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A year of unparalleled potato sales

Potato sales for Q3 (January through March 2021) of marketing year 2021 have caught up to the changed buying habits that the pandemic brought about. March 2020 was an unprecedented time for potato sales in grocery stores as panic buying began a yearlong streak of record-high sales in dollars and volume. It is no surprise that sales in March of 2021 could not keep up with the buying patterns that occurred in that crazy month a year ago.

While sales of potatoes for the first two months of 2021 remained above the same time period the previous year, March brought the total store potato sales down overall. Dollar sales fell by 0.5 percent, while volume sales declined by 3.6 percent, according to IRI. Sales across the store remained above pre-pandemic levels (January through March 2019) showing consumer demand remains strong for potatoes.

The large majority of the decrease in March 2021 sales came from canned and dehydrated potatoes, both of which were wiped clean from the shelves last March. Frozen and refrigerated potatoes, along with deli-prepared sides, were the three categories to grow in both dollar and volume sales compared to 2020. Refrigerated potatoes saw the largest percentage increase, rising by 5.3 percent in dollars and 2.5 percent in volume. Last March, deli-prepared sides was the only category to decline in sales due to the closure of many of these spaces. The increase this year shows the recovery of this department.

Fresh potato sales fell by 3.5 percent in dollars and 5.1 percent in volume compared to the previous year. The decline in sales is attributed to russet, red, white and purple potatoes. Yellow, petite, medley and fingerling potatoes continued to grow in dollar and volume sales for the entire quarter, including March. The most significant percentage increase was for medley potatoes, growing by 21.5 percent in dollars and 27 percent in volume. While the majority of pack sizes declined in sales, one through four-pound bags continued to grow in dollars and volume.

While a lot has changed over the last year, sales have stabilized in a more predictable way for potatoes. Dollar and volume sales remain higher than before panic buying, showing consumer demand for potatoes at home is still strong.

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