

MINUTES  
**HOUSE AGRICULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** Monday, March 16, 2015

**TIME:** 1:30 pm or Upon Adjournment

**PLACE:** Room EW42

**MEMBERS:** Chairman Andrus, Vice Chairman Boyle, Representatives McMillan, Batt, Bell, Dayley, Miller, Romrell, VanOrden, Burtenshaw, Kerby, Troy, Pence, Erpelding

**ABSENT/  
EXCUSED:** Rep. Erpelding

**GUESTS:** Mike Thornton, University of Idaho; Rich Garber, U of I; Jared Wattenberger, Idaho PCN Group; Mark Mickelsen, Shipper, Grower, Processor; Bryan Searle, Grower; Gary Farmer, Bingham Coop-Agronomy; Scott Searle, Grower; Steve France, Grower; Lorin Clinger, Grower; Kirk Oler, Grower; Shane Anderson, Land Owner; Andrew Mickelsen, Grower; Adam Neibaur, Grower; Wyatt Penfold, Seed Grower; Mark Telford, Seed Grower; Stephanie Mickelsen, Grower; Garth VanOrden, Garth VanOrden Farms; Jim Lowe, Food Producers of Idaho; Luke Waitley, Food Producers of Idaho

**Chairman Andrus** called the meeting to order at 1:35 p.m.

**MOTION:** **Rep. Kerby** made a motion to approve the minutes of the Tuesday, March 10, 2015 meeting. **Motion carried by voice vote.**

**Chairman Andrus** addressed the committee stating the purpose of the meeting is to be instructed by those affected by the Potato Cyst Nematode (PCN) so the committee might have a better understanding of the situation from the growers perspective.

**Jared Wattenburg**, IPCN (Idaho Pale Cyst Nematode) Group President, thanked the committee for hearing their concerns from over the past nine years. He turned the time over to the growers for their testimonies.

**Mark Mickelsen** Potato shipper, grower, processor, gave a history of what has happened to several of the farmers in the Shelly, Idaho area starting in 2006 when the Pale Cyst Nematode was first discovered north of Shelly. Letters were sent by Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and the Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) to the infested land owners stating they would no longer be able to grow potatoes on those acres. He said he believes PCN (Pale Cyst Nematode) to be a problem for all potato growers. Potato farmers are always dealing with nematodes but have been able to control them.

In response to a committee question asking if he thought if other fields were tested in the same rigorous manner their fields had been tested, PCN would also be found. He said the fields in Shelly are the only fields tested at this higher level and it seems probable if other farms had been tested in this same manner there is a great likelihood it would be found there also.

When asked by the committee if Europe has been able to control the spread of PCN, he stated they have been able to reduce it by 80% or greater.

In response to a committee question, **Chairman Andrus** stated the Department of Agriculture was notified this meeting was to take place and chose not to send a representative.

**Bryan Searle**, Grower, explained his land was one of the first that was quarantined. He stated his equipment has to be sanitized at temperatures of 140 degrees for one hour. Exposure to these temperatures over the length of time required causes a great deal of damage and affects the electronics.

He said if these affected growers are going to "carry one for the team", they would like some support. He also requested the regulations be changed through the rules process.

When asked by the committee if they are testing for PCN in other states, he said they only test in other states when requested. Mexico requires a 5 pound testing done on any potatoes brought into their country.

In response to committee questions he stated damage starts with 500,000 nematode per five pounds. The most nematodes found in Idaho fields were 5,000. The testing has become more aggressive to the point they are adding three new fields a year to the quarantine list. He stated he would like to see them try chemical eradication and depend less on quarantines.

**Gary Farmer**, Bingham Coop - Agronomy, addressed the loss of income and expense put upon the growers in the quarantined areas. He stated none of the early fields quarantined showed a loss of production. He stated the policies were overreaching, creating undo hardship to the growers and asked that we try to find common ground to resolve the problem.

**Scott Searle, Steve France, Adam Neibaur, Shane Anderson, Andrew Mickelsen, Kirk Oler and Loren Clinger**, Growers, all representing farm families spanning several generations that are now affected by PCN. They told of the added cost to meet regulations and the stress of repeated testing. They said the value of their land is diminished and less desirable causing hardship especially for those now facing retirement. The crops they are able to grow do not bring in the cash price as growing potatoes, making their farm less profitable.

**Stephanie Mickelsen**, Grower, explained the Idaho code concerning PCN. She stated there were serious problems within the code that need to be addressed. She said the science we have is not good and cannot be compared to the testing done in Europe. The testing here is much more stringent than the world standard for testing of PCN. She said the commission and department have not been as helpful as they could have been.

In response to a committee question concerning how much money has been spent by the State Department to try and eradicate PCN, she stated well over 63 million between the state and the federal government.

Responding to a committee question regarding help offered by Dupont and Dow, **Ms. Mickelsen** said the state is the only one who can allow potatoes to grow on those fields that would benefit from the testing.

**Dr. Mark Thornton**, University of Idaho, explained to the committee about trap crops that have been grown and tried in Europe and also in the testing lab at the University of Idaho. The Litchi Tomato plant is a trap plant for the PCN. In controlled studies in Europe this has shown to be effective. In Europe this testing is 10 years ahead of what we are doing in the states. This is similar to other trap crops used in sugarbeet fields. In Europe they are used to managing PCN. Their goal is to manage it rather than eradicate it. He stated in Idaho the Litchi Tomato is classified as a noxious weed although in other areas it is not classified that way.

In response to committee questions **Dr. Thornton** explained potatoes have been planted after the trap plant in controlled green house situations successfully. This has not been tried in fields in Idaho at this time. He said the amount of seed is limited and they would only have enough to seed 50-60 acres at this time.

**Wyatt Pinfold**, Seed Grower, explained PCN was first found in Canada on a seed farm. Regulations were made for seed potatoes rather than whole potatoes. He said seed potatoes are the most likely way for PCN to be spread. He stated international standards should be the guidelines for testing. **Mr. Pinfold** said anytime the standards go beyond those international standards it creates undo hardship. He suggested new standards be set in the rule making process.

He clarified international standards for the committee. The standards are 5 pound soil check for any country. If PCN is found then they do a 20 pound check. If that is clear then they can plant two cycles of potato crops before testing again. If they deem it necessary they can test more often.

**Mark Telford**, seed grower, expressed his concern to the committee that Idaho is not testing at international standards.

**Jared Wattenbarger**, reminded the committee international testing is for 5 pounds but he gave the example of **Mark Anderson's** ground who had 140 pounds tested before they found PCN. He stated if they look hard enough they can find it in almost any potato field.

**Dr. Thornton** clarified a committee question that regardless if they find one nematode or 1,000, the ground is treated the same. There is no delineation for infestation rates.

**ADJOURN:** There being no further business to come before the committee, the meeting was adjourned at 4:04 p.m.

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Representative Andrus  
Chair

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Joan Majors  
Secretary