



## **Interview with Jaren Raybould, Chairman of Potatoes USA.**

### **Cervantes:**

Hello everyone! Welcome to today's episode of *Potato-cast*. A Potatoes USA podcast, full of all of your favorite potato industry content.

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

This episode is being recorded in Louisville Kentucky, at the Potatoes USA summer meeting. This year the summer meeting is back in person again. It's been very exciting to finally be able to see everyone.

Today I have the pleasure of interviewing Potatoes USA Chairman, Jaren Raybould. Jaren, welcome to Potato-Cast!

### **Raybould:**

*Thank you Natalia, it's good to be here with you.*

### **Cervantes:**

Jaren, this is the first official in-person meeting of your presidency. How are you feeling about being able to finally see everyone together, in-person?

### **Raybould:**

*It's about time! I think, as a board, we've done quite well with running things via conference calls and zoom meetings, but there is something to be said for having a meeting face to face, especially the relationships that are built through these meetings.*

### **Cervantes**

I couldn't agree more. I'm glad to be here as well, with you, in-person! Now, many of our listeners are familiar with who you are but do you mind just sharing a little bit about yourself and your operation?

### **Raybould:**

*I am a 3rd generation grower. Our farm is in Eastern Idaho right up against the Saint Anthony Sand Dunes. We raise russet varieties for the fresh market and fresh-cut fries for Five Guys. We are very much a family run operation; I have the privilege of working with my father each and every day. My sister is involved as well as our CFO and is in charge of our food safety program.*

*My beautiful and lovely wife Whitney and I have two daughters, Naomi and Adalyn, and they are our pride and joy.*

*And I'm a Scorpio ;)*



**Cervantes:**

Well then, it's a pleasure to be in the presence of another Scorpio.

And third generation, wow. To work alongside your father and your sister like that, sounds wonderful. And two daughters, how lucky are you to be surrounded by so many lovely women!

**Raybould:**

*Thank you, I am a lucky man.*

**Cervantes:**

This year marks the 6<sup>th</sup> year for you on the board. What has been your favorite part of serving so far?

**Raybould:**

*My goodness, 6 years. I would have to say that it's the relationships I've been lucky enough to make over these years that are my favorite part. That was the hardest part about last year, I really did miss seeing everyone. There are such good people in this industry, and I enjoy rubbing shoulders with them whenever possible.*

**Cervantes:**

I can certainly relate to that. And building relationships is so important, especially in your position. At the end of the day, what impact are you hoping to make in your role?

**Raybould:**

*When it's all said and done, I hope that I can say that I actually helped and that Potatoes USA is in a position where it can do a lot of good.*

**Cervantes:**

I like your positive outlook and attitude Jaren. And we need that! The world, our country and potato industry have gone through a lot since last March. What are your thoughts on how Potatoes USA responded to the changes the pandemic brought?

**Raybould:**

*I think we did awesome! I believe that we were blessed to have the 3 "Rights". The "right" people in the "right" place at the "right" time. The staff and our partners we were working with were already talking about becoming more adaptive and making the programs easy to change long before we could ever imagine the world in 2020. And it was because of this forward thinking that we were able to be so ready for what came at us. And I would be remiss if I didn't say that one of the "right" people was our Chairman Marty Myers and his leadership through this whole ordeal that was 2020.*

**Cervantes:**



You're absolutely spot on. The memories of Marty will live on not just through our hearts but through the impact he had on the industry and that impact will continue to live on and on.

With all that everyone went through last year, how do you think the Board's programs adapted or changed?

**Raybould:**

*The beauty of this whole organization goes back to the fact that the systems were already in place to allow for our programs to adapt under the fast pace of this situation. It just required moving a few pieces around on the chess board. Domestically, we had to shift some of our focus from foodservice and put it toward retail and our foodservice programs needed to shift from sit down to curbside or home delivery and QSR. Some programs had to be shelved. Quite a few of our Research programs were delayed. The end result was we got the job done.*

**Cervantes:**

Coming full circle to what you said about the "right" people at the "right" time in the "right" place. Now, looking ahead, this is a new year. And Potatoes USA just launched the new plan in July, what are some things we can look forward to this coming year?

**Raybould:**

*I think one of the biggest things we can look forward to is that we will be back out there, our staff, our board members, and everyone else we work with both here and abroad. I think you are going to see a much more aggressive marketing and promotion strategy that will be using all of the tools we have available with the main goal of getting people to eat more potatoes in more ways.*

**Cervantes:**

Yes! Getting out there with more passion for U.S. potatoes than ever.

How about from the growers' angle, do you have any thoughts on the challenges they might be facing this year and next?

**Raybould:**

*I think this is going to be different for every grower and operation. For some I think there is going to be some sticker shock when they see the final number on how much it cost to raise this year's crop, from inputs to labor. And I think you will see that again next year. For others I think the real challenge is going to be in marketing and finding a home for all of their potatoes. Especially if things continue to change.*

**Cervantes:**

That's a very great point. Certainly something to be thinking about.



Do you have any advice or guidance for the industry, specifically when it comes to change?

**Raybould:**

*Adapt or die. We can look back now and marvel at it, but we witnessed changes in our industry that would have happened in 3-5 years take place in less than one. It was scary and didn't seem possible at the time but we did it. And I think we always need to remember that we did it and that we can do it again.*

**Cervantes:**

There's that positive outlook again.

What about the inevitable market shifts, how can the industry better prepare for them?

**Raybould:**

*I think we are already doing it. This whole thing hasn't stopped shifting under our feet since it started over a year ago and we have had to constantly be on our toes. And while we didn't necessarily ever have a plan for something like this, we did have a plan that was able to handle this. And that all goes back to having the right people in the right place at the right time.*

**Cervantes:**

I agree, I don't think anyone could have planned for something like 2020!

But there are ways we can adjust like you said. Are there resources available from Potatoes USA that can help operations adapt to the changes in the marketplace?

**Raybould:**

*There are Natalia, If one were to go to [potatoesusa.com](http://potatoesusa.com) they would find an easy to navigate site where they will find a treasure trove of information regarding current and past market trends and data that can help them make decisions that would best fit their operation.*

**Cervantes:**

A treasure trove! How kind of you and very clever.

**Raybould:**

*It's certainly is that to me. It also has easy access to the Keeping It Current videos that share great highlights with the industry. And, that's where this podcast lives as well!*

**Cervantes:**

Yes, it is! You are very familiar with the treasure trove that is [potatoesusa.com](http://potatoesusa.com)



Now, as someone serving on the Potatoes USA board, the Yellowstone Soil Conservation District and the Idaho/East Oregon Potato Control Committee, do you have any advice for our new Board Members?

**Raybould:**

*Be engaged. Take the time and make the effort to get to know the other board members, and not just those from your growing area or state, but from across the whole country. Study the material and if you have questions, ask. I promise that the staff loves questions more than silence. And be engaged with the staff, the people actually making this all happen. If you have a thought, idea, or question then call, or email them, you may have a good one. And lastly, remember that you agreed to and swore an oath that you would do your best.*

**Cervantes:**

I couldn't agree more, especially about the questions.  
And if you were to challenge the industry, what would that challenge be?

**Raybould:**

*You know we are already pretty independent and adventurous spirits in this industry. I think my challenge would be to never stop being that way, and to always be reaching for more.*

**Cervantes:**

Reach for the stars! Potatoes were already the first vegetable grown in space so we are getting close!  
Aside from potatoes, do you have any other hobbies?

**Raybould:**

*During the winter I enjoy traveling, especially with my wife. And when possible, with our kids. And when time permits during the summer I like to golf.*

**Cervantes:**

Any upcoming travel plans you'd like to share? Or maybe your handicap?

**Raybould:**

We do have a couple travel plans coming up but I don't want to jinx anything. And a handicap? I don't even know what that is. \*laugh\*

**Cervantes:**

Anything else while we're still recording?



**Raybould:**

*I would just like to say thank you to everyone for all that they do to make this industry what it is.*

**Cervantes:**

Thank you Jaren. Thank you for everything that you do as well. And thank you for joining me today to share your insights and vision for the industry. I really appreciate your time.

**Raybould:**

*Thank you Natalia, it's been nice to stop for a minute and reflect on how far we have come at potatoes USA and as an industry.*

**Cervantes:**

I hope you all enjoyed listening to Jaren share his perspective as much as I did. And all supporting documents for any data provided in this episode can be found on [potatoesusa.com](http://potatoesusa.com)

To see all the great information available about potatoes or new and fun ways to cook with potatoes, visit [potatogoodness.com](http://potatogoodness.com).

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

I am your host, Natalia Cervantes. Until next time, take care everyone.