



# Frequently Asked Questions

## Why were PEI Potatoes Banned from the US?

The export of PEI Potatoes to the US should have never been halted.

We were told the ban was put in place due to the discovery of potato wart in two fields this year. However, there is no credible science that says there is any risk to shipping washed, sprout inhibited tablestock potatoes to anywhere in the world from non-restricted PEI fields. In fact, we have been safely managing potato wart on PEI for over 20 years with no issues. Potato wart has been reported from almost all northern European countries, as well as countries in Africa, Asia, North and South America, and Oceania. The potatoes were found under the management plan, and would not have been shipped off Prince Edward Island. These two finds are further evidence that the management plan is effective.

Furthermore, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), the organization that initiated the ban, has since deemed PEI Potatoes safe, yet the ban remains. Therefore, it is clear this ban is based in politics and not science, and is the result of a trade issue between the US and Canada

## Was the ban instated by Canada or the USA government?

On November 22, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) suspended the trade of fresh PEI Potatoes to the United States. It has been said this was done based on pressure from the US government who threatened to stop the import of PEI Potatoes.

## Is potato wart dangerous to human health?

Potato wart is of no risk whatsoever to human health. While it renders potatoes unappealing and unmarketable, there is no risk to human health from potato wart. Furthermore, we monitor potato wart closely and DO NOT ship potato wart-infected potatoes off PEI.

## Why do you need to destroy PEI Potatoes?

Annually, PEI Potatoes feed 9 million Americans. When the US markets were taken away, without warning, this left a surplus of over 300 million pounds stranded on PEI.

With no way to move or store such a high volume of perishable food, potatoes must be destroyed before they rot which would have negative environmental consequences.

## Why are potatoes destroyed in the winter / with snowblowers?

Cold temperatures are important for proper disposal. We need to make sure that those potatoes are fully broken down and decomposed by the springtime so that they don't have the opportunity to regrow this coming growing season. These potatoes are going to be spread on fields that grew potatoes last year, and that are going to be rotation crops in 2022. We don't want those potatoes to regrow as weeds. If the potatoes regrow they are called volunteers, which can sometimes be reservoirs for disease.

It is also important to chop them up in a snowblower first and spread the potatoes in a thin layer, so that they are all exposed to the cold. The optimal plan would be to have a reasonably light coating of material over the whole field or as wide an area as possible. Any time that there is a pile or a denser layer, there would be the potential that potatoes on the bottom of the pile would be insulated by what's above, and may escape getting fully frozen. This would make them more likely to be a volunteer next year.

It's also easier if the ground is frozen to get the potatoes to the field. If we were doing this in April and the ground was thawed out and it was muddy, that can cause quite a bit of damage to the soil structure. It can lead to a lot of compaction, which then has long-term detriments to growing crops in those fields.

By destroying them in the winter, the potatoes will be barely visible by spring, and will actually provide some benefit to the soil. That potato material will start to break down quickly as the ground thaws, and as we get warmer temperatures, it'll just be nutrients back to the ground.

## **Are PEI potatoes sold across Canada?**

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We are very happy to send PEI Potatoes to other provinces in Canada if there is a demand for them! However, we also want to protect our fellow potato farmers across Canada by not flooding the market with too many potatoes and put immense downward pressure on pricing. We do NOT want one of the unintended outcomes of this situation to be damaging other farm families across Canada.

If you cannot find PEI Potatoes, we recommend contacting the produce manager at your local grocery store and asking for our potatoes.

## **Why can't I find potatoes at my local Sobeys in BC?**

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The proximity to other markets, and competition makes it hard for us to ship PEI potatoes to Western Canada. We have a desire to ship to Western Canada, and we know these customers have an appetite for our potatoes. It's for the same reasons that we can ship potatoes into the Eastern Seaboard when there are large potato growing areas in the US. We are not competitive on price due to the large shipping costs. If we are to ship lots of volume to Western markets, it will displace other Canadian potatoes that are already providing to those markets.

Because stocks are low in Western North America, we are working to send potatoes there as much as possible. With the low availability of trucks, and the large cost for transportation, it is proving to be difficult.

With that in mind, we hope that you'll see more in Western Canada until the end of the season, if our dealers can work through logistics and make our potatoes available at a competitive price.

## **Can surplus potatoes be used to get frozen food or starches?**

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We have extended some of the potatoes to these end uses, but the quantity is small in relation to the amount displaced by the border closure.

## **Can potatoes be used as Food-aid in other countries?**

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Potato consumption is expanding strongly in developing countries, where potato is an increasingly important source of food, employment and income.

From the perspective of traditional food aid programs, which buy or receive food from where it can be produced cheaply and efficiently and send it to where it is needed, potatoes have limitations. Because they spoil easily and are heavy to ship, groups like the World Food Program avoid them.

They are quite perishable, especially in hotter climates; they sprout and rot quite quickly. Although widely used in North America and other areas, potatoes are currently not a staple food in the majority of the countries in need. Food Aid destinations are often not able to accommodate large quantities of perishable products like potatoes. They are heavy and difficult to transport.

Food aid organizations have made it a priority to increase production of food for aid in the countries where it is needed, both to lessen transportation costs when fuel costs are high and to aid local economies.

## **Why can't PEI Potatoes find other markets to ship to?**

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Exporting to new markets requires contracts to be set in place. This is done before planting season even begins. Most other markets already have contracts set in place from other potato growers.

Due to their close proximity, the New England States and Puerto Rico make the perfect market for PEI Potatoes. Potatoes are fragile and heavy making shipping long distances costly and difficult.

Our growers/packers/dealers have been working for years on finding new markets, and we ship to over 20 countries in the world. No stone has been left unturned. To find additional markets, in a short time period, for such a large quantity of potatoes is almost impossible.

## Why is the US such an important market for PEI Potatoes?

Due to their close proximity, the New England States make the perfect market for PEI Potatoes. Potatoes are fragile and heavy, making shipping long distances costly and difficult.

Furthermore, these regions in the US do not grow very many of their own potatoes. Many of our Canadian provinces have their own markets that we do not want to infringe on.

## Are potatoes being distributed to food banks as opposed to being destroyed?

We are working with local and national food banks and as many people as possible to make sure those who are hungry get this food. But it is, sadly, just not possible to move this massive volume of fresh potatoes before it's too late. Potatoes are perishable food, and moving large volumes takes a considerable amount of time, planning and money.

Through the Surplus Potato Management Response Program, there will be an estimated 300 truckloads of potatoes shipped from coast to coast. This is approximately 18,000,000 pounds of potatoes, which is approximately 6% of the total lost sales due to the border closure. Potatoes will be distributed based on the availability of transportation and the need from the food banks. Potatoes will also be diverted to processors, packers, dehydrators and other markets. The act is part of an effort to distribute potatoes left sitting in PEI warehouses and to provide surplus potatoes to those facing food security challenges. Partners include Food Banks Canada, Second Harvest and the Salvation Army.

## How much of your total crop is affected by this ban?

The ban affects over 300 million pounds of potatoes - around 40% of our fresh market potatoes. However, each farmer is affected differently. For some, 100% of their crop goes to the US and the impact on these farms is devastating.

## Now the Puerto Rico border has opened? What's next?

We are hopeful that the continental US market will soon be open to PEI tablestock potatoes.

## What about the funding you received?

The provided funding was to cover the cost of destroying potatoes (in order to avoid any unwanted environmental consequences of the surplus). It was nowhere near enough to support our growers or cover the losses they will incur. There is also a tremendous amount of uncertainty for next season, and the losses will continue beyond this year.

## Why does action need to be taken immediately?

The US planting season is just weeks away. If PEI Potatoes do not enter the US market at this time, they will plant potatoes to make up for the loss. Without a US market, that means tougher decisions and times ahead for Island potato farmers and the whole potato industry across this country. This will change the potato market for the next 10 years and greatly affect what can be planted on PEI.

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