

## US Fresh Potato Sales Reach Record Levels in Central America

By building knowledge and a positive image of US fresh table-stock potatoes, Potatoes USA's retail marketing program in Central America has driven sales to record levels and made US potatoes a go-to item for many consumers. The value of US fresh potato exports to markets targeted by Potatoes USA's program in this region reached \$13.8 million during the July 2018-June 2019 marketing year. This is up 21 percent from the previous marketing year, and is three times their value a decade ago.

In helping achieve these gains, MAP funds have been utilized to carry out retail promotion and education activities that have developed a solid foundation of product knowledge and loyalty among the retail trade. Retail seminars, one-on-one meetings with retailers and importers, and technical merchandising visits to individual stores have been conducted. These worked together with in-store promotions to build a strong relationship with this sector, improve merchandising and introduce new US potato varieties.

On the consumer side, consumer cooking schools and an increasing strong social media and public relations presence have provided guidance on potato preparation while creating a positive image of US potatoes. A strong focus on potatoes as a nutritional powerhouse has been particularly effective in attaching value to US potatoes and spurring consumer interest. As a result, not only are exports rising, but consumers are increasingly sophisticated in their use of US table-stock potatoes, shifting from viewing them as simple ingredients to welcoming new recipes using new varieties and serving styles, particularly ones that highlight potatoes' nutrition.

Most recently, specific successes of the July 2018-June 2019 program that contributed to higher exports this year include 32 retail promotions during the year that increased sales more than 81 percent. Key to these results were the use of nutritional information and recipes. For example, a promotion in March in the Dominican Republic with Centro Cuesta Nacional Supermarket utilized a professional chef to prepare recipes on the spot. The chef focused on traditional potato recipes while discussing the nutritional benefits with consumers, as well as the different varieties available. The in-store sampling promotion was successful with a 78 percent sales increase in US fresh potato sales. In another example, in-store promotions in Panama included two retailers, El Machetazo and Riba Smith, that also utilized recipe sampling to engage consumers. These retailers saw a 126 percent increase and a 130 percent increase, respectively, in potato sales during promotions.

