



STATE OF IDAHO



C. L. "BUTCH" OTTER
GOVERNOR
CELIA R. GOULD
DIRECTOR

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Contact:
Amanda Albers: 208-332-8678,
amanda.albers@agri.idaho.gov
Mike Cooper: 208-332-8620
mike.cooper@agri.idaho.gov

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Korea Opens Its Borders to Idaho Fresh Potatoes

Boise --- The Korean market for Idaho fresh potatoes re-opened effective July 29, 2010, with the exception of potatoes grown or packed in Bingham and Bonneville counties. Korea suspended fresh potato imports in 2006 due to the discovery of the pale cyst nematode (PCN). The nematode does not pose any threat to human health, but can reduce the yield of potatoes and other crops. There is no sign that the quality of tubers grown in Idaho has been affected. The announcement lifting the import ban follows a May, 2010 on-site visit of a Korean nematologist to Idaho to assess Idaho's PCN Program.

In 2006, PCN was found in two Idaho counties - Bingham and Bonneville counties. The Idaho potato production acreage is the most heavily surveyed area in the world for PCN with over 277,000 samples taken and processed since 2006. The PCN infestation remains confined to 1,100 acres near Shelley, Idaho. There has been no potato production on those fields since the nematodes were first detected. "The level of sampling is evidence that PCN is not present in any fields outside of the regulated fields," said Mike Cooper, Bureau Chief, Idaho State Department of Agriculture. "Hopefully, Korea will eventually allow potatoes from the non-regulated areas of Bingham and Bonneville counties as do Mexico and Canada."

State, industry and federal representatives were persistent in keeping this issue a priority in bi-lateral trade discussions with Korea. By stressing the importance of basing decisions on sound science, arguing for a more regional scientific-based approach, and responding to multiple requests for documentation and reporting on the PCN containment and eradication efforts, the State has achieved success in Korea after several years of minimal progress. The reopening of the Korea market is a major achievement for free trade and economic growth for Idaho's potato industry.

Korea imports roughly 17,000 tons of fresh potatoes annually. Imported fresh potatoes are primarily used in snack food manufacturing however, wholesalers have indicated that there are significant market opportunities for U.S. table stock potatoes. Surveys suggest that Korean consumers like U.S. potatoes because they are juicer, water-cleaned, of higher quality and often less-expensive than domestic potatoes.

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