

Figure 1. (A) Typical "shot-hole" feeding damage to potato leaves by adults and (B) furrowed tubers by larvae of the potato flea beetle (*Epitrix* spp.).

Potato flea beetles (*Epitrix* spp.) are native to North America and can cause serious damage to potato crops. The adults feed on foliage producing characteristic "shot-hole" appearance to leaves, while larvae feed on roots and tubers (Fig. 1).

It is this larval damage to the tubers that has a major impact on the appearance and quality of potatoes, which may render them unmarketable.

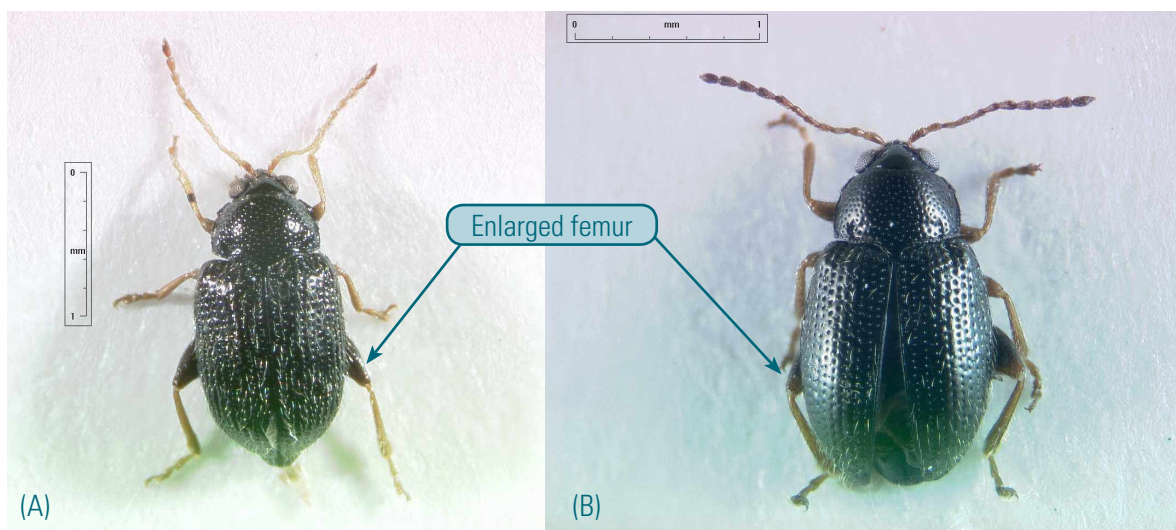
Recently, two *Epitrix* species have been recorded in Portugal and Spain, from which ware potatoes may be imported into Northern Ireland.

While potato yields in Portugal have been largely unaffected, the economic value of the potatoes has been reduced. In addition, the damage caused by larval feeding may affect tuber storage capability.

Potato flea beetles complete their development on plants belonging to the family *Solanaceae*, but the adults may feed on a wide range of unrelated plants.

Adults of the two *Epitrix* species are similar in appearance, being dark brown/black (1.5 - 2.0 mm) with a characteristic enlarged femur on one of the hind legs (Fig. 2). This enables them to jump, particularly when disturbed.

Figure 2. Adult potato flea beetles
(A) *E. cucumeris*
(B) *E. papa*
N.B.enlarged femur.
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It is essential to avoid introduction of this pest and potato growers and processors must be vigilant to ensure early detection.

If you notice any of the symptoms above or find a suspect beetle, please contact DARD Plant Health Inspection Branch at planthealth@dardni.gov.uk or by phoning 0300 200 7847 or AFBI at the address above.