

WASHINGTON'S QUARANTINE LAWS ON SEED POTATOES

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Those of us who are engaged in the actual production of agricultural crops, or associated in the various phases of our agricultural economy, in the producing, harvesting and marketing of agricultural commodities are continually reminded of the tremendous losses that can and do occur from plant pests and plant diseases.

The awareness of these losses is emphasized by very authoritative reports and observations and is further demonstrated by staggering figures of dollar values. Any one of you growers who have planted, cultivated and brought a field of potatoes up to harvest, only to have your efforts nullified and liquidated by Bacterial Ring Rot, I am sure, agree that every action should be directed toward prevention of the introduction of plant pests and diseases into our producing areas.

Both the Federal and State governments have a responsibility to protect our agricultural economy against the invasion of insect pests and diseases.

The legal basis for these responsibilities is supported and directed by legislative action in the form of laws or other acts, which gives the State and Federal Departments of Agriculture the authority to regulate the movement of plants, plant parts and products, between countries, between states, and within states themselves to prevent the introduction and spread, if possible of plant pests and diseases that would impair or cause serious damage to our agricultural crops.

The employment of this legal authority as it relates to the welfare of agriculture and the philosophy in thinking of those responsible for activation of this authority can best be expressed by defining four lines of defense -- namely quarantine, detection, eradication, and containment.

Our first line of defense is plant quarantine. It is far better to keep a pest or a disease out of a state, out of an area or out of the country than to have to contend with it on our own soil.

Our second line of defense is detection. The early detection of a newly introduced pest or disease will enable us to accomplish eradication with a minimum of cost.

The third line of defense is eradication programs. Once a newly introduced pest or disease has been detected and when practical measures of eradication are available, an all out attempt to accomplish eradication should immediately be initiated.

The fourth line of defense is containment. When practical methods or eradication are not available or it has been determined that eradication is not feasible or practical, then it is more important to contain the pest or disease to a given area rather than to attempt to live with it.

In the State of Washington, with our wide diversity of horticultural crops, we have established some thirty-three regulations to protect these crops from the introduction and spread of serious plant pests and disease. Each of these regulations has employed the use of one or all of the four guiding principles that I have just mentioned. Each employed by the most effective and most economical way to attempt to achieve the desired results. The only one used in all regulations has been that of plant quarantine.

Two of our quarantine laws concern themselves with seed potatoes. Both were established to prevent the introduction and spread of Bacterial Ring Rot.

One order prohibits the movement of Irish seed potatoes into Whatcom County, our main seed producing area in the state, unless such potatoes are accompanied by a permit or a certificate stating that the potatoes are free of Bacterial Ring Rot. This determination to be made after inspection by a qualified inspector during the immediate preceding growing season of such seed. The regulation further provides that should potatoes entering the county be found to be infected with Ring Rot at destination, or potatoes growing in the county be found to be infected with Ring Rot, such potatoes are required to be moved to a processing plant or disposed of in any manner that will prevent the spread of this disease, and all contaminated premises or equipment involved be properly treated and disinfected to assure complete arresting of the infection.

The second quarantine regulation restricts the movement into or within the State of Washington, all Irish potatoes for seed purposes, propagation or reproduction within the state, unless each shipment is accompanied by a certificate issued at point of origin stating that such potatoes are reported to be free from Bacterial Ring Rot.

All Irish potatoes used for seed or propagating purposes entering any production area are subject to destination inspection, and if found not to have the proper certificate from point of origin or found to be infected with Bacterial Ring Rot, are immediately condemned and either returned to point of origin or diverted to commercial or other channels.

Bacterial Ring Rot in potatoes is a disease that is very difficult to determine in the field, and even more difficult to detect in tubers by inspection at destination, unless the infection is quite severe.

Last year some 531,000 hundred-pound sacks of seed potatoes originating in seven states and three Canadian provinces were inspected in the production areas of this state by Horticultural Inspectors, handlers, growers, county agents, and seed cutters for compliance with our Bacterial Ring Rot Quarantines.

Some Ring Rot was found in samples cut at destination, and as it was found, those stocks were diverted to commercial or livestock feeding uses. Some seed was returned to state of origin or at least out of the State of Washington.

In spite of all of this close surveillance on the part of the many interested parties, Bacterial Ring Rot was found in some samples of seed grown in the seed evaluation test plots conducted by Washington State University.

The State Department of Agriculture is most appreciative of the assistance given to our Horticultural Inspectors in the enforcement of these quarantines and I personally want to thank all of those persons who contributed to this effort.

Plant Quarantines are necessary to protect our horticultural industries in the State of Washington from the invasion of serious and damaging insect pests and diseases.

The Department of Agriculture has the legal authority to establish quarantines for this protection, and a very definite responsibility for the enforcement of quarantine regulations, but the ultimate success and value of such a program is tremendously increased by the fullest cooperation of those immediately and directly affected.

General agricultural quarantine protection is becoming more difficult, with increased air travel from foreign lands directly into our production areas. We know that travelers represent the greatest danger of pest and disease introduction, by bringing in unauthorized agricultural material. The Federal government is spending large sums of money and is continually looking for new ways to further strengthen agricultural quarantine protection by education, demonstration, by the use of new treatment and fumigation techniques on infested and infected products.

In the case of seed potatoes in the State of Washington, close observance of quarantine requirements and the alert employment of sanitary practices by those who are dependent upon seed to grow their commercial potato crops will go a long way toward the production of a good marketable product.