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Bland Farms welcomes Peruvian deal with sweet potatoes along for the ride

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Bland Farms Vidalia onion deal wrapped up the first week of August in 2015 but ran almost three weeks longer this year due to a bumper crop. But that doesn't mean the company's Peruvian sweet deal is holding back.

"We started harvesting onions in Peru about a month ago, we've already got 125 loads on the water here in mid-August and we've received about 20, which is right on track, so we feel pretty good right now," said Delbert Bland.



Troy, Delbert and Landis Bland in one of their Vidalia onion fields near Glennville, GA. Bland is also a major importer of Peruvian sweets and other sweet onions from multiple growing locations. Photo courtesy of Bland FarmsBland was one of the first Vidalia growers in the Peruvian deal. "I started growing them there before anybody else but didn't export any [to the U.S.] for like two years. I was holding back, scared I was infringing on Vidalia when

I really wasn't," Bland said. "The difference between what we do and most other people do, most people who handle Peruvians buy them from the farmers who grow them, but we actually do all the growing ourselves. We've been in that deal about 20 years now and the way it works is you've got to know exactly what you've got going in and that you're going to actually get it. Sometimes it's cheaper to have somebody else grow them, but at least we know we're going to get them if we do it ourselves."

The crop is a typically gorgeous Peruvian crop. "I was down there the other day and our first harvest was running better than last year. Peru is such a good growing region you can actually end up with too many jumbos and colossal and you don't want that, you want a good range, 15 percent colossal, 15 percent mediums and the bulk jumbo. So we're planting thicker than we used to and actually harvest according to size profile and the amount of days we have them out there," Bland said. "You're dealing with the desert, so you can leave those onions there a little longer if you need too — it works pretty good in as far as lining up your harvest to what you need. You're more likely to have an earthquake in Peru than rain so it works out very well."

"Generally speaking we're pretty comfortable about where we're at and we're pretty optimistic about the market and in the interest at this point."

Bland began a sweet potato program a couple of years ago that has grown season-over-season and that fall crop is coming in now.

"We're digging sweet potatoes in Georgia right now in mid-August, that's going good and they're turning out real good — we already got what we had in Florida, we've done 75 acres of harvest already and are running on schedule on that and the ones we have look very good. We look to start shipping probably the first part of September with fresh sweet potatoes, which is a big deal, because all that's available right now is stuff coming out of storage and it's been there almost a year."

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