

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.

Today's episode is a very special episode. Today I have the pleasure of welcoming back my very first guest from the first episode of Potato-Cast, and that guest is John Toaspern. John has been with the Board for 23 years. In those 23 years, he has helped the Board grow, adapt, overcome obstacles, and ultimately transform into what it is today.

**Cervantes:**

Even though the countdown is almost at zero, John is here to share a couple of his favorite memories and maybe tell us what he plans on doing with all his free time. John, welcome back to Potato-Cast.

**Toaspern:**

Thank you, Natalia. It's certainly bittersweet to record this with you.

**Cervantes:**

I must ask you, what kept you going every day, decade after decade? It's rare that someone is this dedicated to one industry.

**Toaspern:**

I don't know if there's enough time in the episode to cover that question.

But when you break it down, it comes to three things.

- First are the people. The growers themselves, their families, the agencies that we work with, the Board, and the staff. I felt lucky to support and work alongside these incredibly dedicated, kind, loving people. Many of whom have become my closest friends.
- The second is the industry itself. Our industry has seen a lot of ups and downs, frustrations, and obstacles, but we always come together and overcome them. When people come together to support one goal, that has power, a lot of power. That's why we've been so successful.
- And last, are the wins we continue to see because of support from the people and the industry. Wins like market access. In 23 years, there have been over 60 impactful market access achievements, including the most recent access to all of Mexico for fresh potatoes. Or domestic marketing wins like potatoes being positioned as performance fuel for athletes, and our work with APRE to expand nutrition professionals' understanding of the nutritional value of potatoes.

**Cervantes:**

To summarize, for you it's always been about the people, the industry itself, and all the positive results that come from the combined efforts.

**Toaspern:**

Yes. That's a great way to summarize it.

**Cervantes:**

With everything you have experienced, what has been your greatest learning?

**Toaspern:**

That too is a difficult question as I have learned so much over the years. It has been fascinating to learn about the potato industry and the markets both domestically and internationally. But I think that the biggest lesson I have learned is that of perseverance; opening markets, changing people's perceptions, and conducting research, these things take time, and they require a commitment to see them through. We are both runners, so you will understand when I say it is like completing a marathon, one must be committed, and one must work at it every day. The successes we have achieved have come from that hard work and dedication.

**Cervantes:**

I like that analogy. Where do you hope to see the industry in the next five to ten years?

**Toaspern:**

Over the next five to ten years, I hope the industry can continue to expand international sales through increased market access. Fresh sales to Mexico should be fully established. I really hope that we will have gained access for fresh table-stock potatoes in Japan as there is a significant market there and no justified phytosanitary reasons for the access to be denied.

I also really want the potato to be appreciated and recognized for the nutrition powerhouse that it truly is. Using the excellent nutrition research that is being generated by APRE the industry can establish the nutrition credentials of the potato from the scientific community to consumers. My dream is for athletes and activity people worldwide turn to the potato to fuel their performance.

**Cervantes:**

If you could leave the industry with one piece of advice, what would it be?

**Toaspern:**

The main piece of advice I have is for the industry to stick together. The successes we have achieved have been when everyone works together, national organizations, state organizations, growers, and processors all advocating and working for the outcomes that will benefit the entire industry.

**Cervantes:**

Those are very wise words. Last question. What are you going to do with your time?

**Toaspern:**

Besides continuing to advocate for the potato I plan to ski, fly fish, play tennis, and mountain bike mid-week. I am really looking forward to spending more time with my wife, traveling, camping, hiking, and gardening.

**Cervantes:**

Staying active and being with those you love. All sound like lovely activities. Thank you for sharing your time today to do this episode, and thank you for all your dedication, your positive mindset, and for always lifting up everyone around you. You'll be missed.

**Toaspern:**

Thank you for the interview, Natalia. I am confident that you and the other great staff at Potatoes USA will continue to build on the foundation that has been built.

**Cervantes:**

That brings us to the end of our episode.

Potato-cast is growing. If you are an active member in the potato industry, potato-cast wants to interview you about your operation. To submit yourself or your friend, please email me at [natalia@potatoesusa.com](mailto:natalia@potatoesusa.com) It would be great to interview some of our dedicated listeners.

As always, 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.