

Potato Board provides spud price tool

With perennial rice at hand, is perennial wheat far behind?

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

DENVER — A new tool developed for the U.S. Potato Board analyzes how the price fluctuations of fresh potato products affect demand.

The price elasticity tool is available to USPB members by accessing the “resource center” link from www.uspotatoes.com.

Sarah Reece, USPB global retail marketing manager, said ship- pers may use the tool to work with customers on pricing decisions. Reece said USPB has also posted links to webinars demonstrating how to use the tool. Tool users must enter their region, the time of year and the fresh potato product.

USPB has a contract with Nielsen Perishables Group, which developed the tool in conjunction with a price elasticity study, based on 5 1/2 years of retail data involving more than 800,000 sales records.

Reece said the study marks USPB's first analysis of price elasticity, which gauges how price impacts the demand for certain

products. USPB analyzed 24 dif- ferent varieties and sizes of bags, finding wide variability in how price changes impacted demand.

Specialty potato products in smaller packages were the most price sensitive. Furthermore, the study found East Coast consum- ers were the most sensitive to price changes.

For example, a 10 percent in- crease in the price of a 3-pound bag of colored fingerlings drove a 43 percent decrease in sales in the New England area, com- pared with a 26 percent decrease in demand in the Mountain re- gion of the West.

Large bags of Russets, which offer the most food per dollar, were the least price sensitive.

“The study helps us to know we should promote some of those specialty varieties versus Russet varieties or the larger package varieties that consumers are less price sensitive with,” Reece said.

Juliette King, associate client manager with Nielsen Perishables Group, said the study was her company's first look into the price

elasticity of potatoes. King said Nielsen has done similar work with private companies involved in other crops, though USPB is one of the first commodity groups to request an elasticity study.

“(Potatoes) are not a one- size-fits-all category,” King said. “You really do need to look at each product individually and see how people react to changing prices within that product.”

King was also interested to find potatoes had relatively little cross-elasticity — meaning pur- chases of one potato category, such as Russets, didn't neces- sarily correlate with reductions in purchases of other categories, such as reds.

Chris Wada, marketing di- rector for Wada Farms in Idaho Falls, Idaho, and co-chairman of the USPB's domestic marketing committee, said his company has been analyzing price elasticity of potatoes from its own infor- mation source and sharing find- ings with customers since 2008, among other data. He anticipates the USPB tool will be heavily utilized by the industry.

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Perennial rice may soon become available to farmers in China and Australia, but re- searchers say perennial wheat is a decade or more from intro- duction.

Perennial rice is bred to re- grow after harvest over sever- al growing seasons, said Tim Crews, director of research at the nonprofit Land Institute in Salina, Kan.

A perennial rice crop would reduce labor, input costs and weed pressure, he said.

“We don't know how many seasons the current lines will produce, but we know that at least four currently is what's been achieved,” Crews said. “The long-term goal would be to have them produce for quite some time, repeatedly, year after year.”

The institute provided some funding for research and visited

test sites to monitor progress at the Food Crops Research Insti- tute of the Yunnan Academy of Agricultural Sciences in China.

Perennial rice may soon be released in China, said Len Wade, strategic research profes- sor at Charles Sturt University in Australia. He is also involved in the rice trials.

A long-standing goal for the grains industry, perennial wheat, is still under develop- ment, Wade said. The wheat

genome is far more complex than that of rice.

In the United States, Stephen Jones, director of Washington State University's Research and Extension Center in Mount Ver- non, Wash., estimated perennial wheat will become available in 10 to 15 years. Jones' team is looking at the forage value of perennials. He is involved in a perennial wheat project headed by University of Georgia re- searchers.



The Associated Press
A farmer walks near cultivated rice laid on a paddy field during the rice harvesting season in January in Samroang Kandal village on the outskirts of Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

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