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Optimism abounds for sweet potatoes in 2024

By

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The global sweet potato market is predicted to reach \$45.7 million by the end of 2025, according to data from Statista. So, even though things the past couple of years have been a little challenging for growers, things seem to be picking up for 2024.

For instance, [Vick Family Farms](#)' crop yields were good this past year despite a very dry year in the state of North Carolina overall.

"Movement started slow in the fall due to some packers having extra inventory from the previous season of over production; however, once retail and food service began bringing in new crop of good quality, sales picked up and we had very good holiday sales," said Charlotte Vick, partner/sales and marketing manager for the Wilson, NC-based company.

Competition from other countries has made it harder for some U.S. companies to compete as labor costs and most input costs are much higher.

"Export markets have been slower, but I also believe that grower/packer/shippers are much more cautious about sending into a market that has seen low prices the last few years," Vick said.

Nash Produce also saw a slowdown in exports this past year, but expect 2024 to be back to better numbers.

Thomas Joyner, president of Nash Produce, noted that the combination of rich North Carolina soil and a great climate contributes to ensuring that the area's sweet potatoes are among the very best. That's led to increases in demand at the retail level.

"We are seeing continuing increase of sweet potatoes and year over year growth of 5 — 7 percent it seems," Joyner said. "The Sweet Potato Commission does a really good job through ad agencies talking about sweet potatoes, talking about the diversity of them, how easy they are to prepare and teaching people in general."

The North Carolina Sweet Potato Commission is a nonprofit corporation made up of more than 400 sweet potato growers along with the packers, processors and business associates that support them. The commission works to increase sweet potato consumption through education, promotional activities, research and honorable horticultural practices among its producers.

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 sweet potato Commission work hard to let consumers know.

The fact that consumers are becoming a lot more health conscious has also given rise to sale of sweet potatoes, as the nutrients that the sweet potatoes provide are among the best in produce.

For retailers to continue to do a good job of selling sweet potatoes, companies are making sure they are receiving the best quality to put in front of their customers.

“We make sure that packers are sending excellent quality, which in itself will help to increase sales,” Vick said. “The more shelf space and ideal locations are always important and doing promotions—not just during holiday periods but other times during the year—helps.”

Joyner noted it’s important to educate the consumer that sweet potatoes have a variety of uses, from breakfast, to Super Bowl parties, to summer barbecues, or even just incorporating them into weekly menus at home.

“There are so many recipes out there and the sweet potato is so healthy, it makes sense to have it as a choice every week of the year,” Joyner said.

Retail locations have been doing an excellent job in promoting sweet potato sales by simply keeping ample stock of fresh product front and center in the produce section.

“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.”

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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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