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## **Nash Produce posts a remarkable 12 months with its improved facilities**

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The last 12 months have been remarkable for Nash Produce of Nashville, NC, one of the larger sweet potato distributors in the United States. The company improved traceability, added new bagging and packing capabilities, and Director of Marketing Laura Kornegay was selected as one of 36 participants in the PMA Foundation's Emerging Leaders Program.

Nash started its fall harvest at the end of August, "and we're looking forward to moving into the new crop and preparing for Thanksgiving, Christmas and all of next year," Ms. Kornegay said. "Yield and quality are very good and the harvest has been going well."

Last fall, Nash installed an automatic barcode labeling



Hunter Gibbs of Nash Produce, Scott Fisher of Food Lion, Laura Kornegay and Jim Young of Nash Produce. *(Photo by Chip Carter)* system on the packingline, allowing case-level tracking, and added a new bagging machine for custom packing of sweet potatoes in two- to 10-pound bags. In mid-September of this year, “We upgraded our packingline with a brand new stainless steel wash line and pickout tables. We’re really focusing on having a state-of-the-art packing facility,” Ms. Kornegay said.

With the bagging machines, Nash can handle the ever-increasing demand for sweet potatoes as well as do custom packs and private labeling. This year, the company’s packaging will be Canadian-compliant, printed in both English and French as required in parts of the country.

“We have some customers in Canada but that will really help us be able to service all of Canada,” Ms. Kornegay said. “Our bagging capacity has grown tremendously and our new value-added, convenience packaging has become a really popular ticket.”

Nash handles bulk and microwaveable sweet potatoes, and its new bag “is just more appealing and gives us the flexibility to offer different sizes and weights of sweet potatoes. Custom orders and private labeling are another part of our business that’s really grown — we can take care of the whole process for that from start to finish,” Ms. Kornegay said.

Nash earned PrimusLabs certification this year and also implemented new hybrid pallet tags that assist in traceability. “We’re one of the only sweet potato packers to do that,” Ms. Kornegay said.

Nash has continued to increase its presence at industry events, and “tradeshows have become an important part of our business,” Ms. Kornegay said. “Being able to be in front of our customers several times a year is very important.”

Nash will again be exhibiting at PMA’s Fresh Summit and this time Ms. Kornegay is likely to feel a more personal connection. She recently completed the PMA Foundation’s Emerging Leaders program, one of just 36 people in the industry invited to participate.

“It really was a milestone moment for me. It definitely was a challenging experience that really stretched me and took me out of my comfort zone, but it was an invaluable experience,” Ms.

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Kornegay said. "My eyes were wide open and I walked away having a completely different view of my job and really felt a lot of pride just to be part of such an incredible industry."

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