

Indonesian Potato Festival Inspires Chefs to See Potato Possibilities

U.S. frozen and dehydrated potatoes are fast becoming an all-purpose ingredient for restaurants in Indonesia, thanks to an MAP-funded activity that successfully launched U.S. potatoes into new dishes and cuisines. Potatoes USA sponsored an “East Java U.S. Potatoes Festival” this fall that sparked immediate new sales for U.S. potatoes, while setting the stage for future growth by expanding the types of restaurants and dishes that feature them.

With the goal of increasing U.S. potato menu opportunities among both current and new channel users, Potatoes USA utilized MAP funding to first carry out a seminar and cooking demonstration for restaurants, highlighting the range and versatility of U.S. potato products. Chefs for participating restaurants were then challenged to be at their most creative in introducing new menu dishes that featured U.S. potatoes. The festival, which ran during July-September 2017, included a contest that rewarded the most innovative and top-selling recipes.

Thanks to the festival, 56 restaurants in Indonesia created and promoted 85 new menu items featuring U.S. potatoes. This included eight restaurants that were brand new users and a wide variety of restaurants encompassing Western, Indonesian, Chinese, Japan, Korean and Thai food. Participants reported overall sales increases of 10-15% during the August – September promotion period. Even though these are typically slow sales months in Indonesia, local importers and distributors reported an uptick of 17% in their potato product sales during the promotion’s timeframe. Although the closing date for the festival was September 30, some restaurants had such good success with their promotions that they extended them into October.

Dishes launched during the festival showed the foodservice industry’s growing awareness of U.S. potato products’ versatility. Winning entries included frozen potatoes as the centerpiece in Pecel Semanggi (a traditional local salad) and other local dishes such as Chicken Thom Yum (a popular variety of soup). Mashed potatoes from U.S. dehy turned up in popular dumpling recipes such as Ronde (a sweet version of dumpling) and a Black Sesame Seed fried dumpling dish. The dishes demonstrated that U.S. potatoes have left their traditional role as a side dish in Western-style restaurants far behind. New menu items featured potatoes as appetizers, main meals, desserts and even beverages. Instead of ketchup, potatoes were topped with Satay sauce, curry sauces and various local and regional flavors.

This is the fifth year for this promotional event by Potatoes USA, with the activity evolving every year to encompass new U.S. potato products, new types of foodservice companies and new geographical areas. It began five years ago as the Surabaya Fries Festival 2012, when 25 restaurants in the East Java capital of Surabaya competed to develop the most creative and popular new dish using U.S. frozen potatoes. In 2016, the promotion was expanded to Malang, the second largest city in East Java, and broadened to include U.S. dehydrated potatoes as an ingredient. This year, four cities in East Java participated, including Surabaya, Malang, Sidoarjo and Gresik.

By broadening the channels and uses of U.S. potatoes every year, the new menu launches contributed to export growth. During the July 2016-June 2017 marketing year, exports of U.S. frozen and dehydrated potatoes hit a record \$24.2 million, up from the \$15.2 million they totaled the first year of the festival. During the current marketing year, exports are continuing to grow, with frozen potato exports up 41% to \$5.6 million and dehy potato exports up 62% to \$900,850 during July-September 2017.

