



## **Season 2: Episode 9**

**Title:** Doorway for Potatoes: A Visit from South of The Border

**Description:** In this episode, Potatoes USA Conversation Architect, Natalia Cervantes, interviews Kayla Dome, Global Retail Manager, and Tiffany Thompson, International Marketing Manager, about a recent Reverse Trade Mission with Mexico.

To be featured on Potato-Cast, email [Natalia@PotatoesUSA.com](mailto:Natalia@PotatoesUSA.com)

### **Intro:**

Hello everyone! Welcome to Potato-cast. A podcast full of all your favorite potato industry content. I'm Natalia Cervantes, Potatoes USA Conversation Architect, and your host.

### **Cervantes:**

I'm really excited about this episode. October 3 to 7, Potatoes USA hosted an in-person reverse trade mission with Mexican retailers and importers, the first in-person trade mission since prior to 2020. It couldn't have gone better. A total of 30 people traveled to the U.S. to discuss the trade of U.S. fresh potatoes with Mexico.

A lot of planning went into this to make it a success, and to tell you all about it, I have Kayla Dome Global Marketing Manager of retail and Tiffany Thompson International Marketing Manager for Foodservice.

Ladies, welcome to Potato-Cast.

### **Thompson & Dome:**

Thank you for having us.

### **Cervantes:**

Can each of you tell our listeners a little bit about your roles at Potatoes USA?

### **Thompson:**

My role is focused on our international marketing programs. I manage Potatoes USA's international foodservice program to promote U.S. potatoes in the restaurant industry in our 12 international markets. I also help on some of our market access work internationally.

### **Dome:**

I manage domestic and international marketing programs for Potatoes USA. I help our growers sell more potatoes in grocery stores here in the U.S. and our various markets around the world.

### **Cervantes:**



Can you expand for me on what the Reverse Trade Mission is?

**Thompson:**

Potatoes USA hosts Reverse Traded Missions, or RTMs, at least once a year, and the audience can vary from importers and distributors to retailers, foodservice operators, or potato growers.

**Dome:**

The purpose of the RTM is to bring key trade members to the U.S. to educate them on the benefits of U.S. potatoes and encourage them to purchase more U.S. potatoes. This could mean working with existing buyers of U.S. potatoes who are considering purchasing additional potato products or bringing potential customers who are considering purchasing U.S. potatoes for the first time. A typical RTM involves taking the participants to a potato farm, storage and packing sheds, processing facilities, U.S. foodservice, and retail stores, and sometimes a port. Each RTM is tailored to the audience we're working with.

**Cervantes:**

And you've led our RTM's in the past?

**Thompson:** Yes, but with slightly different audiences than this one. I've been a part of putting on two foodservice-focused reverse trade missions virtually in the last two years. I've also helped on a seed potato-focused RTM that brought potato farmers from international markets to the U.S. to learn about U.S. seed potatoes.

**Cervantes:**

What made this RTM different?

**Dome:**

This RTM was focused on buyers in one market – Mexico. Based on feedback from our growers as well as the industry in Mexico, there was a need for stronger relationships from both sides. This RTM specifically focused on U.S. fresh potatoes because of the recently acquired fresh market access for U.S. potatoes to the entire country. Prior to May 2022, U.S. fresh potatoes could only be exported within 26 kilometers of the U.S. border. Now that the U.S. potato industry can ship fresh potatoes throughout Mexico, and not just to the 26-kilometer border region, we have a lot of importers and retailers interested in our potatoes.

**Cervantes:**

Can you talk a bit about the attendees? Who was here and why?

**Dome:**

We had 14 attendees from Mexico who were all representing major importers or retailers in the market. They came to learn all about U.S. fresh potatoes, from production and packaging to shipping and cooking with U.S. fresh potatoes. Since we haven't previously been able to ship fresh potatoes throughout the entire country, many



Mexican consumers aren't familiar with this product, so this was a chance to begin educating on the benefits of U.S. fresh potatoes and how to prepare them. In addition to the visitors from Mexico, we had growers, shippers, and state representatives from Colorado, Idaho, Wisconsin, and Washington attend. The U.S. representatives attended to meet with the importers, distributors, and retailers from Mexico and build stronger business connections.

**Cervantes:**

That's a lot of people together for three days. What was the schedule like?

**Thompson:**

We had a packed schedule while the group was in Colorado. We spent the first full day of the RTM in the San Luis Valley where the group toured a potato farm, storage facilities, and packing shed. After the tour, we drove back up to Denver.

Day two included presentations on the advantages of U.S. potatoes and the support Potatoes USA offers in the market, sampling of different preparation methods for fresh russet potatoes, and a trade show with the U.S. industry.

On the third day of the RTM, we took the group on a retail tour. We visited five different grocery stores to see the potatoes on display and learn a bit about merchandising fresh potatoes.

**Dome:**

Of course, throughout the week, we also ate lots of delicious U.S. potato dishes during each of the meals!

**Cervantes:**

What did our guests from Mexico think of the farm tour?

**Thompson:**

The participants were very impressed by the amount of technology and innovation that they saw on the farm and in the storage and packing facilities. Technology and innovation are factors that really set the U.S. industry apart and allow us to produce such consistent and high-quality potatoes, so it was really valuable to show this side of the industry to the group. The participants were also able to ask many questions to an actual U.S. potato grower who led the tour about potato production and exporting to Mexico. The farm is registered for trade in greater Mexico and has been exporting to the border region for several years, so it was helpful to have someone with experience shipping to Mexico to address questions and concerns from the participants.

**Cervantes:**

Sounds like they gained some valuable information on the farm tour. What grocery stores did you take them to? What was that like?

**Dome:**



We visited an array of retailers to showcase how the different types of markets to different consumers. We visited specialty, mass merchandise, and traditional grocery stores to see the various types and displays based on the demographics of each particular purpose.

**Cervantes:**

What drove your decision to make this RTM Retail specific?

**Dome:**

Since the Mexican market opened for fresh U.S. potatoes, exports have primarily gone to retail. Right now, that's where our efforts are focused to ensure that importers, retailers, and consumers understand the benefits of fresh U.S. potatoes. We are working on promoting U.S. fresh potatoes by educating on proper handling, merchandising, cooking methods, and more. As the market grows for fresh potatoes, we'll expand those efforts to the foodservice industry as well.

**Cervantes:**

Could you share your favorite highlight from the visit?

**Thompson:**

The trade show portion of the RTM was a big hit. This was actually the first time we included a trade show in an RTM, and we already have plans to continue this for the next RTM in the spring. We invited U.S. growers, shippers, and state organizations to come and set up a small display, and the Mexican participants were able to walk around and visit with each of the U.S. companies. This was a great opportunity for dialogue and gave the participants a chance to ask questions specific to their business.

**Cervantes:**

Was there a lot of engagement?

**Dome:**

Everyone involved was really engaged during the trade show, and this seemed to be an excellent platform to foster conversations and build relationships between the Mexican importers and retailers and the U.S. potato industry.

**Cervantes**

Have you received any feedback from the attendees?

**Thompson:**

Feedback during the event was very positive. The attendees were grateful for the opportunity to visit U.S. potato facilities to learn about the production and technology used on the farm. Participants also were glad to have a platform to talk to U.S. potato industry growers, shippers, and other industry members about fresh exports to Mexico. Overall, it was a positive experience for both sides of the border.

**Cervantes:**

What do you hope attendees learned from this trip?

**Dome:**

We hope the RTM gave the participants a good look at what the U.S. potato industry has to offer, from our high-quality products to the merchandising, training, and promotional support we can offer them in the market. One big takeaway that we hope all the participants had is that this is an opportunity to grow Mexican consumer demand for all potatoes, regardless of the origin. Now that more product is available to consumers, we hope to educate on ways consumers can eat more potatoes, and hopefully raise per capita consumption in the market for this nutrient-dense vegetable.

**Cervantes:**

You certainly packed the schedule in a way that would ensure your participants were engaged, educated, and had a great experience. Does this mean you will do this again next year?

**Thompson:**

We'll gauge the market's interest, both on the Mexican side and the U.S. side, to determine if this event would be useful again next year. We hope that the market grows for U.S. fresh exports over the next year, and if more Mexican importers, wholesalers, retailers, or foodservice operators are interested in learning more about fresh U.S. potatoes, we'll definitely consider hosting another event for the market. It is a significant time and budget investment so we are hoping by next year, U.S. fresh potatoes will have well established relationships in the market and the market's future is much more stable.

**Dome:**

We also are already planning another RTM in April 2023. This RTM will be focused on importers, distributors and retailers in the 12 markets, including Mexico, that we conduct marketing programs in, and will be held in Washington state. We are really excited to incorporate our learnings from the Mexico RTM into this next event, and hope to get more of the U.S. potato industry involved. More information on how to get involved will be coming very soon, but if you have any questions in the meantime, please reach out to us at [Tiffany@PotatoesUSA.com](mailto:Tiffany@PotatoesUSA.com) and [Kayla@PotatoesUSA.com](mailto:Kayla@PotatoesUSA.com).

**Cervantes:**

This sounds like a fantastic opportunity for our international markets. Looking forward to recapping that event with you both in May! Thank you for taking the time to explain this event in greater detail and share with our listeners the value this brings to our industry.

**Dome:**

Thank you again for having us on Potato-cast.

**Thompson:**



We enjoyed sharing the highlights of this event with you and the industry.

**Outro:**

This brings us to the end of our episode. I hope you enjoyed learning about the retail reverse trade mission with Mexico as much as I did.

Potato-cast is growing. If you are an active member of the potato industry, we'd love to interview you about your operation. To submit yourself or your friend, please email [natalia@potatoesusa.com](mailto:natalia@potatoesusa.com). It would be a pleasure to hear from our dedicated listeners.

Thank you for listening to this episode of Potato-cast! You can subscribe on Spotify, Apple, or Google Podcast by searching for Potato-cast. Feel free to share potato-cast with your friends and family in the industry.

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, have a tater-licious day, everyone.