



Kenneth J. Bertsch
State Seed Commissioner



January 23, 2025

Chairman Beltz and members of the House Agriculture Committee:

My name is Ken Bertsch and I serve the agriculture industry as State Seed Commissioner. I ask the Committee for your support for HB 1332, which if enacted will positively impact the seed and commercial potato industries in North Dakota.

As you know, our agency is responsible for the certification of all seed crops in North Dakota including potato. What may be unknown is that North Dakota certifies the most acres of field crops, and the second most acres of potato seed in the U.S. On average, North Dakota growers certify 12,500-13,500 acres of potato each year over the past five years, down from 18-20,000 acres twenty years ago. There are a number of factors influencing this decrease, including lessening demand, high cost/risk and better per-acre yields. Our seed growers supply seed for all three sectors of the ND commercial industry: process, chip and table-stock potato.

The announcement of the Agristo project in Grand Forks means that our seed potato industry will (potentially) benefit in the same manner as the commercial production sector. Seed growers will explain that potato seed production can be estimated by a factor of 10X; in other words, it takes approximately 100 acres of seed to produce enough planting stock to produce 1000 commercial acres. While this is a rough calculation, it is reasonably close for estimating purposes.

The Agristo project estimates 30,000 acres (+/-) of commercial potato production in early phases of operation, and up to 45,000 acres in subsequent years. If these estimates hold true, rough math suggests the need for 3000 to 4500 acres of needed seed production in this region. Based on observations and discussions with relevant parties over the past 2 years, I would suggest that the majority of that seed production will occur in North Dakota.

If these estimates hold true, North Dakota's seed potato industry could grow by 20-35% over today's figures. In an industry that varies by the low single-digits from year to year, and has been in decline for decades, this is an amazing number. In an industry that has lost 30-40 percent of its growers over the past 20 years, we could possibly increase that number along with increasing acres in production. In an industry that spends \$3000-\$5000 per acre producing a crop, more rough math suggests an economic impact to seed growers of \$10-20 million dollars and triple that amount to the ag industry and local communities throughout North Dakota.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Agristo project and HB 1332; this is the most positive development in the potato seed sector in years. The potential positive impact on the entire agriculture industry is equally profound. I respectfully request that the Agriculture Committee support a Do Pass for HB 1332 and value-added agriculture facility incentive funding.

"To assure integrity of the seed industry through a commitment to client service and product quality."