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Progressive reporting outstanding crop of organic potatoes

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Depending on the season, Los Angeles-based Progressive Produce's growing regions span California, Washington, Oregon, Colorado and western Canada.

"The quality of our organic potato crop is outstanding this year, and yields are better than expected," said Scott Leimkuhler, sales manager for the company. "Organic potatoes are more plentiful than they have ever been. The heat lasting longer than normal in the Northwest may affect the quality coming out of storage later in the season, but that is yet to be seen."

Addressing Progressive Produce's conventional line of potatoes, Gary Askenaizer, product manager, said the quality of this year's russets will probably be very good.



Progressive Produce's organic potatoes available in 'Sesame Street' packaging. "However, there have been reductions in yields per acre, and also the size due to the extreme heat that the basin experienced during July," said Askenaizer. "Many fields came through the heat wave in very good shape and produced an excellent crop. Other fields were not so lucky and showed the effects of prolonged heat with smaller yields and sizing."

Progressive Produce continually works to keep up with changes in technology in its potato packing operations. The company invested in the Oddenburg sorting system.

"We are constantly making changes to the peripheral parts that feed product in and take product away," explained Askenaizer. "There have also been software upgrades that have improved the performance of the sorting system that we have installed. We have made changes in our packing schedule in order to pack organic products on certain days of the week, which gives our salespeople the flexibility to make changes according to our customers' needs."

Progressive Produce's latest hire is Dan Sands, who works in the company's Quincy, WA, office. Sands was previously with US Foods. He has extensive knowledge of the foodservice industry. His primary responsibility in his new position is to expand the company's footprint in the foodservice business, an area that has been growing steadily.

"We felt that Dan could help us negotiate the world of foodservice and gain market share that we had been lacking," noted Askenaizer.

He also pointed out that the potato industry has been going through many changes of late, most relating to Progressive Produce's customers and their changing habits.

"Customers are going to the market much more frequently and buying smaller packaging," explained Askenaizer. Where the 10-pound poly bag used to be the standard, three- and five-pound bags are becoming much more common. Also, customers are going for more varietal potatoes. Reds, golds and fingerlings have all seen a jump in consumption."

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