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PRESS RELEASE

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'Quarantine' to protect Alaska potato crop from imported disease

(Palmer, AK) – State agricultural officials are taking steps to protect Alaska's valuable potato industry against contamination from potatoes infected by viruses affecting Lower 48 growers.

"Alaska potatoes have a positive, well-deserved reputation at home and abroad for having very low disease incidence, and it's important that we protect that reputation in the face of potential threats from outside our state," said David W. Schade, Director of the Division of Agriculture.

With recent and ongoing outbreaks of potato viruses elsewhere in the country, some other U.S. states are now allowing export of seed potatoes in which up to 8 percent of the lot can carry a virus, yet still be labeled as "Certified". In Alaska, the "Certified" designation presumes less than 0.2 percent of a seed potato lot may be affected.

Schade is exercising his authority as state agriculture director and as the State Plant Quarantine Officer to impose a state quarantine on seed potato imports, restricting importation into Alaska of seed potatoes that do not meet Alaska's "Certified" designation standard.

This quarantine will address the current risk to the state potato industry posed by introduction of these diseases into Alaska's environment, until new regulations are drafted and implemented.

"We have to guard against some unsuspecting member of the public receiving infected seeds from somewhere outside of Alaska, then planting them at home or commercially," Schade said. "That represents an unacceptable risk of contaminating our Alaska potato crop and eroding the tremendous value it brings to our agricultural economy."

The director's quarantine takes effect at midnight on February 29. Anyone with questions on the quarantine is encouraged to contact the Alaska Division of Agriculture.

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