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Helping potato growers succeed

By

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The [Northern Plains Potato Growers Association](#) serves more than 200 grower members and 250 potato associate members throughout northwest Minnesota and all of North Dakota, providing legislative, operational and marketing support.

“We work in legislative issues, we provide dollars for research and we do marketing for the fresh market,” said Ted Kreis, marketing director for the East Grand Forks, MN-based association. “There’s a lot of communication that goes into what we do to keep growers informed. We work closely with the National Potato Council on many issues and Potatoes USA on keeping up to date with marketing and sales trends.”

With the uncertainty arising from COVID-19, that meant strategizing day by day and offering advice to its members on the best ways to succeed.

“Retail was probably the best it’s ever been during COVID-19 because everyone was eating at home,” Kreis said. “Growers needed to adjust to what was happening in the industry.”

The NPPGA has been in existence for 75 years, advocating for the growers and helping them accomplish more by working together.

As the third-largest potato- growing region in the U.S., the Northern Plains area produces potatoes for a quartet of distinct markets — frozen processing, fresh market, potato chips and certified seed.

The Red River Valley is the largest red potato producing region in the country and is also seeing an increase in its yellow potato crops.

“All our potatoes for the fresh packing are red and yellow,” Kreis said. “Ten years ago, yellow was probably 5-10 percent of what we grew for the fresh market, but now it’s closer to 25 percent. Yellow potatoes nationwide are continually being favored by consumers.” Generally, the harvest takes place all of October.

Transportation remains one of the biggest challenges facing the potato industry as trucks are high-priced, which makes it difficult to get the potatoes delivered.

“We’re also readjusting to where people buy their potatoes over the last year or two because of COVID-19,” Kreis said. “We’ve seen a big shift from restaurants to a lot of people eating at home, and it started to get back to a more normal situation, but then it started going the other way again with the variant.”

So, more potatoes are going to grocery stores and less to foodservice, meaning the 50-pound

cartons are not as prevalent as they were, with five- and 10-pound bags being more the norm this year.

The growers the NPPGA represents are typically not in the market during the summer, finishing around June, but business appears to be good for those who started shipping early in the fall.

“We have 15 different packingsheds that will be shipping eventually,” Kreis said. “We’re optimistic that we’re going to see a good season.”

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