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Front and center: Why potato positioning matters

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As the top volume driver in the produce aisle, potatoes are a proven powerhouse. So why do so many retailers hide their spuds away in the back of the department?

It's a missed opportunity for growth, said Ross Johnson, vice president of retail and international for the [Idaho Potato Commission](#)

“Almost 25 percent of all tonnage that flows through the fresh produce area is potatoes, so sometimes we tend to take them for granted,” said Johnson. “But potatoes have the capability to drive even higher sales throughout the entire produce department when they're positioned correctly.

“Our IPC field directors are unique in their ability to offer personalized data analysis for any market throughout the country,” Johnson continued. “They canvass the country surveying grocery stores and finding opportunities in the category. Retailers are able to take these insights to make decisions that directly impact their business.”

Eighty-five percent of all U.S. households purchase potatoes, according to 2023 Circana research commissioned by IPC. With an average potato shopper basket size of \$86, these customers can help push store profits higher, so it pays to look for new ways to appeal to them, said Johnson.

“In the past year, for example, our IPC data insights have shown that there's an opportunity to move back to larger pack sizes,” he said. “Some retailers have decided to do an 8-pound bag jumbo option, while others have decided to reintroduce a 10-pound bag. These are great examples of finding fresh opportunities in the potato category to drive higher sales.”

Promoting to spud shoppers is also key to getting them into your produce department, said Johnson, since 90 percent of all shoppers pre-plan their potato trip.

“Nearly two-thirds of all shoppers compare fresh potato prices before going to the store, and we know from IPC research that price heavily influences a shopper's preferred store,” he said. “Regularly promoting premium Idaho potatoes in ads can play a big role in driving traffic to your store, because most shoppers are using ads to make their potato shopping decisions.”

Russets, which account for more than 50 percent of all potato dollars, are a prime candidate for both in-store and advertising circular promotions. Johnson said Russet ads push dollar sales growth up to 13 percent higher than the competition, according to IPC data.

With 56 percent of shoppers saying they are influenced on their potato decisions at the shelf, in-store promotions are key to capitalizing on Idaho potato appeal, said Johnson. Secondary displays are a proven tactic for heating up sales: IPC research shows that secondary displays of Idaho potatoes drove an incremental 22 percent sales dollar growth versus comparable stores, without cannibalizing other potato sales. Test stores that exhibited secondary displays of Idaho Russets delivered a 10-fold growth advantage, while comparison stores with no secondary display saw only an average category growth of 2.5 percent.

Potato recipes can significantly motivate purchases too, said Johnson, so retailers should take full advantage of IPC's tasty spud dish ideas. More than 1,700 potato recipes are available in the IPC recipe database, including Greek Sheet Pan Lemon Feta Chicken with Idaho Potatoes, Cheesy Mashed Potato Casserole, and Potato Chowder.

“Retailers can download Idaho potato recipes with high-resolution photos to use in their advertising at www.idahopotato.com/recipes,” said Johnson. “They can also promote the website address to shoppers for browsing at home or in-store on their smartphone. Consumers can even search for specific types of recipes such as diabetes-friendly or gluten-free dishes, showing them how potatoes can fit into any kind of eating plan in their household.”

IPC retail promotion directors can provide invaluable guidance about the most effective Idaho potato resources for each market, said Johnson. *To get started on a personalized plan, go to www.idahopotato.com/retail to contact your regional promotion director.*

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