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Potato exports still impacted by pandemic, but beginning to recover

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U.S. potato exports for the July to September quarter were down significantly compared to the same period in 2019. This drop is a result of the pandemic's continuing impact on the demand in many markets, particularly in southeast Asia and Central America, and the tight supplies of U.S. frozen potato products. Additionally, exports for this period in 2019 were at record levels, so the bar was set very high.

Exports of fresh potatoes, including table-stock and chipping, were down 6 percent for the quarter but up 10 percent in September. The decline is largely caused by a 16 percent drop to Canada as the movement of raw potatoes for frozen processing was curtailed. Exports to target markets in Asia,

Central America, and Mexico were either up or even with last year. Of note, the new year-round access to Japan resulted in a 306 percent increase, while the Philippines was up 30 percent, and Taiwan up 42 percent. Exports to Mexico held steady and were up 3 percent in September despite the significant negative impacts of the virus on this country.

Frozen exports were down 23 percent in volume; however, they were down only 14 percent in September, showing recoveries in some markets. Frozen exports to Mexico are still well above 2019 when the retaliatory tariff caused switches to Canadian and European Union products. The least impacted markets are Korea, up 2 percent, Taiwan, down 6 percent, and Japan, down 12 percent. The biggest impacts were in China, down 62 percent, Indonesia, down 71 percent, the Philippines, down 67 percent, and Vietnam, down 69 percent.

Dehydrated exports were down only 2 percent for the quarter and 5 percent for September. This reduction is more reflective of tight U.S. supplies than decreased demand. Some very positive results were recorded for Japan, up 19 percent, Korea, up 71 percent, Taiwan, up 16 percent, and Saudi Arabia, up 137 percent.

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