

New Fresh Potato Importer in Panama Strengthens Marketing Efforts

Company by company, Potatoes USA is creating new sales for U.S. fresh table-stock potatoes in Central America, where lack of knowledge regarding U.S. potatoes' quality and varieties, as well as competition from cheaper local and regional sources, have limited exports in the past. Among the latest successes is a new importer gained in Panama this past fall as a result of MAP-funded trade servicing. The importer has so far purchased two containers of U.S. Russet potatoes in September and November 2017. New importers help strengthen the distribution network in the market and complement education work being done with the retail trade and consumers.

Panama represents a developing market where U.S. fresh potatoes are beginning to gain a good foothold. Potatoes USA identified and repeatedly visited distributor Raul Pineda, an importer of fruits and vegetables with more than 12 years of experience in the market and a nationwide distribution among retail clients. Visits helped to educate the company regarding the quality, benefits and varieties of U.S. fresh potatoes. After several visits, the company asked Potatoes USA to forward a trade lead to identify a U.S. potato supplier, resulting in the importation of their first container of fresh potatoes. Within 15 days the initial purchase was already fully accounted for and distributed to their customers. The company plans to continue regular purchases every two or three months.

By providing retailers with an additional source to buy U.S. fresh table-stock potatoes, Potatoes USA trade servicing is helping ensure that its retailer education/promotion activities, and consumer education activities, are more likely to succeed. So far this year, U.S. exports of fresh potatoes to Panama have jumped 28% to 1,356 metric tons during July-December 2017. By value, they rose 32% to \$638,261 during July-December 2017.