

**Cervantes:**

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

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

Did you know that this episode marks season 2 of Potato-Cast? That’s right, new year, new season of Potato-Cast.

In this episode, I’ll cover some potato media highlights because who doesn’t love positive potato content, recent retail sales, foodservice menu trends and an update on how potatoes are doing internationally.

Let’s get into it.

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There is no doubt that people love potatoes, but I wanted to share with you just how much. I know that the industry receives monthly updates on positive potato coverage in the media, but I dug a little deeper to find spud-love from every angle. From serious to wacky, you’ll want to stay tuned to this episode.

Thanksgiving seems a long time away, but it’s about that time of year when America’s favorite vegetable makes an appearance in probably every household. And while we assume everyone eats potatoes on Thanksgiving, Google Trends analysis proved that whether it’s mashed potatoes, baked, or casserole, states from coast to coast put potatoes at the top of their list for Thanksgiving sides.

We also heard Bill Belichick wax poetic about potatoes on Boston sports radio, saying, “It would be hard for me to turn down any type of potatoes. I’ll go with whatever – mashed, scalloped, baked. Load ‘em up. Throw some butter on there.” Of course, social media had a great time with this content. Now you can buy T-shirts with Belichicks face eating a bowl of spuds. I have one message for Belichick, and that’s Potatoes Fuel Performance. That’s all I’m going to say.

But we don’t need to search too hard to hear people talk about potatoes. Our very own star, Chef RJ Harvey, was featured in Southern Kitchen, which is part of the USA Today Network. RJ spoke with the reporter and shared how to make “The best mashed potatoes of your life.” The recipes and article can be found in newspapers around the Southeast and in Southern Kitchen.

November didn’t stop there though. Bon Appetite did a glowing 7-part series on potatoes that provided potato facts such as “What is the potato, really?”, advice such as “Can you eat sprouted potatoes?” and, of course, recipes.

Well+Good published a terrific article on potatoes and gut health which told readers, “it turns out that the humble spud is an unsung gut health hero.” I always love seeing content like this from an outlet with more than 5 million visitors a month.

Potatoes were also featured on several health-related lists recently, including U.S. News & World Reports 20 Cheap but Healthy Foods to Buy When You’re Broke, Newsweek’s 11 Best High Volume Low-Calorie Foods That Will Fill You Up, Eat This, Not That’s 20 Cozy Potato Soup Recipes Perfect for Weight Loss.” The Manual’s These 11 Healthy Foods are Among the Highest in Potassium.

Potatoes even made Everyday Health’s list of 11 Foods and Drinks to Help Soothe COVID-19 symptoms”. The article reported that “because of potatoes’ potassium content, they can help regulate fluid balance”, which the article states is “crucial when you’re fighting COVID-19”.

Potatoes USA pitched a story to the media around the holidays, specifically for dietary preferences such as vegan and gluten-free. The story even had a dog-friendly potato recipe. That story was published online by 133 media outlets, including Yahoo.

Last but not least, I can’t forget BuzzFeed, who shared an article with 31 potato recipes saying, “Who doesn’t love potatoes? Don’t answer that actually, because if you don’t love potatoes, we probably can’t be friends.” And honestly BuzzFeed, I can relate.

It’s safe to say that the spud love is loud in the digital world, and I just wanted to give you a glimpse of the range of content that’s out there about potatoes.

If you’re feeling like you need more spud love, you can join Tater-Chat. A new community of potato lovers on Facebook where friends can share potato jokes, potato memes, potato recipes and anything potato related that sparks joy. I’ll add a link to the group on this episode’s page.

A select group of leading scientists and communicators have partnered with Potatoes USA as members of the newly formed Scientific Advisory Panel. This panel will proactively support initiatives that look to correct misinformation about potatoes as well as other carbohydrate-containing foods. The panel members were chosen based on their unique backgrounds to help support the broader call for more integrity and transparency in the nutrition research community.

To stay up to date on the latest research and nutrition news please visit our [potatoesusa.com](http://potatoesusa.com) website or the [apre.com](http://apre.com) website.

This is a great opportunity to switch gears and talk about what’s happening with potatoes at retail. From October-December, total store potato sales increased in dollars by 3.5% but decreased in volume by 6.7% compared to 2020. While volume sales were below the pandemic fueled levels of 2020, they still remain higher than 2019. The decline in fresh sales was primarily impacted by russet and red sales..

But, yellow and petite potatoes both grew in dollar and volume sales compared to 2020. The one through four-pound bags of potatoes grew in dollars sales by 5% but saw a slight decline in volume at 3.3%. Micro/steamer trays and regular trays of potatoes grew in both dollar and volume sales. This tells us that consumers continue to purchase value-added products. Both fresh and total store sales numbers were compiled by IRI and are available to everyone in the U.S. potato industry.

To continue supporting retailers, Kayla Dome, retail program manager, recently developed a potato merchandising best practices guide for retailers. It's available at [potatoretailer.com](http://potatoretailer.com) and has fantastic examples on how to best optimize in-store displays to promote potatoes throughout the year. It even includes suggestions for social media posts. I highly encourage everyone to head to [potatoretailer.com](http://potatoretailer.com) and download their copy to share with their retail accounts.

In foodservice, I have a couple menu trends to share with you. For example, the McDonalds McPlant burger may be expanding to more locations sooner than you think. Right now, it's only available at select test locations, but the plant-based patty sees as many as 500 sandwich sales a week per location. The patty was developed in collaboration with Beyond Meat Inc and is made with peas, rice, and potatoes.

Have you ever wanted potato chips and mashed potatoes and loaded potato soup all at the same time? Well, Chef Mykie Moll just launched a pop-up in D.C. called Spud's Subs and Soups, and it serves potatoes five ways. I'll include a link to the pop-up in this week's episode. In short, Chef Moll says, "I can have fancier things, but honestly, spuds let me really put my heart and soul out there and make delicious, feel-good food."

Let's see how potatoes are doing internationally. Market access for U.S. potatoes to Malaysia is fully established. Imported potatoes in Malaysia enter duty-free for almost all fresh, frozen and dehydrated potatoes. The demand is relatively stable for fresh and is increasing for frozen and dehydrated potato products. Consumers in Malaysia view U.S. products as trustworthy and high quality.

The Potatoes USA Retail program in Malaysia works to increase U.S. potato volume and dollar sales at retail through promotions, merchandising visits, and seminars. Meanwhile, the foodservice program conducts technical training with volume foodservice operators who use 100% U.S. potatoes.

While shipping delays and supply chain issues have certainly created obstacles for international trade, U.S. potatoes are still finding their way to success in South Korea. At retail, two new products launched in December. A Hash Brown Stick using U.S. hash browns and Spicy Seasoned Fries using U.S. frozen straight cuts. And at foodservice, two major operators, Ashley and Pizza Hut, launched new pizza menu items using U.S. potatoes. Ashley has a new Stuffed Crust Pizza that uses U.S. potatoes and Pizza Hut is using U.S. potatoes to make Mega Crunch Fries.

I'm curious to try both and see what the Mega Crunch Fries look like.

Maintaining relationships and building demand for U.S. potatoes in these international markets is crucial which is why we have added new assets to the Buy U.S. campaign. The new materials are a presentation template to allow for deeper conversations with the international trade on the Buy U.S. messaging and an updated Buy U.S. fries video showing the technical differences between U.S. and competitor fries, including size, color, texture, moisture content, and cooking ability. The new Buy U.S. materials are all available for industry use on Potatoes USA's digital asset management system, Widen.

These are all the highlights I have time for. I hope you'll tune in next month for the special feature episode on soil health. I promise you won't want to miss it.

**Cervantes:**

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

All supporting documents for 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).

I am your host, Natalia Cervantes.

Until next time, take care everyone