

IDAHO POTATO PULSE



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The following is an update on the inclusion of fresh potatoes in the WIC program from the National Potato Council:

Attached is a copy of the bipartisan letter co-authored by Congressmen Greg Walden (R, OR-2) and Gregory Meeks (D, NY-6) to Secretary Vilsack requesting the inclusion of potatoes in the WIC program. It was signed by 93 members of the U.S. House of Representatives—55 Republicans and 38 Democrats—and sent to Secretary Vilsack yesterday (July 2, 2012). In addition to the signatures included on the copy of the letter, a complete list of those who signed can be found on the attached Excel spreadsheet. You'll see from the list that you all deserve an enormous amount of credit for making this letter a success.

A joint press release from Reps. Walden and Meeks can also be found immediately below. Included in the press release is a link to a YouTube video that the Congressmen made advocating for potatoes in WIC. The video is under a minute in length. We encourage you to share all of these items far and wide with your industry and media contacts.

For Immediate Release
Monday, July 2, 2012
Contact: Andrew Malcolm or Candace Sandy
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Greg Walden and Gregory W. Meeks urge Agriculture Secretary to allow fresh, white potatoes to qualify for supplemental nutrition program

Walden and Meeks lead bipartisan coalition of 93 Members in the House to ask Secretary to preserve nutritious, low-cost fresh fruit and vegetable options for families

[Click here or on the image below to watch a message from Reps. Walden and Meeks](#)



[Click here to see a copy of the letter](#)

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. Reps. Greg Walden (R-Ore.) and Gregory W. Meeks (D-N.Y.) today announced a bipartisan effort calling on U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Tom Vilsack to reverse his department’s decision to ban fresh, white potatoes from the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) supplemental nutrition program.

“Fresh potatoes—especially those grown in Oregon—are loaded with nutrients, and WIC participants should be free to choose them as a healthy, low-cost way to feed their families. Excluding them from the WIC program sends the wrong signal about their nutritional value, and the Secretary should reconsider the department’s decision in the light of overwhelmingly bipartisan opposition,” said Rep. Walden.

“Fresh, white potatoes are a cornerstone of many freshly prepared, home-cooked meals around the country. WIC participants in New York’s sixth congressional district come from rich and diverse cultural backgrounds, and should be given the opportunity to choose how to feed their families. The WIC program should encourage a well-balanced variety in Americans’ diets, not restrict access to a single vegetable,” said Rep. Meeks.

The Oregon Potato Commission cheered the letter.

“With the stroke of a pen, Secretary Vilsack can make a commonsense correction and immediately close the loophole that excludes nutrient-rich fresh white potatoes from the WIC program. For too long, potato growers in Oregon and across the country have argued that adding our crop to the program would help participants stretch their household budgets and deliver nutrients their families require. We are encouraged that 93 Members of the House are helping us urge USDA to follow the latest dietary science and add fresh white potatoes to this important nutritional program,” said Marty Myers, Oregon Potato Commission Chairman and Western Business Manager of RD Offutt Company Farm Division.

The letter was signed by 93 members. The USDA is currently finalizing regulations for the supplemental nutrition program for Women, Infants, and Children. Fresh, white potatoes are the only fruit or vegetable excluded from the WIC program out of more than 2,200 in the marketplace.

According to USDA data, a medium white potato baked and eaten with the skin provides more folate—or folic acid—than cooked carrots or sweet potatoes. Folate is necessary for the production and maintenance of new cells, which is especially important during pregnancy.

Fresh, white potatoes are not only nutritious, they are economical. According to USDA data, at 10 cents per half-cup serving, boiled white potatoes are the cheapest fruit or vegetable available from the produce aisle.

The letter is part of a broader effort in the House to reverse USDA's proposal. On June 19, the House Appropriations Committee approved its fiscal year 2013 agriculture appropriations bill that included an amendment that would prevent the USDA from implementing its proposal to exclude white potatoes for one year.

- Kathy

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