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Simplot's White Russet a marketplace revolution

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Simplot Plant Sciences is serving up a fresh development that is already generating buzz within the potato industry: the trademarked White Russet. “White Russet potatoes bruise about 50 percent less and show virtually no black spots and won’t brown when you cut them,” Rob Myers, director of sales and marketing, told *The Produce News*.



“Fresh potatoes are generally grown from April to October, so potatoes that are purchased in the summer months are coming out of last year’s storage,” he explained. “As such, they are on the

bottom of big piles of potatoes and often show signs of pressure bruise and black spots. White Russet potatoes bruise up to 44 percent less with virtually no black spots. So they are among the highest quality potatoes you can find at this time. Also, retail supermarkets often experience 3 percent or more of shrink loss due to poor quality potatoes. So White Russet potatoes would be a big benefit.”

Simplot began working on technology for the potato variety in 2001, and Myers said the company began to hone in the potato's traits during the past six years, including four years of field trials in all potato-growing regions in the United States.

“We’re initially only working with a handful of potato marketing partners, each of which has their own grower and packer networks,” he continued. “As the volume of available seed increases, these partners will expand their networks.”

At the current time, White Russet growers are primarily located in Idaho and Wisconsin. “But we have plans to grow them in more potato-growing regions over time,” Myers added.

In addition to less bruising and spotting, Myers was asked if there are other characteristics of the White Russet that make it stand out in the marketplace. “Yes, from a convenience standpoint there is no soaking required by customers to prevent them from turning brown, and you can now peel them in advance,” he replied. “In addition, the White Russet potatoes will have less waste so they benefit the environment. Instead of consumers throwing out about a third of their potatoes because of black spots or bruise, consumers will use more of what they pay for. And, from a health perspective, they have up to 70 percent less acrylamide when consumers fry or bake the potatoes at high temperatures.”

According to Myers, the White Russet is identical in terms of taste, texture and cooking time. “But it is whiter in color and will make a brighter looking potato salad which won’t gray if it’s prepared in advance,” he commented.

Looking at marketplace rollout, Myers said available volume is currently limited but will be rapidly expanding over the next few years. “Just in the last three months, we have expanded from 1,500 retail outlets to 3,000 and from 20 to 30 million pounds sold,” he said in mid-June.

Retailers are already using successful strategies to promote the White Russet. “Retailers are generally calling attention to the benefits of 'easier to use,' 'benefiting the environment by reducing food waste' and 'reduced bruising and browning and black spots' on point of purchase displays and ads,” Myers said. “Each bag has a QR code, 1-800 number and website address (www.whiterusset.com) for consumers to learn more,” he said.

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