

Potato-Cast

Season 2: Episode 11

Title: Resetting the Plate: How Policy Impacts Potatoes

Description: In this episode, Potatoes USA Conversation Architect, Natalia Cervantes, interviews Howard Goldstein, MS, RD. Howard provides a holistic outlook on nutrition policies and the impact current potato research is making to stay ahead.

Resources for this episode:

Current APRE Research

To be featured on Potato-Cast, email Natalia@PotatoesUSA.com

Learn more about Potatoes USA by visiting PotatoesUSA.com

See all the great information available about potatoes, potato nutrition, or fun ways to cook with potatoes, visit PotatoGoodness.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. Here with me today is Howard Goldstein. Howard is a registered dietitian with a master's in nutrition communications from Tufts University. His areas of expertise include global food and nutrition affairs, health professionals' engagement, and nutrition communication. He was the Vice President of FoodMinds and is now the owner and president of NomNomGlobal; a food and nutrition consulting firm.

Howard, welcome to Potato-Cast!

Goldstein:

Thank you, Natalia - it's great to be here.

Cervantes:

I know our listeners really appreciate this topic today but before we get started, do you mind sharing a little bit about your background?

Goldstein:

Sure. After graduating from The George Washington University with a bachelor's in international business I worked for Thomson Reuters for a few years focusing on financial software education and business development. Following that, I made a hard left turn into the world of food and nutrition.

Cervantes:

From financial software development to nutrition communication, that's a big leap.

Goldstein:

It was spurred on by a personal passion to learn more about how to keep myself healthy. This led me to pursue a master's in nutrition communication from Tufts University and my Registered

Dietitian credentialing from the University of California, San Francisco. Upon completing my advanced education – I started working with commodity boards, and food companies, helping them lead with science to transform perceptions and opinions about their products across audiences from policy thought leaders to consumers.

Cervantes:

And that's precisely why we are here today. To discuss what it means to transform perceptions and opinions among - thought leaders as well as consumers. Let's get into it. About a month ago, the White House hosted a conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health. What was the purpose of that conference?

Goldstein:

It was intended to drive action on hunger, nutrition, diet-related diseases, and related disparities. As an outcome of the Conference, the White House released a national plan to achieve its [goal](#) to "end hunger and increase healthy eating and physical activity by 2030."

It's important to note that this is actually the Second WH Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health. The first one took place more than 50 years ago by the Nixon Administration and led to the creation or expansion of federal nutrition assistance initiatives such as the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Cervantes:

For those who would like to read the entire national plan, I will include a link to it in this episode's description. I was able to tune in myself and found the conversations very fruitful. What was your take on it?

Goldstein:

There were 5 main pillars discussed throughout the full-day event: improving food access and affordability; integrating nutrition and health; empowering all consumers to make and have access to healthy choices; supporting physical activity for all; and enhancing nutrition and food security research. I think these broad focal points to reverse hunger and nutrition are spot on.

Cervantes:

Let's talk about some of the content in these pillars. How do you see these conversations translating into the potato industry?

Goldstein:

The conversations and actions coming out of this event are just starting to take shape – which means there are opportunities to ensure potatoes are part of discussions and solutions. For example, one of the bigger focal points during the Conference was on the concept of 'Food is Medicine' This approach recognizes that dietary patterns and foods can be one way to prevent, and possibly reverse, chronic diseases. The strategy recommends piloting food-focused interventions like medically tailored meals and produce prescriptions within Medicare and Medicaid, as well as within the Veterans Affairs (VA) system and the Indian Health Services (IHS). For the potato industry, it will be essential to ensure that stakeholders and decision makers who are leading these efforts are aware of the latest nutrition research supporting the role of potatoes in cardiometabolic health and ensure that potatoes are included in medically tailored meals, produce prescriptions, or other initiatives that bring this 'food is medicine' approach to life.

Cervantes:

We use this word a lot in our nutrition conversations, 'healthy,' but what does that really mean?

Goldstein:

This is a hot topic right now. Believe it or not, a new draft definition of healthy was released by the FDA in conjunction with the White House event – and noted throughout the conference.

Cervantes:

Seems like a great deal of content to release to the public all at once. I'm glad you're here today to shed some light for us.

Goldstein:

My pleasure. The long and short of it is that the new proposed definition is complex and highly nuanced—with different variables to meet based on the food form – let's use our potato, for example. The whole potato that is found in the produce aisle would be considered healthy, but if that same potato was sliced and canned, the criteria used to qualify for the healthy claim changes.

Cervantes:

Please elaborate.

Goldstein:

The old definition used specific nutrients to encourage as a criterium, but the new proposed definition ditches that and instead uses food group amounts as the criteria. So, it's moving away from focusing on foods providing certain nutrients like fiber and potassium and moving towards emphasizing dietary patterns like # of vegetable servings, # of whole grains servings.

The other major difference in this updated definition is around nutrients to limit. Similar to the previous definition, there are upper thresholds for certain nutrients that a food cannot exceed to qualify for the healthy claim. These include sodium and saturated fat. The new definition also includes added sugar to this list and tightens the upper thresholds for sodium and saturated fat, compared to the current definition. These newer, tighter thresholds may impact potato products ability to use the term 'healthy' on a product package, especially processed products.

Cervantes:

This is undoubtedly going to create a lot of shifts in the nutrition space.

Goldstein:

It definitely will shake things up. But, as I mentioned – this is a draft definition. Comments are being accepted through the end of December, and a final definition is anticipated to be released next year.

Cervantes:

As dialogues on food and nutrition-related issues evolve and proposed updates to food and nutrition guidelines and programs are proposed, what can we do?

Goldstein:

The broader potato industry and potato stakeholders need to engage in these discussions and ensure those leading this effort are briefed on research supporting the role of potatoes in cardiometabolic health and, as previously mentioned, that potatoes are included in medically

tailored meals, produce prescriptions, or other initiatives that bring this ‘food is medicine’ approach to life.

And, to effectively engage, our messages and recommendations need to be back by science—and that’s where the Alliance for Potato Research and Education, or APRE, steps in. APRE is a non-profit organization supported by US and Canadian potato farmers and potato processors. Collectively, these members fund between \$750K-\$1M in new research annually, through a competitive process. The types of studies APRE funds are influenced by these types of meetings and outcomes. The White House provided a clear blueprint as to how they’d like to tackle the issue of nutrition and hunger – and APRE has an opportunity to help the potato industry respond to the White House’s opinions and, more importantly, get ahead to lead conversations and ensure potatoes are positively viewed and positioned in dietary solutions.

Cervantes:

It’s crucial that the industry is aware of these initiatives. Do you feel like APRE is staying ahead?

Goldstein:

Well, in reality, we are up against nearly 4 decades of potatoes being used as the food world’s scapegoat – wrongly being connected to causing chronic diseases, contributing to the obesity epidemic, and displacing other vegetables from people’s diets. So, we have some catching up to do, but more importantly, we need to get ahead and show new reasons for people to eat more potatoes in more ways.

Cervantes:

Are there approaches in place right now to push back on these miscommunications?

Goldstein:

Yes, but APRE does not do it alone. We work with other potato agencies to provide scientific support for their initiatives. For example, we work closely with Potatoes USA to proactively address misinformation in science and consumer media. Specifically, when Potatoes USA picks up a negative potato story in the media, APRE helps identify appropriate scientific support for their rebuttal, which is used to request article revisions or corrections, help educate writers and position Potatoes USA as a future resource for potato information – especially before writers start to pen stories. As a direct result of this proactive initiative, many media outlets have corrected their stories.

Potatoes USA CEO Blair Richardson along with Bonnie Johnson have been highly active with the media. I think it’s important to remember, if the potato industry doesn’t tell the positive potato story – no one is going to do it for them.

Cervantes:

Couldn’t agree more. We need to be driving the message not simply reacting to it, and we need to be share the science that clearly show the benefits of eating more potatoes in any form. What other research does APRE currently have in the pipeline?

Goldstein:

We have funded more than \$6 Million in research over the past 5 years, resulting in a scientific pipeline that include 51 studies, with about half already published. Also, important to note, more than half of the studies in progress contain a fried or processed potato component.

We select research projects based on three broad categories, which is also a good snap shot of the type of research currently in the pipeline. These categories include:

- *Cardiometabolic health, with studies investigating how eating white potatoes may impact disease outcomes like type 2 diabetes, obesity, hypertension, and blood pressure.*
- *Health Dietary Patterns, with studies investigating how eating potatoes impacts nutrient intakes and Dietary Guidelines adherence*
- *Healthy Lifestyles, with studies investigating how eating potatoes impacts different age groups, as well as special populations—like athletes and active people.*

Cervantes:

How will this research get in front of nutrition thought leaders?

Goldstein:

You hit on a critical point with this question. We are investing significant time and dollars in discovering critical scientific findings on eating potatoes' health and wellness benefits. We cannot simply fund research and then walk away once it is published. We need to ensure nutrition thought leaders and the research community is aware of our studies, referring to our studies in conversations and citing our studies in future research.

To that end – APRE develops a few pieces of communications following study publications to help contextualize the findings across the current nutrition environment. These include press releases and study alerts to thousands of researchers and thought leaders. We also support efforts to get APRE-funded research on researcher and thought leader conference agendas and work with other potato stakeholder agencies—like Potatoes USA—to provide scientific proof to support their outreach and engagement efforts.

That said – we have a minimal budget focused on outreach and communications, as most of our dollars are used for research generation. We rely on and encourage the entire potato industry to promote research publications and use the findings coming out of our studies to inform their messages and programs

Cervantes:

Is there anything those of us in the potato industry can do to help spread awareness about the available research?

Goldstein:

Yes! Be loud and proud potato advocates, where ever food is sold or discussed. The power of grass roots efforts to transform perceptions is strong. A couple of top-of-mind suggestions may include:

-- Getting more involved in you children's school menus. Don't see potato options at breakfast or snack time? Speak up and share resources and information on the health benefits and culinary experiences that potatoes provide.

-- Turning the table and becoming your doctor's resource. The one area of study lacking in nearly all medical school practice is nutrition and diet. So – next time you see your doctor, why

not share some leave behind resources on the role of potatoes in healthy dietary patterns and as part of medically tailored meals for certain populations.

Cervantes:

Howard, those are fantastic ideas. I can't thank you enough for sharing your time with me today. This has been invaluable, and I know the industry appreciates how you break these topics down. I've asked you a lot about nutrition today, but what do you like to do in your free time?

Goldstein:

I cherish my free time! I'm an avid hiker and urban trekker. I love exploring the world and embracing different cultures. I'm also a bit too obsessed with dogs – but who can blame me! I try and volunteer at local shelters and have recently been walking foster dogs who need some time away from the kennel.

Cervantes:

I also heard that you might be a poncho enthusiast. Is that true?

Goldstein:

HA! Have you been rummaging through my closet – only kidding. I think this goes back to my love of exploration and cultures. Over the past couple of years, I've been traveling more to Latin American countries, which is where I was first exposed to the variety of this amazing piece of clothing. While many people only associate the poncho with Mexico – it can actually be found throughout the region. In fact, my very first poncho was from Peru – and made of Alpaca. While it's a hobby only in its infancy – currently have 3 Ponchos—it's one that I think will stick around for years to come!

Cervantes:

That's amazing. This is the best hobby, and I'm looking forward to seeing how your poncho collection grows on Instagram.

Goldstein:

Thank you, Natalia for inviting me on to share a few details about APRE and the necessary potato research being generated!

Outro:

This brings us to the end of our episode. I hope you all enjoyed learning from Howard 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. 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. To see all the great information available about potatoes or new and fun ways to cook with potatoes, visit potatogoodness.com.



I am your host, Natalia Cervantes.
Until next time, have a poncho-full-tater-day, everyone.