



WASHINGTON STATE POTATO COMMISSION  
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June 9, 2025

**RE: Comments on Amendments to Chapter 173-443 WAC – Hydrofluorocarbon Rulemaking (Refrigerants and Cold Storage)**

The Washington State Potato Commission (WSPC) represents over 300 growers, fresh potato shippers and processors who collectively produce approximately **24% of the nation's potatoes**, contributing more than **\$8.8 billion annually to Washington's economy**. We submit the following comments in response to the Department of Ecology's proposed amendments to WAC 173-443, which regulate the use of high global warming potential (GWP) refrigerants in stationary refrigeration systems.

**1. Cold Storage Warehouses Should Receive Sector-Specific Consideration**

Potatoes require **precise and long-term temperature control** to maintain quality throughout storage and market distribution. Unlike retail refrigeration systems, potato storage warehouses operate **at scale, seasonally, and with crop-specific constraints**. These systems are not readily interchangeable with retail equipment and often involve **custom-engineered, high-capacity units**.

**Recommendation:**

We urge Ecology to create a **distinct category or sub-exemption** within WAC 173-443 for **agricultural cold storage**, specifically for:

- Bulk vegetable and root crop storage (e.g., potatoes)
- Facilities where refrigeration equipment operates seasonally and may not meet the commercial load patterns of retail food systems

**2. Transition Timelines Are Not Realistic for Agricultural Operators**

The current compliance deadline of **January 1, 2025** for new cold storage equipment with refrigerants over 150 GWP, and **2029 for retrofits**, may be feasible for some sectors, but poses substantial challenges for agricultural producers:

- **Extended procurement and installation timelines** for compliant systems
- **Cost barriers**, especially for independent and family-run farms
- Limited availability of **low-GWP alternatives** that perform reliably at sub-50°F storage temperatures required for potatoes

**Recommendation:**

Extend the compliance deadline for agricultural cold storage facilities by **at least 24–36 months**, or until:

- Suitable refrigerant options are certified and available for this application
- Utility or agency-based incentive programs are in place to help with conversion costs

**3. Clarify and Streamline the Exemption Process**

The rule includes an exemption process under WAC 173-443-050. However, the process is vague and resource-intensive. Many potato operations are **not traditional retail businesses** and may not be familiar with Ecology's regulatory structures.

**Recommendation:**

- Create **guidance specifically for agricultural cold storage operators**, including eligibility checklists, sample documentation, and technical contacts
- Ensure the exemption process considers **seasonal timing**, such as harvest and shipping schedules
- Provide **technical and financial assistance** to applicants needing to transition

**4. Labeling and Reporting Burden Should Be Scaled to Risk and Facility Type**

The proposed labeling and online disclosure rules may impose **disproportionate compliance burdens** on growers with limited administrative resources, particularly if their systems are managed by third-party refrigeration companies.

**Recommendation:**

Allow an exemption or simplified compliance process for:

- Growers using existing systems with no retrofit or expansion
- Facilities that maintain strict leak detection and refrigerant management practices

**5. Washington Agriculture Supports Climate Goals—but Needs Flexibility to Succeed**

Washington's potato industry is **committed to sustainability** and has significantly reduced water use, energy consumption, and emissions over the last two decades. However, any refrigeration rule should reflect the **realities of farm operations**, avoid unintended food supply chain disruptions, and ensure that compliance pathways are both **practical and equitable**.

We respectfully request that Ecology engage further with agricultural stakeholders before finalizing these rules. The Washington potato sector stands ready to work with the Department to ensure an environmentally sound and economically sustainable transition to next-generation refrigerants.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matt Harris', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Matt Harris

Assistant Executive Director & Director of Governmental Affairs  
Washington State Potato Commission