The goal of potato growers is to produce a high-yielding, high-quality crop that is safe for consumption. Animal bones, a foreign material, are a food safety risk, and fields that have bones in the soil are not suitable for potato production.

Figure 1. Composted turkey piled in a field containing bones. (Photo by Robinson)
The recent highly pathogenic Avian influenza has resulted in millions of birds being composted. This compost can be attractive to farmers because it provides organic matter and a nutrient source. However, if the compost contains any size of bone, those fields should not be planted to potatoes until the bones have been decomposed completely.

Bones in the soil may result in potato tubers growing around bones and/or bones being dug at harvest and piled with potato tubers. If bones are found in a potato lot, they are costly to remove, pose a food safety risk and likely will cause rejection of the entire potato field.

Prior to selecting a field to lease or buy for potato production, conduct a careful analysis of the field history to ensure that the soil does not contain bones or other foreign material such as cans, glass, golf balls, plastic, tools, rocks, wire and wood. This can be done in many ways, such as talking to neighbors and previous growers, looking at historical aerial images of the field and/or testing the soil.

Planting potatoes in fields without foreign material is an important first step to producing a high-quality and safe food product.

Selected Reference

Figure 2. Piles of composted turkey with bones staged for spreading in the field. (Photo by Robinson)