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Quail H Farms has a healthy crop of sweet potatoes for 2021

By

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When COVID-19 changed the way we live in March of 2020, the produce industry was greatly affected as restaurants closed and people began cooking more at home. That meant shoppers purchased lots of produce, and buying a lot at once to avoid more trips to the store.

That led to one of the biggest challenges Quail H Farms, Inc., faced during the pandemic. Sweet potatoes were in high demand because of their health benefits and their versatility, and that led to a lack of supply to meet the demand.



“In terms of marketing and selling our crop during the COVID-19 pandemic, last year during March and April—when the panic buying was going on and no one really realized it until it was a little late to put the brakes on and hold off—we ran out of product by June,” said Larelle Miller, sales manager at Quail H Farms, headquartered in Livingston, CA.

And the good news is that problem isn’t likely to repeat itself this year.

“Our 2020 crop that we harvested from August through November had much better yields than 2019, so coming into January 1, 2021, our inventory holdings have grown significantly from what they were last year at this time,” Miller said. “We feel like we’ll have plenty of product to get us through all of 2021 until we start our next crop’s harvest in August.”

Quail H Farms enjoys a reputation as one of California’s largest and most reputable growers, packers, and shippers of sweet potatoes. As an industry leader, it distributes most of its sweet potatoes west of the Rockies, but also ships nationally and into Canada and Mexico.

The company, which averages 30 million to 40 million pounds of sweet potatoes annually, was founded in 2008 when its owners purchased a company and changed the name. At the time, the owners reduced its number of sweet potato acres, but recent years have seen an increase in farmland devoted to sweet potatoes because of the increased demand for the tasty and nutritious vegetable.

“They started growing in popularity a couple of years ago when they were termed a ‘superfood,’ and the American Heart Association gave us the Heart-Check mark to indicate we’re heart healthy,” Miller said. “And a lot of that happened in 2014 and 2015 when the Superfood and healthy food trend really caught on. We saw an increase in those movements and a spike in the market, so it’s been really good.”

While the company hit something of a plateau about a year and a half ago when things got a little stagnant, the pandemic and people cooking more at home and looking for healthy alternatives, led to more increases in sweet potato consumption again.

Miller explained that Qual H Farms has slowly increased its acreage to about 1,200 to 1,250 acres, about 35 percent of which is organic.

“We’re always looking to increase our organic acreage,” she said. “We’ve been successful in the California sweet potato industry because we truly focus on quality and customer service. We’re not just throwing something in a box and trying it to push it out the door. We’re making sure that the quality is No. 1.”

And that commitment to quality has made Qual H Farms a renowned name in the world of sweet potatoes.

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