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Cambridge Farms sees strong, quality potatoes ahead

By

Keith Loria

June 20, 2024

Ken Gad, the owner of [Cambridge Farms](#) in South Easton, ME, is widely regarded as a leading authority on potatoes on the Eastern Shore.

Over 30 years, he has assembled an outstanding team of growers, shippers, packers and marketing partners dedicated to delivering high-quality products and exceptional customer service.

Things have been a bit challenging this year due to weather, and that will lead to reduced yields in North Carolina and a little less than the past few years in Virginia.

“At one time, we were really concerned with some crop failures, but we’ve had some timely rains taking us out of that talk, but we will have less than a normal crop in North Carolina,” Gad said. “In Virginia, we’re going to have probably more of an average-size crop. The last few years, we’ve had pretty good yields down there. I think this year will be more of a normal season.”

The good news for both areas is that overall, the quality looks “awesome” for red, white and yellow potatoes out of North Carolina and the Russet crop in Virginia.

“That’s the plus,” Gad said. “You can talk about all the weather you want, but the reality is we have quality and that’s what we want to see overall. If you’re going to get something, that’s what we want. We’re not looking at a crop of defects and disease, we have seen really nice testing and we’re happy with that.”

With the supply and demand expected, Cambridge Farms is happy about what it expects in the months ahead.

“The finite amount of growers that are available who we partner with should make for a good, dynamic marketing season,” Gad said.

Overall, for those in the potato industry 2024 has been like a “slog” according to Gad, in the sense

that no one considers the year to have been normal.

“Look at Ohio, which has had such a massive crop, 35,000 extra acres planted, processors not taking what people expected, and it’s put a crimp on the market,” he said. “You didn’t have a big crop on the East Coast, but the excess product out west, and the price, it’s been mindboggling what we’ve been able to purchase out in Idaho. It’s been a bummer for a lot of the marketing.”

Gad noted the color potatoes have moved, and the company had a nice year coming out of the Red River Valley.

“There was a limited crop out of Maine, but we had some failures there,” he said. “The red crop out of Maine suffered because of weather and wasn’t the quality we normally can play with. That pushed some more demand out to the Red River Valley. It was just a tough year to market consistency what we normally would do.”

With more chain stores consolidating, more marketers consolidating and less growers to pull from, challenges continue for those in the industry.

“It’s harder and harder and harder,” Gad said. “The economy is what it is, and the costs are real. We can’t continue to beat up the grower — the costs are going up. We’ve always looked at our growers as marketing partners. We really respect our grower partnerships.”

Cambridge Farms does have some growth opportunities ahead and there are some things that could be changing.

“I do see some more marketing opportunities for us and growth possibilities in some other commodities,” Gad said. “There’s safety in numbers and I think with all the consolidation we are seeing, it’s almost foolish to think you have to stand on your own. You need to make strategic partnerships along the way.”

Photo: Jay and Kenneth Gad

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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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