



POTATOES USA HOSTS MEXICO REVERSE TRADE MISSION

Seventeen importers, distributors and retailers from Mexico met with U.S. farmers and shippers

By Joe Kertzman, managing editor, Badger Common'Tater

Fresh potatoes imported into Mexico. It's been a long, hard-fought battle to get U.S. fresh potatoes past the 26-kilometer border zone and further into Mexico.

More than two years after celebrating the Mexican Supreme Court's unanimous ruling in favor of allowing U.S. fresh potato imports, the first shipments crossed into Mexico on

May 11, 2022.

The U.S. federal government fought for years to restore access to this vital market. The successful crossing signaled the start of Mexico's process to restore full market access for U.S. fresh potatoes after decades of disputes and legal obstructions.

Fast forward to today, and Potatoes USA hosted a Mexico/U.S. Fresh Potato Reverse Trade Mission, October 3-6, beginning and ending at its corporate offices in Denver, Colorado, and including a trip to the fertile San Luis Valley potato producing area.

The Reverse Trade Mission (RTM), which included 17 importers, distributors, and retailers from Mexico, focused on U.S. fresh potatoes in response to the opening of the border for trade.

Potatoes USA staff members Kayla Dome, Tiffany Thompson, Caitlin Roberts, and Blair Richardson coordinated the event, gave

Above: Importers, distributors, and retailers from Mexico pose with freshly harvested Centennial Russet potatoes at Three S. Ranch Inc. in the San Luis Valley of Colorado. The farm tour was part of the Potatoes USA Mexico/U.S. Fresh Potato Reverse Trade Mission, October 3-6, 2022.



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presentations, and welcomed guests to the Potatoes USA offices in Denver.

"This office was designed not to sell potatoes, but with the idea of giving consumers an experience that people have with potatoes," Richardson, the chief executive officer of Potatoes USA, said. "A modern kitchen and state-of-the-art audio/visual system enhance the experience."

INCREASE CONSUMPTION

"We have an opportunity to increase consumption of potatoes in Mexico, whether from Wisconsin, Colorado, Idaho or elsewhere, and demand for all potatoes," he added.

"What sets U.S. potatoes apart?" asked Thompson, the international foodservice marketing manager at Potatoes USA. "U.S. potatoes are high quality, with end-to-end consistency, and that combined with industry leadership and strict governmental oversight is what sets them apart."

"U.S. product variety includes fresh,

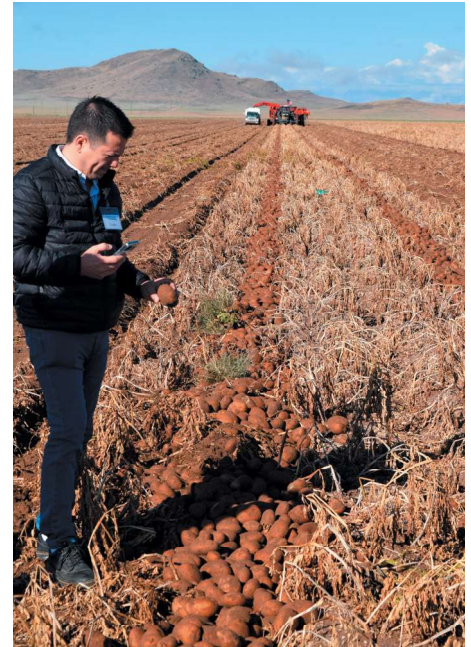
frozen and dehydrated potatoes," she said, "including fresh russets, reds, whites, yellows, purple potatoes, fingerlings and petites."

Farmers and shippers from Colorado, Idaho, Washington, and Wisconsin, the latter including David Wickline and Wendy Dykstra from Alsum Farms & Produce, in Friesland, joined the RTM to garner as much information as they could about trade in Mexico.

Such included the types of fresh and chipping potatoes industry representatives from Mexico are seeking, to gauge the market and learn about import opportunities, challenges, regulations and more.

INTERACT WITH BUYERS

"I have enjoyed this mission very much. I got to learn more about shipping potatoes to Mexico and being able to interact with buyers from Mexico has been a wonderful experience," said Wickline, the sales



Alfredo Lopez Prandini of Papas Costena (Potatoes from the Coast) holds a newly harvested Centennial Russet potato at Three S. Ranch in Colorado. Alfredo was one of 17 importers, distributors, and retailers from Mexico to take part in the Potatoes USA Reverse Trade Mission.

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and new business development manager for Alsum Farms & Produce.

“In my past life, I sold products into Mexico, and at times, it can be difficult to find a potential customer

for your products,” he added. “Potatoes USA has made it much easier to find potential customers with this program, and I look forward to once again doing business in Mexico.”

Left: Visitors from Mexico to the Potatoes USA offices, which include a state-of-the-art kitchen, got the chance to taste russet potatoes prepared three ways by Chef Vince Armada (back right).

Above & Below: The trade show allowed U.S. growers and shippers, such as David Wickline and Wendy Dykstra of Alsum Farms & Produce, shown here, to meet one-on-one with retailers, importers, and distributors from Mexico.

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The trade mission focused on three main areas: a farm tour, trade show for the industry to meet with visitors

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from Mexico, and a retail store tour. The trade show portion was a new tactic for this type of event.

Guests visited the Three S. Ranch Inc. potato farm and the operation's Blanca Potato LLC packing shed in the San Luis Valley to observe harvest and tour storage facilities and the packing house.

IMPRESSIVE TECHNOLOGY

Their visit to the high-desert, mountainous potato producing region went well, with guests from Mexico and the United States being impressed by the technology involved in harvesting and packaging potatoes for distribution.

"From Colorado, about 10 percent of all potatoes harvested go to Mexico," Jim Ehrlich, executive director of the Colorado Potato Administrative Committee, said during the farm tour.

"The U.S. wants to expand its fresh potato exports into Mexico in a controlled manner and with the very

"The U.S. wants to expand its fresh potato exports into Mexico in a controlled manner and with the very best quality potatoes that we have."

– Jim Ehrlich, executive director of the Colorado Potato Administrative Committee

best quality potatoes that we have," Ehrlich stressed.

"We want to grow the market in Mexico with people there eating more potatoes," he remarked. "It will be better for everyone. Potatoes are inexpensive. We can grow demand and feed people."

"Farmers are adaptable," added Jared Smith of Three S. Ranch. "We can grow variety. We'd love to grow more yellows—they grow well on our farm—but we need to meet demand

and build long-term relationships while encouraging varietal development."

By allowing visitors to observe the harvest and packaging process, they could see how much care goes into getting the right potatoes onto the shelves in the United States and across the border.

Potatoes USA and in-country representatives Grupo PM gave presentations focusing on the quality and advantages of U.S.-grown

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potatoes and what promotional opportunities are available to help sell them through importers, distributors, and retailers in Mexico.

The trade show allowed U.S. growers and shippers to meet one-on-one with retailers, importers, and distributors from Mexico, build relationships and have conversations aimed at increasing trade. Guests



The harvest operation was on full display for visitors from Mexico touring Three S. Ranch in Colorado, including windrowing, loading, unloading, sorting, grading, and packaging of potatoes.



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said they appreciated the format and felt it was beneficial for their businesses.

RETAIL DEMOGRAPHICS

The retail tour gave a comprehensive overview of specialty, mass-merchandise, and traditional grocery stores in the Denver area, which proved helpful in seeing how the different retailers display fresh potatoes based on the demographics of the area and their customers.

It was beneficial to have diverse representation from the United States, including growers, shippers, and state organizations from across the country, to interact directly with those with whom they will be doing business.

In the future, Potatoes USA plans to add a trade show element to future RTMs, complementing the farm and retail store tours for visitors and U.S. suppliers to see the potential for global potato trade.

According to a National Potato Council (NPC) press release, two-way trade in food and agricultural products between the United States and Mexico reached a record \$63 billion in 2021, and the strong relationship between the North American neighbors has been further enhanced by the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement.

Mexico is the largest export market for U.S. potatoes and products valued

at \$394 million in 2021, according to the NPC.

Despite the prior restriction to the 26-kilometer border region, Mexico is the second-largest market for fresh potato exports, accounting for 124,449 metric tons valued at \$60 million in 2021.

The U.S. potato industry estimates

Above: The retail tour gave a comprehensive overview of specialty, mass-merchandise, and traditional grocery stores in the Denver area, including Sprouts Farmers Market and Trade Joe’s where these photos were taken.

that access to the entire country for fresh U.S. potatoes will provide a market potential of \$250 million per year, in five years. **BCT**

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