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Wada Farms sees good quality, strong supplies

By

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For both potatoes and onions, “the 2020 crop has come out of the gate very strong,” according to Eric Beck, director of marketing for Wada Farms Marketing Group LLC in Idaho Falls, ID.



Eric Beck

“We are very pleased with the quality that we are seeing thus far, and we anticipate the quality will continue to remain strong for the remainder of the season,” he said.

Particularly exciting, he said, is that Wada Farms’ organic program for potatoes “continues to gain strength as customers find convenience in being able to get all their conventional and organic needs at one place when they are shipping out of Idaho. So we are seeing a lot of growth in that segment.”

Customers “are seeing the value of the one-stop shop feature at Wada Farms which enables them to buy and load not only conventional and organic potatoes but also value-added products from a single source, he added.

Wada Farms has potatoes available both in Idaho and in Colorado. “Those are our two main ship points,” Beck said, “and both areas are very strong. We have plenty of availability. We are able to meet customer’s needs with good success and efficiency.”

In Idaho, Wada Farms has red, yellow and russet potatoes, both organic and conventional, as well as fingerlings. In Colorado, the company has conventional and organic russets as well as organic red and yellow potatoes.

In the onion category, “we are going to continue to ship very heavy out of the Treasure Valley, with strong supplies of both reds and yellows.” In white onions, supplies are “okay,” he said. The quality has been very good for all onion varieties.

(Although locals in the Boise, ID area often use the term Treasure Valley to refer just to Ada and Canyon Counties, it properly encompasses several counties in eastern Oregon as well, thus embracing the famous onion production areas of Southeast Idaho and Eastern Oregon.)

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, retail sales for potatoes surged, and foodservice sales dropped off. "We are continuing to see retail sales be very strong, and we anticipate it to remain strong going forward," Beck said. Foodservice sales have strengthened but have not yet fully recovered. "Foodservice continues to maintain par for the course as we work our way through this pandemic." Operators have made adjustments to new take-out buying patterns. At Wada Farms, "we are figuring that out" and have been able to "help customers build programs that keep them equitable and profitable on their bottom line."

The marketing situation with onions has been similar. Although the demand spike was not as high as with potatoes, Beck said, "Retail has been very good on the onion side of things with very strong demand there." Regardless of the commodity, "while we are going through this COVID deal, those particular commodities are trying to figure out what the new normal is going to be. Hopefully, as we go into 2021 and the vaccines and things of that nature become readily available, we will see more consumer confidence and the foodservice sector will begin to strengthen again and we will see demand get back to a point that it is more consistent and not so spotty."

Meanwhile, Wada Farms is "positioned with a good portfolio to keep things moving the way they need to," he said.

With Potato Lovers Month coming up in the first quarter of 2021, Beck urged retailers to get their programs in place. The sooner they do so the better, he said, so "we can plan to execute for them to capitalize on sales."

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