

Thai Chefs Embrace Message of U.S. Potato Variety and Versatility

In Thailand, U.S. potato products are significantly disadvantaged by high import tariffs, making it one of the more challenging Asian markets in which to promote U.S. potatoes. Competition is created by low-priced products from the EU and duty-free access for products from Australia, New Zealand and China. However, a strong focus by Potatoes USA on education and promotion has helped chefs in Thailand see U.S. potatoes as top-quality products that make an ideal canvas for new menu introductions. This is helping ensure that U.S. potato products continue to feature prominently on menus in the country.

Using MAP funding, Potatoes USA's marketing program first uses chef workshops and seminars to introduce chefs to the wide variety of U.S. potato products available and inspire multi-cultural applications for new and familiar potato products. For some educational activities, Potatoes USA has found it valuable to make it a condition of seminar participation that the participants introduce a new item after the event. Then, the potato program has supported the launch of the new menu items via tie-in promotions, which help build product loyalty by showing participants the additional profits new potato items can garner. During the July 2015-June 2016 marketing year, this tactic resulted in 18 new launches by restaurants participating in the potato industry's seminars and promotions, and the current year looks to be equally successful. So far during the first quarter of the July 2016-June 2017 marketing year, four restaurants have added five new menu items using U.S. frozen or dehydrated potatoes as a result of participating in Potatoes USA activities. The new launches include:

- In September, Siwilai Café added U.S. curly fries to their new menu alongside U.S. wedge potatoes after their initial experience with U.S. fries through FAS' U.S. Burger Festival. They are serving the curly fries with dips as an appetizer dish.
- Popular eatery Jim's Burger showed its loyalty to U.S. potatoes when it added two more U.S. frozen specialty cuts to their menu in August 2016. These serve both as side dishes for their burger menus and as standalone U.S. fry dishes. They became new users of U.S. fries two years as participants in Potatoes USA's "All Burgers Love U.S. Fries" tie-in promotion, launching two U.S. specialty cuts at that time.
- Audrey Café, a chain of 7 outlets, began using U.S. dehydrated potatoes in July for the mashed potato dishes on its menu. The company had participated in a U.S. mashed potato workshop last marketing year.
- Pepper Lunch, a popular 'fast-steak' restaurant franchise from Japan, also began using U.S. dehydrated potatoes to prepare mashed potatoes for the first time in July. The decision by the 16-outlet chain was a direct result of attending a Potatoes USA mashed potato training course for chefs and restaurant owners.