

# Northern Plains POTATO GROWERS ASSOCIATION



**Introduction** - Irish potatoes – red, white, purple, yellow and russet – are the leading perishable produce exported from ND. They are marketed in the forms of seed, fresh tablestock, chipping potatoes and processed (French fries, hash browns, etc). The projected value after packaging/processing is \$1B+ for the 2019 crop.

Potatoes are a staple, primary food in most homes and restaurants. This role puts potatoes in the focus and whims of the ever-changing consumer desires. Classic examples are the increase in market share for yellow and small sized potatoes that are appealing to the eye and palate.

Additionally, potatoes are squarely in the sustainability view of consumers and processors. Major processors, grocery store chains and consumers are asking “What are you doing to grow healthier, lower input crops”. The most commonly asked question by Frito-Lay, McCains, Lamb-Weston, McDonalds and others is “What are you doing to reduce water usage in the production of potatoes”. The essence of the conversation is that the rules of production are changing. Customer views and sustainability questions are pushing the potato industry to change at an unprecedented rate. Each and every request and/or change is an opportunity for the North Dakota potato industry if we are prepared for and recognize the opportunities.

**Opportunities – Short term** – The North Dakota Area Weather Network or NDAWN is surviving on a very aged technologic platform and needs updating to withstand the rigors of today’s demands. Established in 1989, NDAWN has crop specific applications or growth models for at least 8 crops in ND. Potato growers and Extension Potato Specialist Andy Robinson use the information to make predictions for managing Early Blight and Late Blight diseases. Typically control measures are applied 4-8x per season to manage the diseases. We would like to see financial support for this important update.

**Short-Mid Term** – An aging workforce in current positions will slow efforts as turnover takes its natural course. In some disciplines, lack of a lead scientist and technical staff has prevented research for many years. We see opportunities in the disciplines of soil fertility/plant nutrient use, entomology, plant pathology, plant breeding, variety development and added value research. Currently, research dollars are available from multiple sources, but we do not have the staff to apply and receive the funds. We advocate for forward thinking and support of current positions and evaluation of positions in departments that have been lost in recent years.

**Long-Term** – As consumers are changing, so is the world of the potato. Necrotic viruses and new strains of bacteria are complicating the potato industry nationally and internationally. Necrotic viruses render potatoes non-saleable via discolorations or dead tissue within the potato tuber. These viruses are transmitted by insects and fungi. No known or consistent, sustainable management practices are available currently. Bacterial pathogens are also changing rapidly. A new form of soft rotting bacteria known as *Dickeya* sp. and several new genotypes of the common *Pectobacteria* sp. are causing significant losses within the industry. We view and ask for support for the addition of a virologist and bacteriologist essential to the potato industry.

Finally, the greatest link between teaching/education & research is graduate students. The strength of NDSU can be greatly enhanced by robust research programs filled with graduate students. We believe current and future Lead Scientists with strong technical staffs will attract graduate students and external funding.

On behalf of the growers, processors and all supporting factions of the North Dakota potato industry, we appreciate your consideration and support for the opportunities available to us.

Presented by

John T Nordgaard

Plant Pathologist

Black Gold Farms

Grand Forks, ND