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**The North Carolina Potato Association is leading growers to success**

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By

Keith Loria

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The [North Carolina Potato Association](#) promotes growers and their crops and is active in the research initiatives that are in place to provide the best products for consumers.

“Our association appreciates the efforts of the North Carolina Department of Agriculture’s marketing division that helps to promote our potatoes,” said Tommy Fleetwood, executive director of the North Carolina Potato Association. “Their experienced marketing folks help to promote our potatoes to retail, foodservice, wholesale markets and to the consumers. We think they have one of the best marketing structures of state ag departments in the United States.”

North Carolina growers produce around 16,000 acres of potatoes with the crop of about 4 million pounds moved to the market in six weeks before the fall production areas of the U.S. begin harvest.

“About 70 percent of the crop is grown for the potato chip industry and is shipped from Florida to Nova Scotia to all the major potato chip companies,” Fleetwood said. “Some of our larger growers will ship 40-50 loads per day.”

There are many issues affecting potato growers in the state, and the association is working to help growers with these challenges.

“Input costs have soared and the market pricing must increase to help cover the cost of production and getting the products to the marketplace,” Fleetwood said. “Producers have to make a profit to remain in business. We also have labor concerns, government regulations to deal with, trade policies, farm bill issues, etc. Our association is involved in all of the issues to help maintain contacts with the various agencies in order to keep the government informed of the farmers’ needs.”

The North Carolina Potato Association’s 93rd annual meeting will be held May 21-22 in Elizabeth City.

“We have potato buyers from the eastern U.S., and eastern Canada and agribusiness reps from across the U.S., coming in for the events,” Fleetwood said. “This has been a tradition of the association and the industry looks forward to it each year. Buyers spend time with the growers and get to see the crops they will be sending to market during mid-June through July.”

As of mid-May, North Carolina potatoes are looking beautiful as growing conditions have been very good and everyone at the association is always looking forward to providing a premium product for the markets it serves. Growers produce round whites, reds, and yellow flesh potatoes for the retail markets.

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“North Carolina potatoes are harvested during mid-June through July and we have a niche market that falls into place when potatoes from the main storage production areas in the U.S. are becoming depleted or beginning to have quality issues,” Fleetwood said. “Our potatoes are known as ‘summer’s best potatoes’ and are versatile for use as baked, boiled, grilled and fried. We call them ‘new potatoes’ and consumers look forward to their bright thin skins.”

The association is always excited to see retailers buy and promote locally grown products.

“Retail seems to be moving to private label, but it would be great to see grower’s company packaging in the stores,” Fleetwood said. “We know there are many segments of the customer population that are wanting to know who grows their food, how it’s grown and where it comes from.”

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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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