



JERRY PETROWSKI

WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR

Senate Bill 23: Requiring Certified Seed Potatoes
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Small Business and Tourism
April 11, 2017

Mr. Chairman and members, thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 23, requiring large scale potato growers to plant certified seed potatoes. I authored this bill at the request of the Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Growers Association, to help their members continue to have healthy and reliable crops year after year.

Wisconsin currently has a voluntary certified seed potato program which is designed to help Wisconsin's commercial potato industry maintain the quality and disease-free reliability of seed potatoes. The certification program is done at the request of growers by the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) and the Wisconsin College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, and allows commercial potato growers to rely on the seed potatoes they purchase. However, the program is voluntary so that reliance is limited to those potatoes that are certified.

This bill creates a requirement that any person who grows more than 5 acres of potatoes in a year to plant only certified seed potatoes. Mandatory certification would require all Wisconsin produced seed potatoes conform to certification standards. This requirement will help prevent the spread of serious and potentially devastating potato diseases and facilitate the movement of seed potatoes in interstate commerce.

A reliable source of seed potatoes is critical for commercial potato growers to market their potatoes effectively to commercial buyers. Wisconsin consistently ranks third in the country for potato production with approximately 65,000 acres planted each year.

Since the bill was introduced my office has had a number of conversations with growers and I have also introduced Senate Amendment 1 to clarify that DATCP had the authority to grant a waiver on the requirement that farmers only plant certified seed if there is a shortage of a specific variety of potatoes.

Thank you again and I would be happy to answer any questions.

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JOHN SPIROS

State Representative • 86th Assembly District

Senate Bills 20 and 23

April 11, 2017

Testimony from Rep. Spiros

Hello, and thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Small Business, and Tourism for allowing me to have the opportunity to share my testimony with you today regarding Senate Bills 20 and 23, two bills that would impact potato farmers in our state.

Senate Bill 20 addresses the time period in which DATCP can order the treatment of late blight of potatoes. Currently DATCP has the authority to order the abatements of pests that constitute a hazard to plant or animal life. Currently, however, they are limited to ordering that abatement within 10 days. In the case of late blight of potatoes, 10 days is enough time for an incredible amount of damage as the blight travels to neighboring farms. This bill would shorten the time period in Wisconsin to 24 hours for treatment and 72 hours for destruction.

Senate Bill 23 would require those who grow more than 5 acres of potatoes in a year to only plant certified seed potatoes. This program currently exists, but is voluntary. This requirement would help prevent the spread of serious potato diseases.

Potato production is an important industry in the state of Wisconsin – we rank third in the country for acres planted each year. These changes are important for ensuring potato farmers can market and sell their potatoes to commercial buyers. Potato growers across the state are supportive of this legislation, and both bills are supported by the Wisconsin Potato and Vegetable Growers Association.

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to share testimony in support of this bill.

Testimony of Tamas Houlihan – WPVGA
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Small Business and Tourism
2017 Senate Bills 20 and 23 – April 11, 2017

Chairman Moulton and members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today in support of SB 20 and SB 23. My name is Tamas Houlihan and I am the executive director of the Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Association.

The WPVGA represents over 400 members. In terms of food production, Wisconsin ranks first in the nation in the production of green beans for processing, beets for canning and cabbage for kraut. We rank second in the production of carrots and peas for processing and third in the production of potatoes, sweet corn and cucumbers for pickles; and are a top-ten producer of onions. Specialty crop production and processing account for \$6.4 billion in annual economic activity and nearly 35,000 Wisconsin jobs.

I am here today to ask you to **support SB 20 and SB 23**. These two bills each address important issues related to minimizing disease risk for the Wisconsin potato growing industry.

SB 20: Abatement Orders of Late Blight of Potatoes

Under current law, the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consume Protection (DATCP) has the authority to order the abatement of pests that constitute a hazard to plant or animal life in the state. However, the Department's authority is currently limited to ordering an abatement order that requires compliance with the order within 10 days.

This bill would allow the Department to require the owner of an infected field to act more quickly than the current 10-day response time.

In terms of potato production, Wisconsin consistently ranks third in the country, producing potatoes on about 65,000 Wisconsin acres. The Wisconsin potato and vegetable industry currently provides 35,000 jobs in Wisconsin and generates \$6.4 billion in gross state product.

Late blight is a disease that is uniquely destructive to potatoes. It spreads quickly and can cause complete loss of a potato crop. As such, the allowance of a 10 day period of time to respond to an abatement order risks timely disease management.

Biologically, the late blight pathogen, *Phytophthora infestans*, continues to produce new spores (sporangia) roughly every 3-7 days, depending upon weather conditions and crop disease management. Because spores can mature at differing rates, and spores can both directly infect to make new lesions, as well as can release up to 10 new zoospores or swimming spores which each infect under wet conditions, the unmanaged disease can increase exponentially within a field and between fields. This epidemic late blight field status creates extremely high risk of disease spread.

Accordingly, this legislation provides that the DATCP can order treatment of late blight of potatoes by use of an antisporent within 24 hours of issuance of the order and destruction of

the crop within 72 hours of issuance of the order. The bill also allows DATCP to extend those time periods if treatment or destruction cannot be completed within those time periods.

On behalf of the WPVGA, I ask that you SUPPORT Senate Bill 20.

SB 23: Certified Seed Law for Wisconsin Potatoes

Wisconsin consistently ranks third in the country for potato production, producing potatoes on about 65,000 Wisconsin acres. Wisconsin currently has a *voluntary* certified seed potato program, which is designed to help Wisconsin's commercial potato industry maintain the quality and disease-free reliability of seed potatoes. The certification program allows commercial potato growers to rely on the seed potatoes they purchase, but because the program is currently only voluntary, that reliance is limited to those potatoes that are certified.

A reliable source of seed potatoes is critical for commercial potato growers to market their potatoes more effectively to commercial buyers. This bill mandates a requirement that any person who grows more than 5 acres of potatoes in a year to plant only certified seed potatoes.

Under current law, seed potato certification and grading is only voluntary and is done at the request of the seed potato grower under a cooperative agreement between DATCP and the Wisconsin College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALs). *See Wis. Admin. Code § ATCP 156.* Yet, most Wisconsin commercially grown potatoes are grown from certified seed, because certification protects buyers and sellers alike.

Under current law, at the request of a seed potato grower, CALs inspects seed potatoes for diseases and other conditions. CALs then certifies the seed potatoes in appropriate categories based on predicted disease-free reliability. DATCP inspects and grades CALs-certified seed potatoes for other measures of quality. A grower may not sell potatoes as certified seed potatoes unless the potatoes have been certified by the CALs *and* graded by DATCP.

Certified seed potatoes are labeled with their certification and grade classifications, so that commercial growers know what they are getting. Certification and grade classifications affect purchase decisions and sale prices. DATCP and CALs charge fees to cover the cost of requested grading and certification services.

Mandatory certification as required under SB 23 would require all Wisconsin-produced seed potatoes conform to certification standards. We support this proposed mandate. This requirement will help prevent the spread of serious and potentially devastating potato diseases and facilitate the movement of seed potatoes in interstate and international commerce.

On behalf of the WPVGA, I ask that you SUPPORT Senate Bill 23.