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NC Sweetpotato Commission promotes 'Every Season for Every Reason'

By

Keith Loria

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Since 1961 the mission of the [NC Sweetpotato Commission](#) has been to increase consumption of North Carolina sweetpotatoes through education, promotional activities, research and honorable horticultural practices.

This year, it's very focused on its mission to promote North Carolina sweetpotatoes under the message — Every Season for Every Reason.

“Sweetpotatoes aren't just for holidays, and they aren't just for casseroles,” said Michelle Grainger, executive director of the NC Sweetpotato Commission. “Sweetpotatoes are one of the most versatile foods and perfect for nearly every dietary need. They are the perfect vehicle for both sweet and savory flavors and every meal occasion. We've worked closely with dietitians and food influencers to help spread our message and create and promote a variety of digital content that appeals to a wide range of demographics.”

The commission is currently looking ahead to its annual North Carolina Restaurant Week and numerous restaurants across the state will feature unique sweetpotato dishes.

North Carolina is the No. 1 sweetpotato producing state in the U.S., providing more than 60 percent of all sweetpotatoes in the U.S., and representing more than 400 sweetpotato farm families and 40 packer shippers.

“In addition to our continued marketing support to grow consumption, both in the U.S. and abroad, our support of research and education programs has helped yield a nearly \$2.1 billion industry impact and in a variety of areas including the commercialization of sweetpotato fries and the discovery of the Covington variety which makes up nearly 99 percent of production and is regarded for its excellent quality, consistent shape and disease resistance,” Grainger said. “The efforts of the commission in the areas of marketing/promotion and research are intended to directly benefit the NC Sweetpotato producer, packer and shipper.”

There are a lot of steps and time that go into sweetpotatoes and the 2023 season is just getting started as slips are currently being produced.

“Our talented producers are busy preparing to transplant their sweetpotato slips into the fields starting late May, early June depending on the weather,” Grainger said. “Once a sweetpotato slip (or cutting) has been transplanted and weather conditions are ideal, it will take 90-120 days for the transplanted cutting to produce ‘hills’ of our favorite root vegetable. We are hopeful that the state's natural resources of the perfect soil and hot, humid climates will bless our industry with an incredible crop of sweetpotatoes come harvest time this fall.”

While North Carolina sweetpotato growers are producing one of the world's most recognized superfoods, like other producers, they continue to be plagued by inflation-related issues that are impacting their bottom line, whether its input costs, labor or freight.

“We understand that consumers are feeling the pinch in their pocketbook on every spending occasion and we want to make sure our sweetpotatoes continue to be recognized as a great value every time they go to the store,” Grainger said. “After all, it is rare for a superfood to be recognized as having the following traits — nutritionally dense, shelf stable, culinary versatility and affordable — and the NC Sweetpotato meets all of these, plus more.”

The commission is also eager for retailers to help embrace its message of Every Season for Every Reason in digital and in-store promotion to help with impulse purchases as consumer shopping patterns change and don't want consumers to forget about sweetpotatoes during the non-holiday season.

“It's critical that retailers promote sweetpotatoes year-round; not just during holidays,” Grainger said. “Sweet potatoes are highly versatile and a fan favorite in a variety of dishes including as side dishes and as a center of plate star.”

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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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