



PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND POTATO BOARD

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(Charlottetown, PE – November 22, 2021) The Prince Edward Island Potato Board is shocked by the decision by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) to suspend the certification of exports of all potatoes from Prince Edward Island to the United States of America. The United States market represents a value of \$120 million annually to the Prince Edward Island potato industry.

Prevention of the spread of potato wart has been done under the auspices of the Long Term Potato Wart Domestic Management Plan, developed by CFIA to prevent spread both within the province and in market destinations for PEI potatoes. Since the discovery of potato wart in PEI in 2000, there has not been a single incidence of potato wart in any markets, including the USA and the rest of Canada, attributable to Prince Edward Island potatoes. We have faith in this plan, and so should our government who developed it.

The two detections of potato wart in October 2021 were found in fields that were already under regulation as part of this Management Plan. As a result, those potatoes were already ineligible to be shipped to any market outside of Prince Edward Island, including the United States and Canada.

It is the understanding of the Potato Board that this suspension comes as a result of a request from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), under threat of implementation of a federal order. Furthermore, the USDA's basis for this action is predicated on feedback from a segment of the American potato industry, which is advocating for this suspension. Based on the communications that our growers, dealers, exporters and staff have had with numerous contacts in the United States, it is apparent that these calls for border restrictions are not representative of the majority of American industry stakeholders and buyers who need and want PEI potatoes this marketing season.

This is solely a politically-based trade disruption that will limit trade in a year when potatoes are already in short supply across North America and globally. These trade restrictions will undoubtedly lead to higher grocery store prices for American consumers due to a lack of available product in regions that depend on Prince Edward Island potatoes. At a time when consumers are already facing rising food costs and food bank use has increased, trade restrictions based on political rather than scientific rationale is frustrating. In addition, it will lead to shortages of product for some processing facilities, with the potential for lay-offs to follow. Closer to home, there will undoubtedly be lay-offs and other economic impacts on PEI potato farms and packing sheds.

There is negligible risk of spreading potato wart from the export of fresh potatoes, as existing trade regulations require potatoes originating from Prince Edward Island to be washed and treated with a sprout inhibitor. In addition, potato wart is of no risk to human health.

If this suspension of exports is not reversed, it will necessitate the destruction of hundreds of millions of pounds of high quality fresh potatoes, as potatoes are a perishable crop that can not be stored indefinitely until market access is reopened. This presents not only an enormous waste of nutritious food but also a potential environmental issue related to product disposal. The volume of potatoes that PEI normally exports to the United States meets the fresh potato needs of approximately nine million Americans each year.

The Prince Edward Island Potato Board is calling for an immediate reversal of government-imposed restrictions on the movement of fresh potatoes. We call on representatives on both sides of the border to work without delay to resolve this issue. Without an immediate reversal of this decision, there will be far-reaching economic consequences not only for Prince Edward Island potato producers but also on the provincial economy, other Canadian potato producers, retailers, and consumers.

About the PEI Potato Board:

The PEI Potato Board represents PEI potato growers, working together to ensure the long-term profitability and sustainability through marketing, advocacy, negotiations, and activities to support quality potato production. Prince Edward Island potato farms grow one-quarter of Canada's potatoes, injects more than 1.3 billion dollars into the Island economy, and employs approximately eight percent of the Island's workforce. For more information about the Board and its members, visit: www.peipotato.org

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