

# Bones are Bad in Potato Production

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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)

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When any type of highly pathogenic avian influenza or other cause of death results in many birds being composted, this compost is often spread on agricultural fields. Poultry compost is attractive to farmers because it is low in cost, provides organic matter, and supplies nutrients. However, if a field is spread with compost containing any bones, it should not be planted to potatoes until the bones have been completely decomposed.

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 pose a food safety risk, are costly to remove, and will almost certainly 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 produce a high-quality and safe food product.

### Selected Reference

Olsen, N and B Geary. 2002. Managing foreign material for quality Idaho potatoes. University of Idaho Extension CIS 1104. Online at <http://extension.uidaho.edu/kiimberly/files/2013/04/cis11041.pdf>



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

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