

On behalf of production agriculture, The Pennsylvania Cooperative Potato Growers, and the National Potato Council, I want to thank your distinguished Committee for seeking input from grass roots organizations on agriculture bio-security.

I am the eighth generation in my family to own and operate a farming operation in western Schuylkill County Pennsylvania. After receiving an Agricultural Engineering degree from the Pennsylvania State University, I worked for Procter and Gamble as a Project Engineer at a plant in Mehoopany, PA that converts hard wood trees into personal care paper products. In 1976, I joined and eventually purchased my families farming operation, Serman Masser Inc. Today this company farms 3600 acres of potatoes, hay and small grain crops. It also packages and distributes over 4600 truck loads annually of potatoes, onions, sweet potatoes and sweet corn to super market chain stores and food service providers in the Mid-Atlantic region.

In 2004, I developed and built a \$12 million potato processing facility, Keystone Potato Products LLC. This company converts raw potatoes into dehydrated potato products using landfill gas as its energy source for the steam used in the dehydration process.

The third company I operate as president is the Pennsylvania Co-Operative Potato Growers located in Harrisburg PA. Organized in 1922 this Co-Operative is a non-profit organization helping growers market their potatoes.

Nationally, I recently was the president of the National Potato Council an organization that provides a voice for the 6000 growers making up the US potato industry on trade, environmental and legislative issues. I also served as chairman of the US Potato Board a national promotional organization funded by all US potato growers to create demand for potatoes and potato products.

Regionally, I chair the agricultural advisory committee to the Susquehanna River Basin Commission. This committee provides input on agricultural issues relating to the mission of the SRBC.

Statewide, I serve on the board of directors of the Pennsylvania Vegetable growers association and on the PA Potato Research Program.

Locally, I chair the Hubley Township Board of Supervisors since 1977, I chair the Schuylkill County Farmland Preservation Board and serve on the Schuylkill-Carbon County PA Farm Bureau board of directors.

Both Serman Masser, Inc. and Keystone Potato Products use independent third party food safety programs to audit our food safety and bio-security practices. We are held accountable for traceability and chain of custody. With Keystone Potato Products being a food processing plant, customers such as ATEECO Foods and Campbell Soups require a HACAAP plan and an independent third party food safety audit program. With Serman Masser Inc. being a farming and fresh potato packaging company, the American Institute of Baking is used. SMI uses the program voluntarily as the food safety audit programs are not yet required by the retail chain stores being serviced. Many growers and shippers of fruits and vegetables in the Mid-Atlantic region are not involved in such programs and in the near future will be forced to do so

or loose their markets. Some state organizations such as the North Carolina Department of Agriculture have developed food safety audit programs and sell services to local grower shippers. It may be worth having an association such as the PA Coop contract with a Food Safety Audit provider and sell the services to it's members. This is being done by some sales organizations who are marketing national brands such as Green Giant and Dole Fresh. The costs of these programs ultimately need to be passed on to the consumer.

The role of government needs to be in the area of protecting the accidental or forceful introduction of pests, standardizing the crop protection chemicals allowed for imported foods and maintain those standards to equate to those used in the US. It needs to maintain programs such as the Golden Nematode program in NY to contain pests that have already been introduced into this country. We need to continue to fund research to help eradicate existing agricultural pests. This country's agricultural industry needs to enhance protection at it's borders from accidental and forceful introduction of agricultural pests. The Federal Government needs to keep emphasis on maintaining strong leadership at APHIS and provide additional training on plant and animal health issues to the Homeland Security Agency.

I believe the role of private industry should be to fund those demands created by market forces and let the level of standards be raised by competition and free enterprise. Government imposed programs need to be funded by government resources.

Thank you for allowing me to comment on this important topic.

Keith Masser