



## NEWS RELEASE

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# Tomorrow's Leaders Trained at 2017 Potato Industry Leadership Institute

The 2017 Potato Industry Leadership Institute (PILI) provided training to 22 potato growers and industry representatives in leadership development, public policy, marketing, team building and public communication. The annual program, administered by the National Potato Council (NPC) and Potatoes USA, aims to cultivate the next generation of industry leaders. The PILI was held February 9-16, starting in Bangor and Aroostook County, Maine, and concluding in Washington, D.C.

In Maine, the class received an overview of the local and national potato industry. Northern Maine potato grower Dominic LaJoie, NPC Vice President of Environmental Affairs, provided details on the Maine growing season. A PILI alumnus, LaJoie also spoke on how the program has benefited him as a grower and NPC leader.

John Toaspern of Potatoes USA presented marketing insights, retail sales and the changes in consumer eating habits. He highlighted good news with world potato demand and potential new markets.

The participants toured local chipping producers Crane Brothers Farm. The class inspected their state-of-the-art storage facility and asked questions about crop rotations and production cycles.

A visit to McCain Foods showed where millions of pounds of fries, hash browns, and other frozen potato products are processed. Participants stopped in the onsite lab which regularly tests raw product for optimum color and quality. More than one-third of Aroostook County's potatoes end up at this processor.

Another learning experience was touring Maine's Early Generation Nuclear Seed Facility. The facility uses tissue culture and the latest hydroponic growing techniques to produce disease-free and virus-free mini tubers.

The Maine trip concluded with a visit to the U.S.-Canada border to hear from U.S. Customs and Border Protection on the movement of plants and animals between countries. One goal of these gatekeepers is to prevent pests and diseases from entering the U.S.

During the Washington, D.C, segment, attendees demonstrated their culinary skills at a cook-off held to show the healthiness, convenience and diversity of cooking with potatoes. Participants created unique appetizers targeted at busy food enthusiasts.

The rest of the week featured public policy experts who explained the legislative and regulatory priorities of the U.S. potato industry. Attendees then practiced how to effectively deliver key messages to Congress. To culminate the week, the class put their sharpened communication skills into use during lobbying visits to Capitol Hill. Participants partnered with their state grower delegations to deliver the industry's messages.

Travis Meacham of Moses Lake, Wash., a graduate of the 2016 class, served as the group's Grower-Leader. "The PILI program last year gave me a strong foundation for returning to help this class maximize their experience. I saw how each participant advanced his or her leadership skills and became more invested in the potato industry," said Meacham.

At the conclusion of the event, the 2017 class elected Chad Platt of Kennewick, Wash., to serve as the 2018 Grower-Leader.

The Institute is made possible each year through a major sponsorship from Syngenta and a supporting sponsorship from Farm Credit.



*Participants in the 2017 Potato Industry Leadership Institute: (front row, left to right): Lucas Wysocki, Wisconsin Rapids, WI; Jay LaJoie, Van Buren, ME; Lynn Dickman, Hancock, WI; Lindsey Dodgen, Denver, CO; Suzanne Price, Washington, DC; Lyla Davis, Monte Vista, CO; Brant Darrington, Declo, ID; Matthew Skogman, Foster City, MI; (second row): Braden Lake, Rupert, ID; Mike Larson, Rupert, ID; Sander Dagen, Karstad, MN; Russ Kehl, Quincy, WA; Nate Lancaster, Connell, WA; Jared Smith, Blanca, CO; Kelly Kuball, Bakersfield, CA; (third row): Chad Platt, Kennewick, WA; Nathan Bula, Oxford, WI; Travis Meacham, Moses Lake, WA; Paul Streich, Kalispell, MT; David Fedje, Crystal, ND; and Scott Fenters, Klamath Falls, OR (not pictured: Jordan Reed, WA)*

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*The National Potato Council is the advocate for the economic well-being of U.S. potato growers on federal legislative, regulatory, environmental, and trade issues. NPC supports the U.S. potato industry by monitoring issues affecting the strength and viability of the potato industry, influencing regulators and legislators on issues crucial to the industry's long term success, ensuring fair market access for potatoes and potato products, and bringing the unique issues and interests of diverse growing regions in the U.S. together on a national level.*

*Potatoes USA is the nation's potato marketing and research organization. Based in Denver, Colorado, Potatoes USA represents more than 2,500 potato growers and handlers across the country. Potatoes USA was established in 1971 by a group of potato growers to promote the benefits of eating potatoes. Today, as the largest vegetable commodity board, Potatoes USA is proud to be recognized as an innovator in the produce industry.*