

# U.S. potato utilization drops 5.2% as foodservice sags

By BRAD CARLSON  
Capital Press

Foodservice shutdowns during the coronavirus pandemic fueled a 5.2% drop in utilization of U.S.-grown potatoes for the marketing year that ended June 30, Potatoes USA reported.

The total utilization decline, to about 34.6 billion pounds, takes into account potatoes and potato products sold at retail and in foodservice as well as U.S. export and import volumes.

A 12.6% decrease in foodservice volume and a 2.4% drop in exports outweighed an 8.7% gain in retail sales, Potatoes USA said in a news release. A 6.7% increase in imports also hurt utilization of the U.S. crop.



John Toaspersn

The decline occurred at the end of the marketing year and was measured against strong sales in the second half of the previous year, the national marketing group said.

Sales of frozen potato products dropped 10% from July 2019 through June 2020. Potatoes USA said COVID-19 restrictions impacted quick-service restaurants less than full-service restaurants, as fresh-potato sales to foodservice fell 19%.

Foodservice sales have been accounting for a greater share of total potato sales in the U.S., peaking at 58% in marketing year 2019.

The foodservice share of the marketing year 2020 total dropped to 53%.

Potatoes USA Chief Marketing Officer John Toaspersn said foodservice sales recovered somewhat from July through September 2020.

Fry sales at quick-service restaurants increased since spring but remained about 10% below summer 2019. A lack of non-restaurant sales, such as at theme parks and event venues, continued to drag on total fry sales.

Fresh potato sales improved from spring to summer but remained well below year-earlier levels.

"Things have been a little more uncertain this fall," Toaspersn said. "The big question is how

quickly the recovery is going to occur, and when restaurants are going to start reopening."

Demand in the foodservice segment could start to improve in late winter and early spring as the weather warms and as more vaccine gets out to the public, he said.

Idaho Potato Commission Foodservice Vice President Alan Kahn said IPC is "thinking now about, longer term, when things return to a somewhat normal state, how to help our customers drive volume."

Now, "a significant percentage of the population still does not feel comfortable dining in at a restaurant," he said. Sit-down restaurants that typically order 40- and 50-count cartons of larger pota-

toes "are struggling because their business in large part depends on consumers dining inside the restaurant."

Distributors tell IPC that their business is "completely dynamic" depending on the state they are in and the restrictions imposed on restaurants, Kahn said.

Potatoes USA said retail-sales changes for the marketing year ended June 30 included an increase of 15% for frozen and dehydrated products, a 9.5% gain for fresh — the industry has moved some foodservice-bound fresh potatoes into the retail channel — and a 5.5% increase for chips.

Toaspersn said summer retail sales did not match the spring surge but remained 10-15% above year-earlier levels.

# Feds sued over nixing grizzlies in Cascades

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

The Center for Biological Diversity sued the Trump administration Wednesday over grizzly bears, alleging the Interior Department illegally canceled plans to release bears into the North Cascades.

The federal suit, filed in the District of Columbia, comes one month before a change in White House administrations.

"We definitely hope that the Biden administration will reconsider the Trump administration's decision to terminate the restoration plan," Center for Biological Diversity attorney Andrea Zaccardi said. "Grizzly bears are not going to recover without a plan for restoration."

The suit names Interior Secretary David Bernhardt, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service. Efforts to obtain comment from the Interior Department were unsuccessful.



Terry Tollefsbol/USFWS

**The Center for Biological Diversity sued the Trump administration Dec. 16 in the District of Columbia for dropping plans to release grizzly bears into the North Cascades.**

Bernhardt announced July 7 in Omak, Wash., that the federal agencies were dropping plans to capture and release grizzly bears in north-central Washington.

Bernhardt cited local opposition to reintroducing grizzlies to the region. He made the announcement to an invited group of cattlemen, farmers and elected officials.

The North Cascades are one of six federal grizzly bear "recovery zones," but

no grizzly has been seen in the Cascades south of the Canadian border since 1996.

The suit alleges the Trump administration violated its obligation under the Endangered Species Act to conserve grizzly bears, a threatened species.

Furthermore, the agencies broke the National Environmental Policy Act and Administrative Procedure Act by failing to adequately explain the decision, the suit claims.

# Idaho water-quality trading legislation to be proposed

By BRAD CARLSON  
Capital Press



Paul Arrington

The Idaho Water Users Association wants the state to endorse and help carry out water-quality trading.

IWUA Executive Director and General Counsel Paul Arrington said the group plans to propose a bill and a joint resolution. The 2021 Idaho Legislature is scheduled to start Jan. 11.

The bill would authorize the state Department of Environmental Quality to establish and operate voluntary water-quality trading programs. The resolution would be a non-binding statement that the Legislature supports water-quality trading as a concept.

Water-quality trading establishes a tangible value as a means of exchange. It aims to encourage upstream improvements that reduce the need for more expensive treatment downstream. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency supports it on a watershed scale.

Arrington said several settlement-pond projects, aiming to improve water quality in the Snake River or tributaries, have been planned or completed in southern Idaho. They can be expensive, as land, equipment and permits

must be obtained.

Water-quality trading has the potential to create more opportunity for projects, he said. A potential example involves a city's total maximum-daily-load permit that authorizes wastewater discharge per

Clean Water Act requirements.

"A city treats water, releases it, and it finds its way back into the river," Arrington said. "Sometimes the cost of installing additional water treatment facilities can be exorbitant, and small communities can't bear that burden. If you can go spend a couple hundred thousand to build one of these ponds to reduce loading from a different source, you can use that to offset what would have been cleaned at the treatment facility."

State law allows water-quality trading.

"This simply would be formalizing this opportunity in Idaho," Arrington said. "This is just another tool in the toolbox as these groups are working to improve the water quality of the Snake River and the (tributary) Boise River."

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