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Sweet potato industry beefs up promotions

By

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Due to their sweetness and pleasant texture, sweet potatoes are a multipurpose vegetable that more consumers are starting to add to their grocery carts regularly—especially in the fall, when sweet potatoes' scrumptious taste and vivid coloring perfectly represent the season when leaves drop to the ground.

And while sweet potatoes have been historically known as a dish served for Thanksgiving and Christmas, with increased consumer demand of healthy eating habits, sweet potatoes are no longer just a holiday food.

Many involved in the sweet potato industry today are working to further consumption and bring sweet potatoes to an even greater level.

Robin Narron, sales support and marketing director for the Nashville, NC-based Nash Produce, is working closely with the [North Carolina Sweetpotato Commission](#) to promote the consumption of North Carolina sweet potatoes all over the world.

“Researching new varieties and constant innovation in harvest and post-harvest practices has the future of the sweet potato industry looking bright,” she said. “Also, particularly here at Nash Produce, we are excited about our newly completed temperature-controlled storage facility. This investment along with our other numerous temperature-controlled storage units will allow us to provide the highest quality sweet potato year-round to consumers.”

Another way Nash Produce plans to expand its sweet potato business is through adapting to customers' needs.

“One way we can ensure this is through our value-added packaging options, with the latest being our tray pack,” Narron said.

North Carolina has ranked as the No. 1 sweet potato producer in the United States since 1971 according to the USDA Agricultural Statistics Service, and that's something that those at the North Carolina Sweetpotato Commission work hard to let consumers know.

“We always want our retailers to know that sweet potatoes from North Carolina are available 12 months of the year and that given their tremendous nutritious value and versatility—not to mention shelf life stability—that they should be prominently displayed for consumers to easily select,” said Michelle Grainger, executive director of the NC SweetPotato Commission.

In North Carolina, the growing conditions and soil types are optimal for successful sweet potato growth, allowing growers to produce a wide size variety of the root vegetable to fulfill any customer

preference.

Retailers have seen an uptick in sweet potato sales since the pandemic, but grocery stores can still do more if they want to see the category grow.

“We need to be promoting sweet potatoes year-round due to their storage durability and longevity in comparison to other produce along with their versatility in the kitchen and health benefits,” Narron said.

About a year ago, the North Carolina SweetPotato Commission entered into a partnership with Shopping for Health, where the commission provides retail dietitians resources that they can draw upon, including the newly released Retail Dietitian’s Toolkit. This has proven to be a great success.

“Retailers have done a good job with helping to highlight sweet potatoes in the stores,” said Autumn Campbell, sales manager for the Wynne, AR-based Matthews Ridgeview Farms. “If they continue to build displays, offer additional nutritional information to consumers, offer recipes and promote when it’s not necessarily peak season, things will continue to be strong.”

But it’s not only North Carolina that is famous for sweet potatoes, Louisiana is also a strong player in the industry, and the numbers continue to grow each year.

Rene Simon, director of the Louisiana Sweet Potato Commission, noted the alluvium soils of Louisiana produce a high-quality product and growers have been doing it a long time and know how to do it right.

In the past, the commission hasn’t focused too great an effort on the retail side of things, but with 2022 being the 70th anniversary of the commission, it has brought more attention to farmers at the store level to help consumers feel the connection between sweet potato growers in Louisiana and those in other places.

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About Keith Loria |

A graduate of the University of Miami, Keith Loria is a D.C.-based award-winning journalist who has been writing for major publications for close to 20 years on topics as diverse as real estate, food and sports. He started his career with the Associated Press and has held high editorial positions at magazines aimed at healthcare, sports and technology. When not busy writing, he can be found enjoying time with his wife, Patricia, and two daughters, Jordan and Cassidy.

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