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**Idaho potato marketing order celebrates 80 years of quality**

The Great Depression was becoming history and the United States was poised to enter World War II when Idaho's potato marketing order first went into effect on Sept. 3, 1941. Today, the state still leads the pack with Idaho Marketing Order 945, one of the first two potato marketing orders ever administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"Idaho has the strictest marketing order across the country," said Ross Johnson, director of category management for the [Idaho Potato Commission](#). "The U.S. Department of Agriculture has their own standards — what most states follow — but Idaho took it a step further and created additional standards. It ensures a level playing field for Idaho shippers."

Producer-approved marketing orders, administered by the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, regulate participating handlers for 21 fruit, vegetable and specialty crops to maintain the high quality of produce, standardize packages and containers, regulate the flow of product to market, establish reserve programs, and authorize production research, marketing research and development, and advertising. The first marketing orders were a New Deal response to low farm prices during the Great Depression, authorized by the Agricultural Marketing Agreement of 1937, as amended.

Idaho maintains the strictest quality standards in the United States, said Johnson, allowing a maximum of only 6 percent defects, compared with the USDA standard of 8 percent for potatoes. It's also the only state where the count of potatoes is adhered to: An 80-count, 50-pound box of potatoes, for example, must have 80 potatoes in it with just a 10 percent variance allowed for the box. In addition, all varieties are required to be U.S. No. 2 grade or better.

### **Dedicated inspections**

The Idaho marketing order also goes above and beyond in its inspection requirements to ensure that no wayward spuds make it through the production process. To service its 32 fresh pack warehouses, the state employs 114 USDA-licensed shipping point inspectors who are monitored by the Idaho State Department of Agriculture with USDA oversight.

"We have on-site inspectors in the pack warehouses doing in-line inspection. They're doing inspections immediately as the potatoes are coming off the line, and communicating in real time with packing foremen," said Johnson. "If they see anything wrong, they can reject those potatoes."

Round varieties are required to be 1-7/8-inch minimum in diameter, and all other varieties must have a 2-inch minimum diameter or 4-ounce minimum weight, provided that 40 percent of the potatoes in each lot are 5 ounces or heavier.

All of Idaho's shipping point inspectors are seasoned professionals, some with 20 to 30 years of service under their belt. They receive monthly evaluations from their supervisors and must take refresher classes annually, with a training curriculum that is uniform across each of the four state districts.

### **Tracking and tracing**

Idaho potatoes offer a high degree of transparency to both retailers and consumers, under the marketing order. The state's inspectors are required to provide certificates for each lot, certifying that

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the potatoes meet the requirements of USDA grade standard and the marketing order, in addition to tracing the product back to their logbook of inspections. Certificates are valid for four days; after that, the potatoes are reinspected for quality and condition before shipping.

Idaho is also the only state that has positive lot identification (PLI) required by its marketing order, which provides recognizable identification that the product was sampled, inspected and certified by a USDA inspection program. Recognized by the AMS Perishable Agricultural Commodities Act (PACA) for dispute resolution, PLI offers a reliable means of tracking product throughout the supply and marketing chains.

“We can trace our potatoes back to the field they came out of,” said Johnson. “It’s an added measure of protection for the buyer and the shipper. That’s especially important to consumers nowadays, who want to connect back to the farm where a product came from. We have been doing that for many years.”

Idaho inspection certificates are cornerstones of fair-trading practices, he added. The extensive documentation helps prevent misbranding in the marketplace, provides shippers with a reliable means of monitoring the quality of products being shipped, supports breach of warranty claims, and is prima facie evidence in administrative and civil proceedings.

“Our unbiased third-party inspection service is instrumental and essential to the Idaho potato industry, and we’re proud to be a part of it,” said Laura Thomas, bureau chief of the Ag Inspection Division of the Idaho State Department of Agriculture. “The extensive certification process shows the world just what it takes to earn the ‘Grown in Idaho’ seal. It is our mission to ensure that every Idaho potato sold delivers the top quality that buyers expect from the Idaho potato brand.”

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