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NPPGA continues to see big demand in yellow potatoes

By

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The [Northern Plains Potato Growers Association](#) has been operating for 75 years, advocating for its more than 200 grower members and 250 potato associate members and helping them accomplish more by working together.

The NPPGA provides legislative, operational and marketing support to growers throughout northwest Minnesota and all of North Dakota.

Ted Kreis, marketing director for the East Grand Forks, MN-based association, said that the NPPGA provides money for research and marketing and keeps its members informed about the latest trends and issues impacting potato growers throughout the industry.

It works hand-in-hand with both Potatoes USA and the National Potato Council to ensure it is providing the most accurate and important information.

“We had a really dry summer, and we got a little bit larger crop than we thought we’d get, but we knew we’d be done this year,” Kreis said. “Some of the red acres switched to yellow because they yield higher. We’re down about 6 percent over the previous year, with yellows being up and red being down considerably.”

As the largest red potato producing region in the U.S., growers in the Red River Valley rely on this communication and advice to continue leading the industry. The region’s yellow potato crops are quickly rising, and production has increased more than 15 percent over the last decade, with the category now representing 25-30 percent of all potatoes grown.

“Yellow potatoes nationwide are continually being favored by consumers,” Kreis said. “The consumer demand continues, which is why growers are switching over. It’s been a gradual thing but one that is a big trend.”

In the fall, there was plenty of rain, so the drought conditions of last year should be a thing of the past once the new season starts up. Harvest begins in late September and goes all the way to late October or stretched into early November. A majority goes into storage.

“The fresh portion is about 12 percent of our production and 20 percent of the acres,” Kreis said. “Almost 90 percent of our potatoes grown for the fresh market are without irrigation, so we don’t get as high a yield as you do with the irrigated crops.”

Two-thirds of the potatoes grown are for frozen processing, which are all Russets. There’s also some chip stock and certified seed, which represents the four segments.

A small percentage of growers are doing organic potatoes, but that's not a major thing for most of the growers so the NPPGA doesn't do that much, as it only represents about 5 percent of the total market.

A majority of NPPGA potatoes go to the East Coast and down South and the Midwest, though very few go to the West since the competition is tough there.

There's a great deal of innovation going on around the Red River Valley as growers work to overcome some of the challenges that the potato industry has faced in recent years.

For instance, Halls, a potato company located in Hoople, ND, recently installed some high-tech sorting and grading equipment that Kreis noted was a big boon to the operations. The optical grading system plant utilizes cameras to evaluate potatoes individually and then sorts them into lanes — up to 1,700 potatoes a minute.

It's innovation and forward thinking like this that has kept the growers in the Red River Valley going strong.

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