

# 2007 Farm Bill Forum

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See Attachment Thank you



WASHINGTON STATE POTATO COMMISSION  
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Secretary Mike Johanns  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, DC 20250

The Washington State Potato Commission works with approximately 350 potato growers throughout Washington. Potatoes are the second largest crop grown in the state, with an annual farm-gate value of approximately \$500 million. Washington State accounts for nearly one-third of all potatoes and potato products exported from the U.S., totaling nearly \$500 million in exports from the Ports of Seattle, Portland, and Tacoma in 2001 alone.

A study of the economic impacts of the Washington State potato industry show that potato farming and related processing contributes \$3.01 billion annually to the Washington economy. (David Holland & Hun Ho Yeo, *The Economic Impact of the Potato Industry in Washington State* (1997). This translates into 27,600 jobs. (Id.) This is significant considering that Washington State has one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation. (See U.S. Dep't of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, September 2002, <http://www.bls.gov/web/lauustrk.htm>.)

Currently the financial health of the Washington potato industry is precarious. During the past five years, selling prices for potatoes have been very low, margins are tight, credit is scarce, and losses are mounting for many Washington potato farmers.

There is a disparity in the current Farm Bill that needs correction. Ninety-two percent of commodity spending was paid on 5 crops representing only a third of the growers in the U.S. The majority, the other two-thirds of the farmers, many specialty crop growers, receive very little support from the current Farm Bill. Potato growers do not want traditional programs with direct payments but need assistance in other program areas.

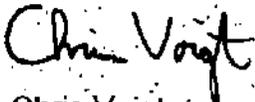
1. **Washington Potato growers expect continuation of restrictions that do not allow acres that receive program payments to shift production to fruits and vegetables.**
2. **Dramatically expanded funding of the TASC program (Technical**

**Assistance for Specialty Crops)**

- 3. Increase resources for APHIS to address phytosanitary issues preventing the export of domestic potatoes;**
- 4. Increased resources for border inspections to prevent introductions of pests into the US**
- 5. Effective programs to improve the efficiency and lower the cost of transporting potatoes and potato products**
- 6. Fund block grants similar to the Specialty Crop Bill**
- 7. Increased funding for variety research – specifically disease and pest resistant varieties that reduce pesticide use**
- 8. Allowing acres set aside for pesticide buffers and to improve aquifers to be eligible for conservation payments.**

Thank you for this opportunity for the Washington potato growers to part of the dialog in developing this new Ag policy. Please feel free to call upon us as a resource in future discussion as we develop the new Farm Bill.

Sincerely,



Chris Voigt  
Executive Director

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SECRETARIAT, USDA

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