

Cervantes:

Hello everyone! Welcome to the second episode of *Potato-cast*, the new Potatoes USA podcast, full of all of your favorite potato industry content.

I'm Natalia Cervantes, Potatoes USA Conversation Architect, and your host.

I'm very excited to share some recent highlights with you. And in today's episode we will cover some really fun things. Taco Bell announcement, new consumer recipes on potatogoodness.com, some Potato Pro ads, media mentions, Team Potato, Foodservice sales and Retail sales. And I hope that will be enough for you today.

With me I have John Toaspern, Chief Marketing Officer at Potatoes USA.

Welcome back, John!

Toaspern:

Hello Natalia, it's great to be back!

Cervantes:

John, I know I'm very impatient about this so can we start with the really spicy stuff. Talk to me more about the Taco Bell announcement and what does it mean for the industry.

Toaspern:

This is a very big win for the potato industry. As you know, back in the fall Taco Bell removed potatoes from their menu in an effort to simplify their menu for drive-through operations. And as a result, they received a lot of push back for this. Customers and especially vegetarian customers were very frustrated with that change.

After a social media barrage from disgruntled customers including a change.org petition, Taco Bell announced in January that they are officially bringing potatoes back to their menu. So mark your calendars everyone, March 11th is the official return of potatoes at Taco Bell!

You know, it takes a lot of pushback for a chain of this size to make a switch like this. This not only shows Taco Bell's commitment to its customers but also the huge demand for potatoes on menus, especially as a go-to meat alternative. Having potatoes back on Taco Bell's menu, will certainly help with the recovery of potato sales at foodservice.

Cervantes:

This is HUGE John! It's a big win for the potato industry!

It's important to note that it's a great addition especially since they brought back Nacho Fries. And I've seen the Nacho Fries ads that they were prominently running on football Sunday's. I've seen them many times.

And actually speaking of football, have you checked out the new recipes Chef RJ developed for gameday? I think I'm going to use his Build Your Own Tater Bowl station next weekend for the big game.

Toaspern:

Yes, he has a number of new recipes on potatogoodness.com for gameday. I like the Potato Not Wings as well as the Buffalo Chicken Dip on Potato Half Shells. I challenge everyone in the potato industry to serve one these potato recipes when they are watching Kansas City beat the Buccaneers.

But, for a more intimate setting, Chef RJ also created new valentine's day recipes. These valentine's recipes are full meals featuring a delicious potato dish, yet are simple to prepare. They would be perfect for Valentines Day or any night for a fun date-night in!

Cervantes:

They certainly would be, especially the Sheet Pan Salmon with Olive Oil Roasted Red Potatoes, Beets and Asparagus or the Lemon Tarragon Roasted Chicken with yellow potatoes and garlicky green beans. That's delicious!

And all of RJ's new recipes, as well as other recipes, are available for download on PotatoesUSA.com. I encourage all of our listeners to repurpose them in their marketing and promotion activities, including just sharing with your friends and family on social.

Potatoes USA has already shared them on social and they are getting a lot of attention!

Speaking of social and attention, we just launched our Potato Pro ads on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube!

And John, I know you've seen these ads, but just a reminder to our listeners, Potato Pro is a series of ads that follow two main characters as they explore mouth-watering potato recipes using all forms and types of potatoes. The ads have light-hearted humor to them and focus on potato versatility as well as the positive health benefits. The ads are LIVE, reaching thousands of hungry consumers every day and let me tell you John, people love them.

Toaspern:

I bet they do.

So what are they saying about the ads?

Cervantes:

Well, as I monitor the conversations around these ads, the response has been nothing short of amazing. Everything from, the simple "Potatoes are my favorite" to "We are totally a potato household" but the most humoring comments have been from people who tag their friends and say "This made me think of you" and then watching their tagged friend respond back and talk about how much they love potatoes just seeing that

conversation continue back and forth. I think this really shows that not only do people genuinely love potatoes but they love them so much that their friends associate them with our ads. And this shows that we hit the spot with this content for our generation tater audience.

Toaspern:

That's great to hear! And another reminder, these Potato Pro videos can be requested for use by anyone in the potato industry.

Natalia, did you know that Potatoes have been in a number of positive media mentions lately.

We have seen media outlets providing consumers with the information they need to debunk the myths they hear about potatoes. *Real Simple*, *the Healthy*, and *the Daily Meal* stress the importance of fueling with carbohydrates, and mentioning potatoes are a great option. *Men's Health* not only positioned potatoes as a top pick for heart health, but also provided preparation tips to save time.

Which reminds me, we just had our virtual Team Potato event with Sports Dietitian, Amy Goodson. She was streaming LIVE from her kitchen while she prepared some potato fueling dishes. She debunked some common nutrition myths as well as giving information about fueling with potatoes. She explained and demonstrated how to fuel a healthy lifestyle with potatoes, like an athlete!

Cervantes:

A "Potato" athlete.

I attended that event actually as well and she showed us her really delicious recipe for Egg and Veggie Hash Brown Cups! I haven't tried them yet, but I thought it was a great way to use frozen shredded hash browns!

I know frozen potatoes continue to dominate the foodservice category.

Toaspern:

They do. We just conducted some research and frozen potatoes make up 62% of potato sales to foodservice, followed by fresh potatoes at 30%. Frozen potatoes gained 2% share of the foodservice market in marketing year 2020 that we studied.

As you know, frozen potatoes are heavily used in the limited-service restaurant (LSR) sector, especially at burger and chicken joints. While 2020 was a very difficult year for the foodservice industry, these limited-service restaurants fared the best due to their orientation to drive-through and take-out. Sales of frozen products to foodservice rebounded in the 3rd quarter of 2020 and we believe that the lost sales due to the pandemic were even less in the 4th quarter.

While the foodservice sector will take some time to recover, we do expect frozen potato sales to recover much more quickly than overall sales.

Cervantes:

I can certainly believe that. As we discussed in our last episode, Kendra Keenan, our Foodservice Manager, continues to work hard on helping restaurants utilize potatoes more. And in fact, I have an update for you on Potato Pizza!

Potatoes USA entered into a partnership with famed pizza chef Tony Gemignani, 13-time World Pizza Champion. And he is developing a series of potato pizzas using fresh, frozen, and dehy to showcase the versatility of potatoes as a topping and in the crust. These pizzas will not only be on the menu at his restaurants but will also be featured in a series of posts across his popular and highly followed social media channels. In fact, he recently posted a purple potato pizza recipe on his Instagram and its had over 16,000 views.

Toaspern:

I tell you, foodservice operators and Consumers' interest in potatoes is clearly increasing.

Cervantes:

Well, numbers don't lie John.

And while a lot of work has gone into promoting potatogoodness.com, our consumer facing website, the numbers don't go up unless there is interest!

Toaspern:

Yes, the number of website visits continue to be much higher than last year due to all the activities driving consumers and professionals to the site. Additionally, the improvements and changes made to the site SEO optimization are really working to our benefit. PotatoGoodness.com now ranks #1 for potato nutrition, as the top listing for potato history and is #2 for a general "Potatoes" search on Google.

Cervantes:

That's fantastic! It's great to continue seeing our site receive such high rankings from Google. It really shows that Google views us as trustworthy and finds our content most relevant for a lot of potato search inquiries.

Toaspern:

And searches for cooking tips and recipes continue to expand as people's eating habits have changed. Which has led to changes in consumer buying habits since the pandemic started.

Cervantes:

They certainly have. And Kayla Dome, Potatoes USA Retail Manager, is working really hard to get updated consumer information to retailers. She was featured in a second Podcast with *The Packer*. In that episode, she discussed the results of the recent Total Store Study research we did with Kantar.

Toaspern:

She's been working very hard to gather together all of the important notes from the Total Store Study and making sure retailers and the potato industry have access to the information. This study shares a lot of valuable data about the way consumers are using potatoes at home and how the shifts in their shopping habits impact center store potato sales.

Cervantes:

The Total Store Study is certainly very robust and valuable. And although it can be found on potatoesusa.com, I'll definitely make sure to add a link to it on this episode's page.

It's been a very busy January for the potato industry.

But what's the one thing you think you took away from this episode, John?

Toaspern:

I'd say my main takeaway from the episode is that the love for potatoes is staying very strong.

Cervantes:

I think that's my main takeaway as well.

Go Potatoes!

I know we've covered a lot of information, again, but I just want to add real quick that we now have Potato Industry social media accounts where you can find relevant U.S. potato industry information in mini post format. You can find Potatoes USA on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. These are official Potatoes USA accounts and anyone is welcome to follow this account to stay up to date on the latest U.S. potato industry news, Potatoes USA program activities and their impact on the market.

If you have questions about these accounts please don't hesitate to reach out to me. I would love to hear from all of you.

John, thank you so much for joining me today.

Toaspern:

Always happy to talk U.S. potatoes with you Natalia.

Cervantes:

All supporting documents for data provided in this episode can be found on potatoesusa.com. To see all the great information available about potatoes or new and fun ways to cook with potatoes, visit potatogoodness.com.

Thank you for listening to this episode of *Potato-cast!* Please subscribe on Spotify or Apple Podcast by searching for *Potato-cast*.

I am your host, Natalia Cervantes.

Until next time, take care everyone.

