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POTATOES IN THE LIMELIGHT

Organizations Ranging from The United Nations to the Maine Potato Board Set Plans in Motion to Promote Potatoes & the Potato Industry

Presque Isle, ME – Potatoes have long caught the attention of Mainers; however, their status is about to be elevated here and around the globe. The United Nations has declared 2008 “International Year of the Potato,” and the Maine Potato Board is expanding its marketing efforts as well. The humble spud is about to steal the limelight – and deservedly so.

Potatoes can be grown quickly and on less land and in harsher climates than any other crop, giving them an edge when it comes to feeding the world’s rapidly growing population. “The potato is on the front line in the fight against world hunger and poverty,” said Jacques Diouf, the director-general of the U.N.’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Maine ranks about seventh or eighth in the nation in terms of production. In 2007, Maine growers planted on 57,000 acres, yielding 295 CWT (hundred weight) per acre, which adds up to about 1.6 billion pounds of potatoes.

Moving forward, Maine is holding steadfast to a focus on quality, as well as advancing the positive and profound impact potatoes have on the state economically, naturally, and culturally. One way the Maine Potato Board is communicating this message is by building on an already solid marketing campaign.

Coming off the heels of last year’s successful advertising efforts, which centered on economic development, the Maine Potato Board recently launch its latest print and radio campaign, called “Generations of Faming.”

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The objective of the campaign is to put a face on the potato industry, drawing attention to the many generations of families who have poured their hearts and souls into sustaining Maine's farms and natural resources.

The Maine Potato Board has also ramped up its public relations efforts, generating fresh and powerful story ideas, introducing an online newsletter to keep people abreast of what's going on in the industry.

Efforts to elevate Maine potatoes don't stop at the state line. Maine wants people nationwide to understand its historical and current contributions to the industry. Two Maine growers, in particular, will support national efforts. Keith Labrie, of St. Agatha, Maine, and Alan Moir, of Woodland, Maine, have both earned spots on the National Potato Promotion Board, strengthening Maine's voice when it comes to touting potatoes. They join current USPB members from Maine, Tom Qualey and Steve Whited.

There is also an opportunity for Mainers in general to support the state's potato industry by buying Maine potatoes and value-added products. To find Maine potatoes, consumers should look for the Maine Quality Trademark – a blue, white, and red State of Maine trademark that is typically carried on all bags of Maine potatoes, even on private labels. Also, look for processed Maine potatoes by McCain Foods, Naturally Potatoes, and Penobscot Frozen Foods.

There are about 380 potato growers in Maine, from Aroostook County to the western mountain region around Bethel and Fryeburg. The total impact of the potato industry on the state's economy is \$540 million in sales (direct and indirect combined), 6,100 jobs, \$230 million in personal income, and \$32 million in state and local taxes.

The Maine Potato Board

The Maine Potato Board was created in 1986 by an act on the Maine Legislature for the purpose of establishing a cohesive framework for effective leadership within the potato industry. Its mission is to provide a competitive environment for Maine's potato growers, processors, and dealers. The board also strives to create both stability and the infrastructure for future growth, while promoting economic importance to the state and quality of product.