as appropriate:

1. **Restrict bulk shipments into the United States to smaller-size packages:** Bulk shipments of potatoes into the United States are often broken down into smaller sizes at intermediate facilities within the United States prior to being shipped across the country. During this repacking process, a substantial amount of waste is generated, which can then transmit the potato wart disease. USDA should limit these large bulk shipments to smaller sizes (20 pounds or less), so that any waste that occurs during the repacking process is significantly retained in Canada.
2. **Limit large retail shipments and ensure consumers know they are for consumption rather than cultivation:** The U.S. potato industry is concerned that sales of retail (table stock) potatoes may result in consumers unknowingly planting infected potatoes in home gardens, without proper mitigation strategies, and unintentionally spreading potato wart. USDA should limit retail shipments to consumer pack sizes and take steps to ensure the American public is fully informed of the risks associated with cultivation.
3. **Control the waste generated by processing facilities:** Potato processing generates a significant amount of waste product, which, again, can transmit the potato wart disease. Any processing facilities using PEI potatoes should operate under the supervision of USDA and include the treatment of biohazard waste. Such compliance agreements should prohibit the conversion of waste potatoes into livestock feed, because the process could embed potato wart into agricultural land.

The ongoing and persistent potato wart outbreaks in PEI represent a current and immediate threat to potato growers in the United States. We urge you to take swift action to remedy the potato wart risk associated with imports from PEI.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We stand ready to assist as needed.

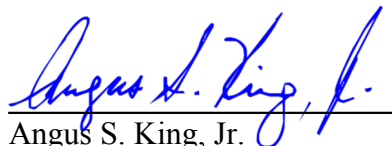
Sincerely,



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Mike Crapo  
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator



John Hickenlooper  
United States Senator



James E. Risch  
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



Pete Ricketts  
United States Senator



John Fetterman  
United States Senator



John Hoeven  
United States Senator



Jon Tester  
United States Senator



Steve Daines  
United States Senator



---

Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator



---

Kevin Cramer  
United States Senator



---

Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



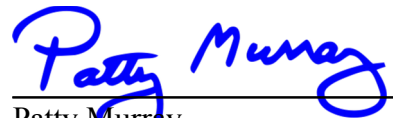
---

John Boozman  
United States Senator



---

Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senator



---

Patty Murray  
United States Senator