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**PATRICK TESTIN**  
STATE SENATOR

*Op-Ed: The Fight Against Blight*

When I was young, my father taught me to be proud of my Irish heritage. I learned the history of the Irish in America, and about the unfortunate events that caused the mass Irish migration to the United States.

In the 1840s, famine struck Ireland, taking one million lives and causing another one million people to flee to other countries. The cause of that famine was potato blight, a problem that still affects the lives of farmers today. Thankfully, modern farmers in Central and Western Wisconsin don't see blight cause devastation on that scale. Nevertheless, it is still a problem that has the potential to eat away at our food supply and at the livelihoods of Wisconsin farmers. That is why I am proposing a bill that will help in the fight to eradicate potato blight.

The proposal, which I am authoring with Senator Jerry Petrowski (Marathon) and Representative John Spiros (Marshfield), uses scientific information provided by Dr. Amanda Gevens, the Associate Professor and Extension Specialist of Potato and Vegetable Pathology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, to set new timetables for farmers dealing with blight.

Knowledge about the life cycle of blight is the driving force behind our proposed changes. Blight is caused by a pathogen that forms spores, which are then spread by the air. It takes only a few days for the pathogen to complete its life cycle, which leads to more spores and a compounding of the problem. Current law allows too much time to pass between the discovery of blight and its treatment or eradication, potentially allowing it to escape containment, affect the crops of surrounding farmers, and exact a heavy financial toll on the region.

Under our proposal, blighted potatoes must be treated within 24 hours of the issuance of a treatment order by the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) in order to stop spore production. In unfortunate cases, when an affected crop has to be eliminated, action would have to take place within 72 hours of DATCP's decision.

In developing this piece of legislation, I worked with colleagues in the state capitol as well as members of both the scientific and agricultural communities. I believe that by taking a balanced, evidence based approach to the problem, we've come up with a plan that will protect farmers in Central Wisconsin from this centuries old scourge. I am proud that this is my first proposal, and I look forward to continuing to work with people of diverse backgrounds and skills to address the challenges that we face in Central Wisconsin. If you have any ideas for legislation, please contact my office at [Sen.Testin@legis.wi.gov](mailto:Sen.Testin@legis.wi.gov), and let's work on solutions together.