

## **CHEF SEMINARS INCREASE U.S. POTATO PRESENCE IN VIETNAM**

A series of tailored chef seminars conducted by Potatoes USA in Vietnam is introducing new products to the market and new foodservice operators to U.S. frozen potatoes. So far this year, two restaurant chains and one importer/distributor have begun making new U.S. purchases after attending the chef seminars. New usage by these companies translates into more than 1 metric ton/month in new exports due to this activity.

Potatoes USA's chef seminars are funded by USDA's Market Access Program and are part of an overall foodservice trade education program. The goal of the seminars is to spark new usage by introducing participants to the wide variety of frozen potato products and to broaden their appeal by demonstrating new ways of using U.S. potatoes. The seminars also educate participants regarding the high quality, consistency and other benefits of U.S. frozen potato products versus competitors' products. These seminars work in conjunction with other activities such as trade visits, technical training, promotions and special events such as FAS trade show/reception participation, all of which help showcase why U.S. frozen potato products provide more value and better quality than fries from other sources.

This strong focus on trade education is vital in Vietnam, which is a young and dynamic market where the foodservice industry is developing rapidly, and opportunity for potato sales are still in the early development stages. Many foodservice operators still lack a full awareness of the wide variety and versatility of U.S. potatoes and products they could utilize in their operations to generate more sales. Since the major competitor, the European Union, offers frozen potato products at a sizable discount to U.S. frozen potatoes, it is crucial to help chefs and others understand why they should buy U.S. potatoes and how loyal U.S. customers benefit from U.S. products and services.

Seminar results include the following:

- In December 2016, New Viet Dairy (NVD) began importing and distributing frozen mashed potatoes for the first time in Vietnam. It carried the product at the request of restaurants and foodservice chains who learned about it through a tailored chef seminar. It also demonstrates the value of creating internal demand among foodservice operators to create pull-through for new products.
- In January 2017, a local buffet chain and family dining restaurant called Dinky switched from EU fries to U.S. coated fries. The switch was sparked by attendance at a December chef seminar where they learned about the benefits of U.S. coated fries' long holding time. Dinky, which is the first Vietnamese buffet chain to serve U.S. coated fries, has estimated usage at about 1 metric ton a month.
- In February 2017, Cowboy Jack, a 7-outlet Western-style food chain, launched a U.S. frozen potato dish using a new U.S. frozen product – half-shell cuts – after attending a Potatoes USA tailored seminar. The half-shell cuts increase the overall usage of U.S. frozen potatoes by the chain, which also serves U.S. wedges and straight cuts. Initial usage of the new half-shell product is around 30 cases per month.

These gains, along with additional successes achieved through other activities in the foodservice trade education program, contributed to strong export growth to Vietnam this fiscal year. During July 2016-March 2017, the U.S. exported 4,449 metric tons in frozen potato

products, valued at \$5.3 million. This is a jump of 72% by volume and 83% by value compared with the first three quarters of the previous fiscal year. It is worth noting that during this timeframe, the average price of U.S. frozen fries per MT was 46% higher than the level of EU fries per MT. The fact that the Potatoes USA program continues to convince foodservice operators to make new purchases of higher-value specialty frozen products – and to convince EU customers to switch to U.S. products – demonstrates the value of a strong marketing presence.