

Guatemala Program Marks First Successful Commercial Seed Sale

In March 2017, a commercial shipment of U.S. seed potatoes was sold in Guatemala for the first time in more than 70 years. Although small, the sale -- comprising \$5,700 worth of fresh market varieties -- is hoped to mark the beginning of Guatemala's status as a new commercial market for U.S. seed potato growers.

This first commercial sales of U.S. seed potatoes was made possible by the efforts of Potatoes USA variety trials and its seed program, which introduces U.S. seed varieties and facilitates business connections between U.S. growers/exporters and international buyers -- and also by funding from the USDA's Emerging Markets Program (EMP), Market Access Program (MAP) and Quality Samples Program (QSP).

Potatoes USA initiated a seed marketing program in Guatemala approximately two years ago, targeting the Central American country due to its substantial potential for seed sales. Guatemala is a large market with a growing population and significant potato production and consumption, and the U.S. has exported small amounts of chip-stock seed potatoes to the country in the recent past. A Potatoes USA market assessment conducted in February 2015 with funding from an EMP grant showed a great opportunity to carve out a new market for U.S. seed potato exports. The country has a farming industry reliant on older potato varieties with waning production and some disease pressure, but no other seed potato import competition. It appeared that U.S. seed varieties could help Guatemalan growers meet expanding demand for table-stock and chip-stock by providing much-needed yield improvements and variety disease resistance. The key appeared to be identifying varieties that performed well in the country's potato-growing regions. Also, Potatoes USA needed to prove U.S. seeds' worth to importers and growers, and overcome the average farmer's reluctance to purchase imported seed potatoes due to cost. In addition, because Guatemalan growers do not normally cut seed as in the U.S., they required education on how to cut seed properly, a technique that can also save money.

During the July 2015-June 2016 and July 2016-June 2017 marketing years, Potatoes USA utilized the EMP to carry out visits to Guatemalan fields to carry out planting and trials of U.S. varieties. QSP funding provided the seed samples for the trials, while MAP funding sponsored technical training for Guatemalans to learn more about U.S. seed and seed cutting techniques, and also aided Guatemalan growers, importers and officials to come to the U.S. to attend a seed symposium and visit seed growing operations in California, Washington and Oregon. Activities have generated considerable interest in both the trials and in commercial sales, although an earlier 2016 commercial sale was postponed. To date, Potatoes USA has initiated its third trial in two years, with early results showing good yields and potential for many of the varieties tested. As of August 2017, the commercial seed that was sent to Guatemala has been harvested and sold without any problems in the market.

