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Vick Family Farms stresses the importance of U.S. farmers

By

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Over the years, [Vick Family Farms](#), operating in Wilson, NC, has seen the spring sweet potato movement increase substantially.

“Twenty-plus years ago, Thanksgiving and Christmas were the big movement holidays, but I think creative marketing and the demand for healthier foods has certainly helped grow spring sweet potato sales,” said Charlotte Vick, partner/sales and marketing manager at Vick Family Farms.

Having been in the sweet potato business for a while, the company knows what it takes to be a success, including consistency in quality, good communication with customers, strong customer service, and a lot of hard work.

“You need to be willing to adapt and change as the category changes,” Vick said. “No two years are the same, so you cannot get complacent in this industry. It is evolving always and you have got to stay on top of consumer trends and market demands.”

Last year presented many challenges, but the spring sweet potato season for Vick Family Farms was still very good.

“Export market sales increased for us last spring and domestic sales were a little slower,” Vick said. “Spring is typically always good though.”

Online shopping is the new big trend in the industry, as the pandemic caused many consumers to shop from home. That has been somewhat problematic for sweet potato sales.

“Anytime you can get in front of the consumer, you always have a better chance at making the sale, but that seems to be changing and is no longer at the front entrance of the produce section of the store anymore,” Vick said. “Sure that is a great place to be, but to be attracting the younger generations you have to have an online presence.”

That’s where Vick Family Farms is putting some of its recent efforts.

“I feel that the more you can attract bloggers, foodies, any social media sites to show off your product, the more successful you will be,” Vick said. “The sweet potato already has so many good things going for it and is such a healthy vegetable so that should be an easy sell. The main thing is education, because some people still do not know how versatile it can be.”

As of early 2022, the company was still marketing the 2021 crop and preparing to begin another growing season in March.

“That is the month we prepare seedbeds that grow our transplants which will be planted in late April to June,” Vick said.

“Here in North Carolina, we have not had a lot of cold weather and last season our spring was later and very wet. We have been through a drought here this winter but recently started getting some rains. We pray Mother Nature will be good to us this season as all farmers will be needing a good crop to help offset these high input costs we are all experiencing.”

She noted that the last few years, the industry faced uncertainty, but for farmers this coming year will be compounded with higher seed, fertilizer, chemical, fuel, transportation, and cartons prices.

“Our labor rates for local help is being forced to go higher because other industries are paying higher wages so we have that competition to deal with and those that use H2A the rates are much higher,” Vick said.

“You see other business’ increasing their rates to account for all of these increases but commodities are different. We can only control to a small degree what our prices are. If farmers, packers, shippers and brokers would all stand together and just raise our prices, it would help a lot but that isn’t going to happen.”

While consumers are paying higher prices, those prices are not filtering down to the grower, packer or shipper, she added.

“I do hope that the wholesalers and retailers will see the importance of U.S. farmers and do all they can to help us out with recovering some of our losses,” Vick said. “I realize they do have increase input costs and need to be fiscally responsible with their companies, but also remember that without the growers they wouldn’t have any products.”

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