

Spuds & Suds Pairing Drives New Potato Menus around the Globe

Spuds are being paired with beer from around the world, and locals are loving it. From crispy pommes frites and craft beer in hipster gastropubs to waffle fries topped with crème fraiche and caviar paired with champagne in fine dining restaurants, potatoes prove they pair well with carbonated beverages. This is great news for the U.S. potato industry because as bar menus expand and evolve around the world, chefs and restaurants are looking for effective ways to build their revenue stream with cost-effective menu offerings and snacks.

Potatoes USA has been utilizing MAP funds in recent years to tap into the craft beer trend, capitalizing on it to develop a new distribution channel. US frozen potatoes may have made their initial mark internationally as an accompaniment to fast food burgers, but by marketing US fries as the ideal pairing with beer, Potatoes USA has created an alternative image for US fries as the quintessentially global bar food.

Trade education and promotions in numerous countries have worked to spur beer pubs around the world to add new US frozen potato menu items. Activities have included the development and distribution of new bar menu ideas. In particular, Potatoes USA has encouraged chefs to think globally to create unique one-of-kind fusion menu items and/or to incorporate specialty cuts and loaded fries in their menus. Given the significant competition, both from other frozen potato suppliers and other snack food items, the potato industry's ability to carve out a following in this crowded segment of the foodservice industry has contributed to maintenance of U.S. exports. This is crucial given the increasingly challenging trade environment where US frozen potatoes are often at a disadvantage compared to other suppliers or products. During July 2018-June 2019, the US exported \$912.9 million in frozen potato products to its target countries, a dip of 0.5% from the previous year, but still a significant increase from the \$884 exported two years prior.

Following is a roundup of some of the brewpubs adding US frozen potato menu items during the July 2018-June 2019 marketing year as a result of Potatoes USA activities:

- In Vietnam, a craft beer and U.S. potato promotion with Vevuzela, a fast-casual restaurant chain, featured U.S. battered potato wedges paired with an ice cold, bubbly brew.
- In Japan, IBrew, a craft beer bar with three outlets in Tokyo, was convinced to develop and launch a Lamb Chili Cheese Potato item after receiving Why Buy US information and fry menu ideas from Potatoes USA. The spicy snack contains lamb meat and chili sauce. Prior to the promotion, IBrew used exclusively fries from the European Union.
- Also in Japan, Craft Beer Market, a craft beer chains with 13 outlets, launched a Loaded Potato Fry with chili con carne lamb and jalapeno sauce, after attending a Why Buy US seminar held by Potatoes USA.
- In Malaysia, the Beer Factory launched a specialty platter for fries where consumers can select four types of fry cuts from a choice of five different specialty cuts.
- In Thailand, a popular burger bar called 25 Degrees Bangkok, now features happy hour pairings of crispy salted U.S. fries and chilled frosty lagers as a result of Potatoes USA trade education.
- The South Korea market has been a particularly strong adopter of the spuds and suds concept, becoming a major market segment for U.S. frozen potatoes thanks to aggressive trade education. During a February/March promotion this year alone, three beer pubs franchises (representing a total of 113 outlets) launched 13 new US potato menu items to accompany their brews. Then in April, a beer/potato menu seminar convinced four brand

new users of US fries to add and promote US fry items. Meanwhile, online successes include meal delivery kits including fries and cans of craft beer, which continue to be successful.

